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# RPSC Assistant Professor - English

# CHAPTER

# Literary Criticism

## (a) Classical (Western and Indian)

### I. Introduction to Classical Literary Criticism

- Literary criticism, at its core, involves the systematic interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of literary works. In the classical period, this discipline laid the foundational principles for understanding the very nature, purpose, and profound impact of art on human experience and society. It encompassed deep philosophical inquiries into concepts such as beauty, truth, and morality, alongside the development of practical guidelines for effective artistic creation.

- The foundational debates originating in classical criticism, concerning concepts such as the nature of imitation or the ultimate purpose of art, are not merely historical relics. Instead, they established enduring theoretical frameworks that continue to be revisited, re-engaged with, and re-interpreted by subsequent critical movements across centuries. For instance, T.S. Eliot's emphasis on the impersonality of poetry can be seen as a direct counterpoint to the Romantic emphasis on individual expression, which itself was a re-evaluation of earlier classical ideas. Similarly, New Historicism's focus on contextualizing art within its historical and cultural milieu offers a re-examination of the classical notion of art reflecting timeless truths. This continuous re-engagement underscores a cyclical, rather than strictly linear, progression of literary theory, where core questions and their varied responses persist through different eras, shaping the ongoing discourse on literature.

- Classical Western literary criticism primarily originated in ancient Greece, flourishing from approximately 800 BCE, and subsequently evolved through the Roman and Renaissance periods. Its focus was largely on the analysis of drama, poetry, and rhetoric. Concurrently, classical Indian literary criticism, deeply rooted in the rich Vedic and epic traditions, developed its own sophisticated aesthetic theories, particularly concerning performance and the experience of poetic art.

### II. Classical Western Literary Criticism

### A. Ancient Greek Period

The genesis of Western literary criticism is firmly situated in ancient Greece, a period that laid the philosophical bedrock for subsequent aesthetic thought.

#### Plato (429-347 BCE)

- Plato, a towering figure in Western philosophy, extensively explored the nature and function of art, particularly poetry.

- His **Theory of Mimesis (Imitation)** posits that all artistic creation is fundamentally a form of imitation, or mimesis, representing nature. Plato conceived of a "world of ideas" as the ultimate reality, a realm of perfect forms created by a divine entity. The tangible objects we perceive in our physical world are merely shadowy, imperfect representations of these ideal types. Consequently, art, by imitating these concrete, perceived things, becomes "twice removed from reality". For example, the "idea" of a chair first exists in the carpenter's mind, who then constructs a physical chair. A painter, in turn, imitates this physical chair in their artwork. Thus, the painter's rendition of the chair is twice removed from the ultimate reality of the "idea" of a chair.

- Plato's **Critique of Poetry in *Republic*** stemmed from this understanding of mimesis. He viewed literature, especially drama and poetry, as potentially dangerous to the stability and moral fabric of his envisioned ideal city-state. He argued that art possesses a significant power to shape character, and therefore, an ideal society must exercise strict censorship over the arts to ensure its citizens receive proper moral and intellectual education. The illusory nature of art, coupled with its capacity to stir powerful emotions and incite action, rendered it a hazardous social force in Plato's estimation. He consistently positioned philosophy as superior to poetry, contending that philosophy directly engages with "ideas," which constitute ultimate reality, whereas poetry traffics in "illusion," being twice removed from that truth.

- This critique of mimesis extends beyond a mere aesthetic judgment; it reflects a profound socio-political concern. Plato's apprehension regarding art's emotional power and its perceived distance from objective truth reveals a deep-seated anxiety about art's potential to mislead and destabilize the ideal state. This perspective directly links aesthetic theory to principles of governance and public education. The inherent danger, from his viewpoint, arose from art's mimetic quality, which presented an imperfect copy of reality, combined with its capacity to evoke strong emotional responses. This combination could, in his view, lead to irrationality or misdirected actions among citizens, thereby posing a threat to social order. This philosophical stance thus established a recurring tension in Western thought concerning the balance between artistic freedom and the perceived social utility or control of art.

- Despite his severe criticisms in *Republic*, Plato's **Role of the Artist in *Ion* and *Symposium*** offers a more nuanced perspective. In these dialogues, he speculated that artists might, in fact, create "better copies of that which is true" and could be understood as "prophets or visionaries". This suggests an acknowledgment of a different form of artistic inspiration—perhaps divine or intuitive—that transcends mere rational imitation. The apparent contrast between Plato's condemnation of art in *Republic* and his more appreciative stance in *Ion* and *Symposium* highlights the intricate nature of his philosophical thought. This is not necessarily a direct contradiction but rather a distinction based on the perceived source and type of artistic creation. If art merely copies the sensory world, it is deemed problematic. However, if it is inspired by a higher, intuitive truth, it can be considered valuable. This internal tension within Plato's oeuvre foreshadowed later debates in literary theory regarding artistic genius versus craft, and the diverse ways in which art can engage with truth.

### Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

- Aristotle, a student of Plato, is widely recognized as the Western world's first true literary theorist, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the function of literary art.

- In his seminal work, ***Poetics***, Aristotle defines poetry as an art that imitates, or engages in **mimesis**. He famously states that "imitation... is one instinct of our nature" and that "the objects of imitation are men in action". Unlike Plato's negative portrayal of mimesis as a mere copy of a copy, Aristotle viewed imitation as a fundamental human instinct, a natural and pleasurable activity through which humans learn their earliest lessons and derive enjoyment. This perspective fundamentally shifts the focus from art's ontological status—its truthfulness or reality—to its psychological and social functions. While Plato was concerned with the epistemological and moral implications of art's mimetic nature, Aristotle adopted a more empirical and functional approach, analyzing *how* art operates and its effects on the audience.

- Aristotle's analysis of tragedy in *Poetics* is particularly influential. He defines tragedy as "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". He identifies **Six Elements of Tragedy**, ranking them in order of importance:

- **Plot (Mythos):** Considered the most important element and the "soul of tragedy". It refers to the arrangement of incidents and the overall structure of the action. A well-constructed plot, according to Aristotle, must be complete (having a distinct beginning, middle, and end), unified, and of an appropriate magnitude, adhering to principles of probability or necessity. The unity of the plot derives from the structural coherence of its parts, rather than merely the unity of the hero. Aristotle favored "Complex" plots, which are characterized by the inclusion of **Reversal (Peripeteia)** and/or **Recognition (Anagnorisis)**.
- **Character (Ethos):** Second in importance after plot. This element pertains to the qualities and motivations of the agents within the drama. Characters should be depicted as good (relative to their social class), appropriate (consistent with their type), true to life, and consistent in their portrayal. Their decisions and actions should carry meaningful consequences within the narrative.
- **Thought (Dianoia):** This refers to the faculty of articulating what is possible and pertinent within given circumstances, often expressing a moral purpose or a general truth.
- **Diction (Lexis):** The expression of meaning through words. Aristotle believed that perfection of style lies in clarity without being pedestrian, achieved through the use of current or proper words, while also being elevated by unusual or metaphorical language. A balance of these elements is crucial to avoid jargon or obscurity. He considered the greatest command of language to be that of metaphor.
- **Spectacle (Opsis):** This encompasses the visual and audial elements of a production, such as scenery, costumes, settings, and music, which contribute to conveying the story. Aristotle regarded it as the least artistic element, depending more on the stage machinist than the poet.
- **Song (Melopoeia):** An embellishment of tragedy, holding a chief place among the artistic ornaments. It can be considered an auditory form of spectacle.
- Aristotle's **Key Concepts** further refine his dramatic theory:
- **Catharsis:** One of the most debated and influential concepts in *Poetics*, catharsis refers to the emotional effect of tragedy on the audience. By experiencing pity and fear through the unfolding events of a tragedy, the audience undergoes a "purging or cleansing" of these emotions, leading to a sense of emotional relief and profound insight. Aristotle considered catharsis the ultimate goal of tragedy, offering a therapeutic effect and fostering empathy and understanding of the human condition. This stands in stark contrast to Plato's apprehension about art's ability to stir emotions. Aristotle posited that the arousal of pity and fear, far from being dangerous, actually leads to a beneficial purification. This marks a profound philosophical shift from a moral and political critique of art to a psychological and therapeutic understanding of its impact, thereby validating the emotional experience derived from art. Plato's concern was that uncontrolled emotion could lead to irrationality and social disorder. Aristotle's concept of catharsis, however, implies a controlled release and subsequent purification of these emotions, which ultimately leads to intellectual insight and a deeper sense of empathy. This is not about suppressing emotion, but rather transforming it into a beneficial experience.
- **Hamartia (Tragic Flaw):** More precisely defined as an "error," "mistake," or "misjudgment" made by the protagonist, often stemming from ignorance or a moral blind spot, which ultimately leads to their downfall. It's not necessarily a deep character defect in the modern sense.
- **Anagnorisis (Recognition):** A pivotal moment of critical discovery or realization, representing a change from ignorance to knowledge. This often involves the protagonist recognizing a crucial truth about their own situation, identity, or the identity of others. It's most effective when it coincides with a **Peripeteia**.
- **Peripeteia (Reversal):** A sudden and unexpected change in the protagonist's fortune or situation, typically from good to bad, where the action dramatically veers to its opposite. This is a key element of complex plots.

B. **Ancient Roman Period**
   Roman literary criticism, while indebted to Greek thought, developed its own distinct characteristics, often emphasizing practical application and social utility.

## Horace (65-8 BCE)

- Horace, a prominent Roman poet, articulated his critical principles in **Ars Poetica**, also known as *Epistle to the Pisos*. Written around 19 BCE as a letter to Lucius Calpurnius Piso and his two sons, this work served as a practical guide for aspiring poets. Unlike the more abstract philosophical inquiries of Plato and Aristotle, Horace approached poetry from a pragmatic standpoint, focusing on the craft (*ars*) of writing rather than purely theoretical philosophy.

- His **Key Principles** include:

- **Utile Dulci (Useful and Sweet):** This enduring maxim encapsulates Horace's belief that poetry should serve a dual function: it ought to both entertain (*dulci*) and instruct (*utile*) the reader. This principle highlights the importance of combining aesthetic pleasure with moral or intellectual benefit.

- **Decorum:** Horace stressed the importance of employing appropriate vocabulary and diction for each specific style of writing, ensuring a consistent and fitting relationship between the style and the subject matter. This principle profoundly influenced subsequent literary theory, guiding decisions from genre selection to characterization and meter.

- **Unity:** A well-crafted poem, according to Horace, demands unity, coherence, and balance in its composition, with consistency maintained in characterization and plot development throughout. He famously cautioned against works that lack cohesion, likening them to a monstrous figure composed of disparate parts.

- **Originality:** While acknowledging the value of studying and emulating great poets like Homer, Horace also advocated for originality, encouraging poets to create new works rather than merely engaging in slavish imitation. This promoted innovation while respecting established literary traditions.

- **Poet's Social Responsibility:** Horace viewed the poet as a public figure who carries a significant responsibility to society. This perspective reflects the broader cultural values of the Augustan Age, which prioritized moral responsibility and artistic excellence.

- **Balance of Talent and Skill:** He emphasized that poets should strive for a harmonious balance between innate natural talent (*ingenium*) and acquired skill (*ars*) through diligent practice and study.

- **Literary Techniques:** Horace also provided practical advice on literary techniques, stressing the importance of choosing an appropriate subject and genre, employing vivid imagery, maintaining a clear and logical structure, and using figurative language and poetic devices judiciously.

- Horace's *Ars Poetica* represents a notable shift in the trajectory of Western literary criticism. While Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle engaged in grand philosophical inquiries into the essence and purpose of art, Horace's work pivoted towards a more practical and prescriptive approach to poetic craft. His emphasis on *utile dulci* and *decorum* reflects a distinct Roman pragmatism that sought to integrate art seamlessly into societal function and moral instruction, a contrast to the more abstract metaphysical concerns of the Greeks. This practical orientation laid crucial groundwork for later neoclassical literary theory, which similarly valued rules, decorum, and the social utility of art.

## Longinus (1st Century CE, Pseudo-Longinus)

- The treatise **On the Sublime**, attributed to Longinus (or Pseudo-Longinus as the author is not definitively known), is a profound work focusing on aesthetics and the power of elevated writing. It analyzes both exemplary and flawed literary passages to elucidate the concept of the "sublime".

- Longinus defines the **Sublime** as a "loftiness and excellence in language" that elevates ordinary discourse. This quality, he argues, originates from a "great and lofty soul," becoming "one echo of a great soul". The experience of the sublime is transformative; it leads listeners "not to persuasion, but to ecstasy," characterized by a sense of awe and prevailing over mere convincing or delightful rhetoric. Its effects include a temporary loss of rationality, an alienation that fosters identification with the artist's creative process, and a profound emotional experience intermingled with pleasure and exaltation.

**Longinus identifies Five Sources of Sublimity:**

- **Great thoughts:** The grandeur of thought within the writer, which naturally leads to lofty and authentic expression.
- **Strong emotions:** Enthusiastic and powerful passion that imbues expression with weight and impact.
- **Certain figures of thought and speech:** The skillful and organic use of rhetorical devices that are intimately connected with the underlying thoughts and emotions.
- **Noble diction:** The judicious selection of appropriate and elevated vocabulary.
- **Dignified word arrangement:** The harmonious and elevated composition of words.
- It is noteworthy that Longinus categorizes these sources into those that are inborn (great thoughts, strong emotions) and those that are acquirable through study and practice (rhetorical devices, diction, and arrangement).
- Longinus also offers a compelling **Discussion on the Decay of Rhetoric**. He attributes the decline of powerful oratory not only to the absence of political freedom but also to the corruption of morals, both of which, he argues, erode the high spirit necessary to achieve the sublime. He aligns with the historian Tacitus in suggesting that the establishment of the Princedom or Empire, while bringing stability, inadvertently led to censorship and reduced oratory to a mere exercise in style, thereby diminishing its capacity for true sublimity.
- Longinus's *On the Sublime* introduces a significant new dimension to aesthetic theory by focusing on the overwhelming and transformative power of language, moving beyond mere persuasion or instruction to a state of "ecstasy." His assertion that the sublime is a product of a "great soul," coupled with his analysis of the decay of rhetoric as a consequence of political and moral decline, establishes a profound causal relationship between societal conditions, individual character, and the quality of artistic expression. This perspective highlights the ethical and political stakes inherent in literary excellence. The implication is that a truly healthy and free society is a prerequisite for the flourishing of great, impactful art, as it nurtures the "great souls" capable of producing the sublime. This interconnectedness of artistic quality with the broader health of the body politic is a crucial concept within his theory.

### C. Renaissance Classicism (14th-16th Centuries CE)

- Renaissance literary criticism emerged as a direct consequence of the widespread **Revival of Classical Culture**, famously known as humanism. This intellectual movement initially took root in Italy during the 14th and 15th centuries.
- A central concern of Renaissance critics, dating back to figures like Dante, was the **Defense of Poetry and Literary Imitation**. They sought to defend poetry against its ancient and contemporary detractors and to advocate for the vernacular languages as legitimate mediums for poetic expression. This defense necessitated defining poetry and establishing its formal criteria, both of which were intimately tied to the concept of imitation. Critics engaged in extensive debates regarding the status, source, and purpose of imitation, frequently referencing classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle.
- The **Influence of Italian Criticism** was profound and far-reaching. It matured in the 16th century with the rediscovery and widespread study of Aristotle's *Poetics*. This led to numerous commentaries and the development of comprehensive theories of poetry, exemplified by figures such as Lodovico Castelvetro, whose ideas were then applied to vernacular works by prominent authors like Dante, Ariosto, and Tasso. This critical influence rapidly disseminated across Europe, with scholars like Joachim Du Bellay in France and Philip Sidney in England utilizing these Italian critical frameworks, alongside other humanist resources, to establish their own vernacular literary and critical traditions. Julius Caesar Scaliger, for instance, composed encyclopedic *artes poeticae* that aimed to systematize the art of poetry by establishing unprecedented standards of prosody, figure, and genre derived from classical models. These efforts sparked heated debates over which classical models to imitate, the precise methods of imitation (e.g., imitating Cicero's style, the use of quantitative meter versus rhyme), and the comparative merits of different genres like romance versus epic poetry.

- Renaissance Classicism, therefore, represents a dynamic re-engagement with and adaptation of classical Western thought. Rather than simply replicating ancient ideas, Renaissance critics actively synthesized and extended classical poetics to address the specific demands and intellectual contexts of their own time, particularly the need to defend the value of poetry and legitimize the use of vernacular languages in serious literary endeavors. This demonstrates that classical ideas are not static but are continuously reinterpreted and applied to new cultural and intellectual landscapes, highlighting a significant trend in the history of ideas where foundational concepts are perpetually reshaped by contemporary concerns.

### III. Classical Indian Literary Criticism

- Classical Indian literary criticism is deeply interwoven with its rich philosophical, spiritual, and performative traditions, offering a distinct perspective on the nature and purpose of art. The earliest Indian literature is rooted in the canonical Hindu sacred writings, the **Veda** (composed in Sanskrit), followed by significant prose commentaries such as the **Brahmanas** and **Upanishads**. These foundational texts, along with the two great Sanskrit epic poems, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, profoundly influenced later Indian languages and literary developments. Sanskrit philosophies and schools of rhetoric were also instrumental in shaping the sophisticated court poetry that emerged. Central to this tradition are fundamental concepts from Vedic religion, including the Veda itself, the Brahmans, the issues of religious authority, the doctrine of Atman-Brahman, Karma, Samsara (the cycle of rebirth), Moksha (liberation), Dharma (righteous conduct), and the four stages of life (Ashramas).

- The deep embedding of Indian literary criticism in sacred texts and profound philosophical concepts like Karma, Moksha, and Dharma significantly differentiates it from Western classical traditions. While Western thought also engaged with philosophy, it often maintained a more distinct separation between literary theory and direct religious doctrine. This difference suggests a more holistic and integrated approach within the Indian context, where aesthetics are intrinsically linked to broader spiritual and ethical pursuits. This worldview implies that art is not merely an intellectual or civic endeavor but can serve as a potent pathway to spiritual realization or a reflection of cosmic order.

### B. Bharata Muni: Natyashastra (c. 500 BCE - 500 CE)

- The *Natyashastra*, attributed to Bharata Muni, is regarded as the earliest comprehensive treatise on music, dance, and drama in India. Comprising 6000 couplets spread across 36 chapters, its title combines "Natya" (referring to the technique of dance and drama) and "Shastra" (denoting science or systematic knowledge). This monumental work meticulously details various aspects of theatrical production, including the relationship between the director and the audience, the structuring of plays, acting techniques, costumes, make-up, the use of music and musical instruments, and even stage dimensions and audience seating arrangements.

- The most influential concept presented in the *Natyashastra* is the **Rasa Theory**, which explores how emotions are evoked and experienced by the audience through performance. The term "Rasa" itself signifies the "flavor" or "essence" of an emotional experience that is created in the mind of the audience during a performance. The ultimate goal of any artistic performance, according to Bharata, is to evoke Rasa, a dynamic process that actively involves both the performer and the viewer in a shared emotional journey.

- The realization of Rasa depends on the intricate interplay of several **Key Components**, forming the Rasa-Bhava relationship:

- **Bhavas (Emotional States):** These are the raw, internal emotions or moods that are expressed by the actor. Bharata identifies eight primary Bhavas:
  - **Rati** (Love)
  - **Hasa** (Laughter)
  - **Shoka** (Sorrow)
  - **Krodha** (Anger)
  - **Utsaha** (Courage)
  - **Bhaya** (Fear)
  - **Jugupsa** (Disgust)
  - **Vismaya** (Astonishment or Marvel). These emotional states are considered inherent to humans, basic, and capable of dominating and directing behavior.
- **Vibhavas (Determinants):** These are the external stimuli or causes within the narrative that give rise to emotions. They are categorized into **Alambana Vibhavas** (the main characters or objects that trigger emotions) and **Uddipana Vibhavas** (situational or environmental factors that amplify emotions).
- **Anubhavas (Consequents):** These are the physical manifestations or expressions of emotions on stage, such as facial expressions, body movements, voice modulation, and gestures.
- **Sthayibhavas (Permanent Emotional States):** These represent the enduring, predominant emotional dispositions that define a character's overall mood or temperament throughout a performance. They are the "Durable," "Permanent," or "Constant" emotional conditions.
- **Vyabhicari Bhavas (Transient States):** In contrast to Sthayibhavas, these are fleeting, temporary emotions that arise momentarily and add layers of depth and complexity to the emotional portrayal.
- Bharata succinctly encapsulates the theory in his most famous formula, the **Rasa-Sutra**: "Vibhava-anubhava-vyabhichari-samyogad rasa nishpattih" (Rasa is produced from the combination of Vibhavas, Anubhavas, and Vyabhicari Bhavas). This aesthetic relish, which is experienced through mental perception, is termed 'natyarasa'.
- The Rasa theory, while not explicitly using the term "Anukriti" (imitation), inherently implies a form of representation. The Bhavas, described as "emotions felt by the character and communicated to the audience via various dramatizations by the performer, resulting in the audience experiencing the rasa", constitute a representation of emotional states rather than a literal copy of external reality. This is a process of transformation leading to an aesthetic experience.
- Bharata's Rasa theory offers a sophisticated model of aesthetic experience that transcends simple "imitation" (as often debated in Western mimesis) to a transformative process of "relish" (rasana). The emphasis on the intricate interplay of various components (Bhavas, Vibhavas, Anubhavas) to evoke a universal emotional state in the audience highlights a focus on the process and effect of art, rather than its strict fidelity to external reality. While Western mimesis often grappled with the truthfulness of the artistic copy, Bharata's system is less concerned with merely copying external reality and more with recreating internal emotional states and their triggers in a manner that generates a universal, relishable experience for the audience. This leads to a distinct understanding of artistic truth and purpose.
- The following table summarizes Bharata Muni's eight primary Rasas and their corresponding Sthayibhavas, which are fundamental to understanding the emotional framework of Indian aesthetics:

| Rasa (Aesthetic Sentiment) | Sthayibhava (Permanent Emotional State) | General Emotion/Meaning |
|---|---|---|
| Shringara | Rati | Love or Erotic Sentiment |
| Hasya | Hasa | Laughter or Humor |
| Karuna | Shoka | Compassion or Pity |
| Raudra | Krodha | Anger |
| Veera | Utsaha | Heroism or Courage |
| Bhayanaka | Bhaya | Fear |
| Vibhatsa | Jugupsa | Disgust |
| Adbhuta | Vismaya | Astonishment or Marvel |

## C. Anandavardhana: Dhvanyaloka (9th Century AD)

- Anandavardhana's monumental work, *Dhvanyaloka*, introduced the **Dhvani Theory**, which posits that Dhvani (suggestion) is the very "soul of poetry" (*Kavya Atma*). This "Navina School" (New School) profoundly altered the landscape of Indian poetics by shifting the critical focus from explicit, direct meaning to the subtle, implied meaning of a text. While words and their direct meanings form the "body of poetry," Dhvani is considered to endow it with "soul and breath of life".

- Anandavardhana meticulously distinguishes between **Vachya (Expressed Meaning)** and **Pratiyamana (Implied/Suggested Meaning)**. Vacya refers to the directly expressed or denotative meaning, which is generally accessible to all, often through figures of speech (Alankaras). In contrast, the **Pratiyamana** (implied or suggested meaning) is described as a distinct charm, akin to the subtle beauty of a lady beyond her physical attributes, and is perceived primarily by a **Sahrudaya** (a sympathetic critic or a responsive, cultivated reader). This suggested meaning is paramount and constitutes the prime source of aesthetic appeal in poetry.

- The Dhvani theory introduces a sophisticated layer of meaning that extends beyond the literal or figurative, emphasizing the power of the unsaid but evoked. This focus on the reader's mind and their active interaction with the text represents a significant advancement in Indian criticism, moving towards a theory of reception and the subjective experience of art. The assertion that "beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder" directly links the aesthetic experience to the reader's mental engagement and sensibility. This implies that the aesthetic pleasure derived from poetry is not solely dependent on the poet's creation or the objective qualities of the text, but crucially on the interaction with a receptive and sensitive mind. This can be seen as an early form of reader-response theory, highlighting the active role of the audience in constructing meaning and experiencing aesthetic delight.

- Anandavardhana classifies the implied sense (**Vyangya**) into primarily **Three Types of Dhvani**:
- **Vastu-dhvani:** The suggestion of a bare idea or plot.
- **Alankara-dhvani:** The suggestion of a figure of speech.
- **Rasa-dhvani:** The suggestion of a sentiment or emotion (Rasa). This is considered the most important type, as rasa is the very essence of poetry, and it can only be suggested, never directly described. Dhvani is also classified by its relation to the prima facie (literal) meaning:
- **Avivakshita Vacya Dhvani:** Here, the literal meaning is not intended to be conveyed, and an extended literal import is required. This often occurs in metaphorical uses where the literal sense is entirely set aside or shifted.
- **Vivakshitanyapara Vacya Dhvani:** In this type, the literal import is intended but ultimately subserves the implied meaning. An example would be a direct statement that subtly implies something else.

The suggested meaning is consistently presented as the primary source of aesthetic appeal. The enjoyment of a poem, according to Anandavardhana, occurs within the mind of a capable reader who can properly engage with the words, symbols, metaphors, and ideas presented. He further states that appreciating poetry is, in essence, the same as creating it.

## D. Abhinavagupta: Abhinavabharati and Lochana (10th-11th Century AD)

- Abhinavagupta, a polymath and prolific scholar with over 40 ascribed texts, made monumental contributions to Indian aesthetics and literary theory. He is known for his profound **Interpretation and Synthesis of Rasa and Dhvani Theories**. His work *Abhinavabharati* is a seminal commentary on Bharata's *Natyashastra*, serving as a foundational text for Indian poetics. Concurrently, his *Lochana* is a crucial commentary on Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka*. Abhinavagupta championed the **Dhvanipaddhati** (the path of suggestion) and extensively elaborated upon the Rasa system, delving into its roots and meticulously analyzing its psychological processes. He synthesized Rasa and Dhvani theories, addressing Bharata's concept of **Rasanispatti** (the production of Rasa) by asserting that what is produced is not merely rasa but **rasana** (relish), which arises from a process of deep realization.

- Abhinavagupta's most significant contribution to the Rasa theory was his **Introduction of Santa Rasa (the Ninth Rasa)**. He extended Bharata's original eight rasas by adding Santa Rasa, representing peace and tranquility. He philosophically argued that *santa* is akin to the highest center, Siva, with the other eight rasas serving as subordinate deities. He considered *santa rasa* not just an additional sentiment, but an overarching attribute that permeates and underlies all other mundane rasas as their common denominator, ultimately resolving all other emotions into itself. This Rasa signifies a state where the mind achieves rest and tranquility, and it is regarded as more enduring than the other, more transitory *rasas*. He provided a robust philosophical foundation for this Rasa, explicitly linking the experience of art to **Moksha** (ultimate liberation or spiritual freedom).

- The introduction of Santa Rasa by Abhinavagupta elevates Indian aesthetic theory to a profound spiritual dimension. This move directly links the artistic experience to the ultimate goal of human life, Moksha. It transforms aesthetic relish from a mere emotional experience into a potential pathway for profound spiritual realization and detachment. This demonstrates a unique and deep integration of art, philosophy, and spirituality, a characteristic not as explicitly present in Western classical thought, which often focuses on civic virtue, intellectual understanding, or emotional catharsis.

- Abhinavagupta's central thesis revolved around the **Concept of Sympathetic Identification (Sahrudaya)**. He posited a complete identity of aesthetic experience among the hero (nayaka), the poet (kavi), and the reader or audience (srotr). He argued that aesthetic appreciation is fundamentally based on a sympathetic identification with the characters and situations depicted in literary works. He emphasized the harmonious agreement between the feelings and emotions of the poet and those of the reader, suggesting that an overflow of emotions in the poet's mind directly flows into the mind of the receptive reader.

## E. Kshemendra: Auchitya Theory (Auchitya Vicharacharcha) (11th Century AD)

- Kshemendra, an 11th-century scholar and a disciple of Abhinavagupta, was a prolific writer who contributed significantly to Indian literary criticism. His primary contribution is the **Auchitya Theory**, articulated in his work *Auchitya Vicharacharcha*.

- This theory centers on the concept of **Auchitya**, which means propriety or the "proper placing of things" within a literary composition. Kshemendra defines it precisely: "When one thing befits another or matches perfectly, it is said to be appropriate, Auchitya". He argued that the proper use of figures of speech and stylistic merits is crucial for achieving the desired aesthetic effect, and conversely, any impropriety diminishes it. For Kshemendra, *Auchitya* is not merely a superficial rule but the very "abiding life of poetry, full of flavor".

- Kshemendra's theory makes a critical distinction regarding the **Relation of Auchitya to Rasa**. While he accepted Rasa as the "soul" of poetry, he considered Auchitya its "life" (*jivita*). He famously stated, "if rasa is the essence of a Kavya, Auchitya is the quintessence of Rasa". This indicates a hierarchical relationship where he subordinated the long-standing predominance of Rasa to Auchitya. He contended that **Alankara** (figures of speech), **Guna** (merits), **Dosha** (defects), and other poetic elements are insignificant and meaningless without the presence of Auchitya. He further noted that the proper mixing of different Rasas, guided by propriety, enhances the overall relish of a *Kavya*.
- Kshemendra's Auchitya theory, by emphasizing the subordination of Rasa to propriety, introduces a critical principle that highlights the contextual appropriateness of every poetic element. This shifts the focus from the inherent emotional quality (Rasa) to the skillful and harmonious deployment of all literary devices to achieve the intended effect. This framework functions as a practical guide for poets, ensuring that even powerful emotions or brilliant figures of speech are used judiciously to avoid aesthetic dissonance. The implication is that impropriety in any element—be it diction, meter, plot, or character—can spoil the intended Rasa. Therefore, Auchitya serves as the essential condition for Rasa to be fully realized and relished, providing a comprehensive system of checks and balances for artistic creation and evaluation.
- Kshemendra meticulously enumerated **27 Areas of Auchitya in Poetic Composition** where propriety should be observed. These include **Pada** (phrase), **Vakya** (sentence), **Prabhandhartha** (the meaning of the whole composition), **Guna** (excellences), **Alamkara** (figures of speech), **Rasa** (sentiment), **Kriya** (verb), **Kala** (time), **Desa** (country), **Kula** (family), and **Svabhava** (nature), among others. He often illustrated his points with examples that either complied with his rule of *Auchitya* or demonstrated **Anauchitya** (impropriety).
- Among his **Other Works**, *Kavikantaabharanam* serves as a guide for aspiring poets, discussing ten types of **Chamatkara** (strikingness). His *Suvruttatilakam* delves into 27 different meters, detailing their appropriate employment and how they can evoke or even spoil a particular Rasa.

**F. Kalidasa (as a literary practitioner) (c. 4th-5th Century CE)**

- While not a literary critic in the traditional sense, Kalidasa, a renowned poet and dramatist, serves as a quintessential example of classical Indian literary practice, embodying many of the aesthetic principles discussed by critics of his era and later. His epic poem, *Kumarasambhava*, meaning "Birth of the War God," is composed in eight *Sargas* (cantos).
- The main theme of *Kumarasambhava* is the profound love between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, detailing their courtship, the tragic conflagration of Kama (the god of desire), their subsequent wedding, their divine lovemaking, and the eventual birth of their son, Kumara (Skanda or Kartikeya). Kalidasa is traditionally believed to have been a Brahman and a Shaivite, possibly gracing the court of the legendary Vikramaditya of Ujjain during the illustrious Gupta dynasty. His works, including *Kumarasambhava*, are often seen as reflecting the serene and sophisticated aristocracy of the Gupta period, and they exemplify the harmonious fusion of older Brahmanic religious traditions with the emerging secular Hinduism.
- Including Kalidasa, a literary practitioner, within a study of literary criticism emphasizes the crucial interplay between theory and practice. His works, such as *Kumarasambhava*, concretely embody the aesthetic principles and goals articulated by critics like Bharata, Anandavardhana, and Abhinavagupta. They provide tangible examples of how concepts like Rasa (aesthetic relish), Dhvani (suggested meaning), and Auchitya (propriety) manifest in actual literary *creation*, thereby bridging the gap between abstract theoretical frameworks and their practical application in art.

## IV. Comparative Perspectives and Key Distinctions

- A comparative analysis of classical Western and Indian literary criticism reveals both universal concerns regarding art and profound divergences rooted in distinct philosophical and cultural worldviews.

**Similarities and Differences in Mimesis/Imitation**

- The concept of "imitation" is central to both Western (**mimesis**) and Indian (**anukriti**) classical traditions, yet their interpretations and implications differ significantly.

- In the **Western Classical Tradition**, particularly with Plato, art as imitation is often viewed suspiciously, being "twice removed from reality" and potentially dangerous, thus requiring censorship. The focus here is heavily on philosophical truth and the moral implications of artistic representation. Aristotle, while also defining art as imitation of "men in action," views it as a natural human instinct that provides pleasure and facilitates learning. His focus shifts to the *how* and *effect* of imitation in shaping plot and character to achieve tragic catharsis. During the Renaissance, imitation remained a central concept for defining poetry and establishing formal criteria, often involving the adaptation of classical models to new contexts.

- In the **Indian Classical Tradition**, particularly within Bharata's Rasa theory, imitation (implied as *anukriti*) is understood as the representation of emotional states (Bhavas) and their physical manifestations (Anubhavas) to evoke Rasa in the audience. This isn't a literal copy of external reality but a transformative process aimed at creating a profound aesthetic experience. Abhinavagupta further refines this, arguing against mere imitation of others' emotions, emphasizing a deeper process of generalization (**Sadhāranikarana**) and sympathetic identification that leads to **rasana** (relish).

- A key distinction emerges: while both traditions engage with "imitation," Western classical thought, especially Plato, frequently grapples with the truth-value and ontological status of the imitation—questioning whether it is real or true, leading to debates about art's potentially deceptive nature. Indian classical thought, particularly Rasa theory, places less emphasis on the literal fidelity of the imitation to external reality and more on its transformative capacity to evoke universal emotional and spiritual experiences within the audience. The "imitation" in the Indian context is often of inner states and their triggers, leading to a shared aesthetic relish rather than a mere factual copy of external events. This fundamental difference points to divergent underlying philosophical questions: Western thought often asks, "What is the nature of reality, and how does art relate to it?" whereas Indian thought often asks, "How can art lead to a profound, universal emotional or spiritual experience?" This leads to different criteria for evaluating artistic success.

**Table: Comparative Overview of Mimesis/Imitation**

| Aspect | Western Classical Tradition | Indian Classical Tradition |
|---|---|---|
| **Primary Figures** | Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Renaissance critics | Bharata Muni, Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta |
| **Nature of Imitation** | **Plato:** Copy of a copy, twice removed from ultimate reality; potentially deceptive and dangerous. **Aristotle:** Natural human instinct; imitation of "men in action"; a means of learning and pleasure. | Implied as *anukriti* (representation); focuses on evoking internal emotional states (Bhavas) and their manifestations (Anubhavas) to create Rasa. Not a literal copy of external reality, but a transformative process. |

| Focus/Concern | **Plato:** Ontological status (truth-value), moral implications, societal impact (censorship). **Aristotle:** Psychological function, structural elements of art, effect on audience (catharsis). | Transforming representation to evoke universal aesthetic and spiritual experience. Less concern with literal fidelity, more with inner states and triggers. |
|---|---|---|
| **Purpose of Art (related to imitation)** | To represent truth (though debated), teach, delight, and purge emotions (Aristotle). | To create **Rasa** (relish) through represented emotional states, leading to universal and profound aesthetic experiences, often linked to spiritual realization (Moksha). |

**Comparative Analysis of Aesthetic Experience (Catharsis vs. Rasa/Dhvani/Sublime)**

- Different traditions conceptualized the audience's aesthetic experience in distinct ways, though all aimed at profound impact.

- **Catharsis (Western):** Aristotle's concept, primarily associated with tragedy, describes a "purging or cleansing" of pity and fear experienced by the audience. This process leads to emotional relief and intellectual insight, serving a psychological and moral function.

- **Rasa (Indian):** Bharata's Rasa refers to the "relish" or "flavor" derived from the intricate interplay of emotional states (Bhavas) and their determinants/consequents (Vibhavas, Anubhavas). It signifies a shared, universal emotional experience that leads to delight. Abhinavagupta significantly expanded this by introducing **Santa Rasa**, which represents tranquility and serves as a path to spiritual detachment and ultimate liberation (Moksha).

- **Dhvani (Indian):** Anandavardhana's Dhvani theory posits "suggestion" as the soul of poetry, where the implied meaning leads to a universal, disinterested aesthetic pleasure. The emphasis here is on the subtle, evoked meaning that resonates with the **Sahrudaya**.

- **Sublime (Western):** Longinus's concept of the Sublime describes an overwhelming, ecstatic experience that transcends rational persuasion. It originates from a "great soul" and elevated language, focusing on grandeur and intense emotional impact.

- While all these concepts describe forms of audience engagement and emotional impact, their ultimate aims and underlying mechanisms diverge. Catharsis is primarily about the purification of specific emotions within a dramatic context. Rasa is concerned with universalizing and savoring emotions, with the potential to lead to spiritual detachment. Dhvani focuses on the power of suggestion to evoke a particular aesthetic pleasure. The Sublime, on the other hand, aims to overwhelm the audience through sheer grandeur. The Indian concepts, particularly with Abhinavagupta's development of Santa Rasa, often lean towards a more spiritual or meditative ultimate end, explicitly integrating aesthetic experience with spiritual liberation. In contrast, Western concepts like Catharsis and the Sublime, while powerful and transformative, largely remain within the psychological, moral, or rhetorical domains, focusing on human understanding or civic improvement. This difference in ultimate purpose represents a fundamental philosophical distinction in the telos of art between the two traditions.

**Divergent Views on the Purpose and Function of Art**

- The purpose and function of art are central inquiries in both classical traditions, revealing both commonalities and significant philosophical distinctions.

- In the **Western Classical Tradition**:
  - Plato viewed art's purpose as problematic, believing it could corrupt and mislead, necessitating censorship for the ideal state. Its function was deemed secondary to philosophy and moral education.
  - Aristotle saw art's purpose as imitating human action, providing pleasure, and offering a unique form of learning and catharsis.
  - Horace advocated for art's dual purpose: to both entertain and instruct (*utile dulci*), emphasizing the poet's social responsibility.
- In the **Indian Classical Tradition**:
  - Bharata believed art's primary purpose was to evoke Rasa, thereby creating a shared emotional experience and delight for the audience.
  - Anandavardhana posited that art's purpose was to provide aesthetic appeal through suggested meaning, leading to universal and disinterested pleasure for the Sahrudaya.
  - Abhinavagupta extended art's purpose to encompass spiritual realization and the experience of Santa Rasa, directly linking it to the ultimate goal of Moksha.
  - Kshemendra emphasized that art's purpose is to achieve aesthetic effect through propriety (Auchitya), making the composition convincing and effective.
- While both traditions acknowledge entertainment and instruction as common threads in the function of art, their ultimate purposes diverge profoundly. Western classical thought frequently ties art to civic virtue, moral instruction, or intellectual understanding, generally operating within a human-centric framework. The highest aim of art, in this view, is often to cultivate better citizens or to deepen human understanding of the world. In contrast, Indian thought, particularly from Bharata onwards and culminating in Abhinavagupta, frequently connects art to a deeper, often spiritual, experience of universal consciousness or liberation. Here, art is portrayed as a means to transcend mundane existence and achieve higher states of being. This fundamental difference in the teleology of art has significant implications for the types of subjects, emotions, and forms that are considered most elevated or valuable within each tradition.

**Unique Contributions of Each Tradition**
- Both Western and Indian classical literary criticism have made distinct and invaluable contributions to the global understanding of art and aesthetics.
- **Western Contributions**:
  - **Plato:** Offered the first systematic philosophical critique of art, intricately linking aesthetics to metaphysics and ethics, and raising enduring questions about artistic truth, illusion, and censorship.
  - **Aristotle:** Provided the first comprehensive literary theory in his *Poetics*, establishing a detailed analytical framework for drama (including plot, character, and the effects of catharsis, hamartia, anagnorisis, and peripeteia) that continues to influence dramatic theory and storytelling worldwide.
  - **Horace:** Contributed a practical and prescriptive guide to poetic craft in *Ars Poetica*, emphasizing principles such as decorum, unity, and the dual function of poetry to both entertain and instruct.
  - **Longinus:** Introduced the concept of the "Sublime," focusing on the overwhelming and ecstatic effect of elevated language, and linking literary grandeur to the "great soul" of the writer and prevailing societal conditions.

- **Indian Contributions**:
  - **Bharata Muni:** Developed the groundbreaking **Rasa theory** in his *Natyashastra*, a sophisticated framework for understanding emotional evocation and aesthetic relish in performance, complete with detailed components like Bhavas, Vibhavas, and Anubhavas.
  - **Anandavardhana:** Revolutionized Indian poetics with his **Dhvani theory**, establishing "suggestion" as the soul of poetry and emphasizing the profound impact of implied meaning on the responsive reader (Sahrudaya).
  - **Abhinavagupta:** Offered a comprehensive synthesis of Rasa and Dhvani theories, and most notably, developed the profound philosophical concept of **Santa Rasa** as the ultimate, unifying aesthetic experience intrinsically linked to spiritual liberation (Moksha).
  - **Kshemendra:** Introduced the **Auchitya theory**, emphasizing "propriety" as the life-breath of Rasa, providing a comprehensive framework for ensuring contextual appropriateness across all elements of a poetic composition.
- A discernible trend emerges when comparing these unique contributions: Western criticism tends to be more analytical and prescriptive regarding form, structure, and rhetorical effectiveness. Its roots often lie in philosophical inquiries concerning truth, morality, and the logical construction of arguments and narratives. Indian criticism, while also analytical, is more deeply integrated with spiritual philosophy and the subjective experience of art. It consistently focuses on the experience of art (Rasa, Dhvani) and its potential for inner transformation, placing a strong emphasis on the receptive and cultivated response of the Sahrudaya. This distinction reflects differing cultural priorities and philosophical traditions, where Western thought, influenced by Greek rationalism, often seeks to categorize, define, and prescribe, while Indian thought, shaped by its spiritual heritage, seeks to understand the essence and transformative power of aesthetic experience.

## V. Conclusion

- The study of classical Western and Indian literary criticism reveals two distinct yet equally profound intellectual traditions that have shaped our understanding of art, literature, and their impact on humanity. Both traditions grappled with fundamental questions about the nature of artistic creation, the relationship between art and reality, and the effect of art on its audience.
- Western classical criticism, commencing with Plato and Aristotle, established foundational concepts such as mimesis, the elements of tragedy, and catharsis, laying the groundwork for analytical and prescriptive approaches to literary form and function. Roman critics like Horace introduced practical guidelines for poetic craft, emphasizing decorum and the dual purpose of art to entertain and instruct. Longinus further explored the overwhelming power of the "sublime," linking artistic grandeur to the moral and political health of society. The Renaissance then saw a dynamic re-engagement with these classical ideas, adapting them to new cultural and linguistic contexts.
- Concurrently, classical Indian literary criticism, deeply rooted in its rich philosophical and spiritual traditions, developed sophisticated theories centered on aesthetic experience. Bharata Muni's Rasa theory provided a meticulous framework for understanding emotional evocation and relish in performance, emphasizing the interplay of various emotional states. Anandavardhana's Dhvani theory revolutionized poetics by positing "suggestion" as the soul of poetry, highlighting the profound impact of implied meaning on the discerning reader. Abhinavagupta synthesized these theories and, crucially, introduced Santa Rasa, elevating aesthetic experience to a path for spiritual liberation. Kshemendra's Auchitya theory then provided a comprehensive principle of propriety, ensuring the harmonious and effective deployment of all poetic elements.

- Ultimately, while Western criticism often interrogated art's truth-value and its role in civic or moral instruction, Indian criticism delved into art's transformative capacity to evoke universal emotional and spiritual experiences, often linking aesthetic relish to profound inner realization and liberation. These classical traditions, despite their geographical and philosophical divides, collectively underscore the enduring human impulse to understand, analyze, and elevate the art of language, providing timeless frameworks that continue to inform contemporary literary discourse. Mastering these nuanced and subtle aspects is essential for a comprehensive understanding of literary criticism and for excelling in competitive examinations.

## (b) Renaissance, (c) Elizabethan, and Jacobean

The literary landscape of the Renaissance, particularly during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods in England, saw profound transformations in critical thought, artistic expression, and the very purpose of literature. This era, spanning from the late 15th to the early 17th century, was a crucible of intellectual ferment, driven by the resurgence of classical learning, religious reformation, and a burgeoning sense of national identity. Understanding the evolution of literary criticism during these periods is essential for grasping the foundational principles that shaped English literature.

1. **Introduction to Renaissance Literary Criticism**
- Renaissance literary criticism didn't emerge in a vacuum; it was a direct result of broader intellectual and cultural shifts across Europe. Its roots are deeply embedded in the humanist movement, which championed the revival of classical Greek and Roman culture.

### 1.1. Historical Context: Humanism and the Revival of Classical Learning
- Renaissance literary criticism first took hold in Italy during the 14th and 15th centuries, born from **humanism**, a movement emphasizing the study of classical texts and human potential. By the 16th century, it matured in Italy, becoming an independent discourse, especially influenced by the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*. This intellectual movement profoundly shaped the era by advocating for the study of the humanities—grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy—all grounded in classical texts. Humanism fostered a strong belief in human potential, individual achievement, and the power of reason, a significant departure from the theological dominance of medieval scholasticism.
- The period saw an extensive re-examination, translation, and widespread dissemination of works by ancient authors like Cicero, Virgil, and Aristotle. This pervasive classical influence became strikingly evident in Elizabethan literature, with prominent writers like Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney seamlessly integrating classical forms and themes into their contemporary works. Beyond its direct impact on literature, Renaissance Humanism played a pivotal role in shaping modern education by advocating for curricula that nurtured critical thinking and eloquence, cultivating a new generation of scholars who valued individual inquiry. The broader historical context of the Renaissance also included significant advancements in communication and commercial exchange, alongside the increasing political influence of the bourgeois class, all contributing to the dynamic and evolving cultural landscape.
- The redefinition of poetry's purpose during this period is a notable development. For the humanist mind, poetry was often seen as a branch of learning, a tool alongside oratory, history, and philosophy, for recapturing the lost culture of antiquity, rather than an independent art of infinite possibilities. This perspective indicates a fundamental shift in literature's expected function. It moved from being solely for religious instruction or mere entertainment to becoming a vital instrument for intellectual and moral development, a vehicle for understanding human potential and civic virtue, and a means to reconnect with a perceived golden age of knowledge. This shift in the understanding of poetry's utility laid the groundwork for subsequent critical discussions regarding its moral, educational, and aesthetic roles, moving away from purely theological interpretations toward a more human-centric, though still Christian-inflected, worldview. This also explains the proliferation of "Defences of Poetry," as critics sought to justify and elevate its newfound intellectual weight against detractors.

- Furthermore, Renaissance criticism wasn't a mere replication of classical models but an active process of adaptation and synthesis. While deeply indebted to classical authorities—Horace, Aristotle, and Plato, roughly in that order—it was precisely the questions left unanswered by these ancient thinkers that compelled Renaissance critics to synthesize, adapt, and extend classical poetics to meet the demands of contemporary Christian writers and readers. This approach involved blending classical forms with "contemporary concerns" and resulted in a "happy marriage of classical and native English drama." This syncretism was crucial for shaping the unique character of Renaissance literature. For instance, Elizabethan drama adopted structural elements from Senecan tragedy, like the five-act structure and the use of ghosts, but it didn't rigidly adhere to classical unities, instead blending these elements with native English humor and settings. This selective incorporation, rather than slavish imitation, allowed the English literary tradition to be enriched and to assert its own distinct needs, foreshadowing later debates about the relative merits of ancient versus modern literary practices.

## 1.2. Core Principles: Defense of Poetry, Theory of Imitation, and the Role of the Vernacular

- A paramount concern for Renaissance critics was the vigorous **defense of poetry** against its ancient and contemporary detractors, alongside the equally crucial task of legitimizing the **vernacular** as a suitable poetic medium. This defense necessitated a clear definition of poetry and the establishment of its formal criteria, both intricately tied to the **theory of imitation**. Critics debated extensively the status, source, and purpose of poetry as an act of imitation, drawing broadly from classical philosophers and rhetoricians.
- The prevailing critical perspective held that literature was valued not merely for its aesthetic qualities but, more significantly, for its practical, pedagogical, or moralizing applications. The aim was to influence character and prepare individuals for active participation in civic life. Consequently, the period saw a proliferation of "Defences of Poetry" and "Arts of Poetry" as critics endeavored to theorize and justify literary practice.
- The Renaissance marked a pivotal moment when vernacular languages began to assume the cultural prominence previously held by Latin during the Middle Ages. Influential figures such as Pietro Bembo in Italy and Joachim Du Bellay in France actively linked the use of the vernacular to a burgeoning sense of national and patriotic identity. This linguistic shift underscored a broader cultural movement toward asserting national distinctiveness in artistic and intellectual endeavors.

## 1.3. Key Italian Influences and Their Impact

- Italian criticism reached its zenith in the 16th century, significantly spurred by the recovery and subsequent commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*. This intellectual revival led to the development of comprehensive theories of poetry, exemplified by the work of Lodovico Castelvetro. Renaissance criticism was fundamentally indebted to classical authorities, with Horace, Aristotle, and Plato influencing critical thought, roughly in that order. Ambitious critics like Julius Caesar Scaliger composed encyclopedic *artes poeticae* (arts of poetry), which aimed to systematize the art of poetry by establishing standards of prosody, figure, and genre derived from classical models. The rhetorical treatises of classical authors, such as Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, also exerted significant influence, notably on later English critics like Ben Jonson.

## 2. Elizabethan Literary Criticism and its Architects (1558-1603)

- The reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) marked a vibrant period for English literature, characterized by a unique blend of intellectual movements and artistic flourishing.

## 2.1. Intellectual Climate: Humanism, Desire for Knowledge, and the Reformation's Impact

- The Elizabethan Age was profoundly shaped by **humanism**, which encouraged the exploration of complex human emotions and experiences in both poetry and drama. This was facilitated by a renewed engagement with classical learning and a strong emphasis on human potential. Concurrently, there was a growing curiosity about the natural world and a desire for scientific truth, reflected in literary works exploring new ideas and challenging traditional beliefs. A heightened sense of national pride, particularly following the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, fostered a pervasive sense of confidence and optimism that significantly contributed to the flourishing of the arts. Elizabethan literature consistently showed a dedication to artistic craft, a fascination with human emotions, and a nuanced engagement with moral dilemmas, captivating audiences through compelling storytelling.

- The **Reformation** also significantly influenced Elizabethan literary thought. Plays frequently dramatized the inherent conflicts among the sacred (often associated with Catholicism), the critical (Protestant perspectives), and the secular. Shakespeare's works, for instance, often explored these religious differences, depicting their potential reconciliation or failure. Despite the religious turmoil, a notable aspect of Elizabethan drama, particularly as observed by later critics like A.C. Bradley, was its largely secular focus, confining itself to "non-theological observation and thought."

- This secular trend in drama, despite the backdrop of intense religious upheaval, points to a growing artistic independence and a focus on human psychology and societal structures rather than solely on divine intervention or strict religious morality. The theatre, in this view, became a space where complex, unresolved societal and spiritual tensions could be explored without necessarily offering religious solutions, contributing to its enduring power and relevance beyond its immediate religious context. This represents a subtle yet significant shift in the cultural role of theatre, moving toward a more independent artistic domain.

## 2.2. Sir Philip Sidney: *A Defence of Poesie*

- Sir Philip Sidney's **A Defence of Poesie** (also known as *The Defense of Poesy* or *An Apology for Poetry*), though not published during his lifetime, is regarded as one of the earliest and most pivotal works of literary criticism in English. In this seminal essay, Sidney passionately argues for poetry's profound value and purpose in society, asserting its unique capacity to teach, delight, and inspire moral virtues. He directly confronts contemporary criticisms that dismissed poetry as frivolous, deceptive, or even immoral.

- Sidney underscores poetry's ability to instill virtue and promote ethical behavior, famously stating: "We need not say that poetry abuseth man's wit, but that man's wit abuseth poetry." This declaration emphasizes his belief that poetry itself isn't inherently corrupting, but rather its misuse by individuals can lead to negative outcomes. He extensively employs classical references, drawing upon the authority of figures like Plato and Aristotle, and philosophical arguments to bolster his claims about the intrinsic connection between art and morality.

- Sidney articulates the concept of the "poet as prophet," suggesting that poets, through their creative expressions, possess the power to inspire their audience toward higher ideals. He famously declares: "Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diverse poets have done," thereby assigning to the poet the role of "a creator of imaginaries." This positions the poet not merely as an imitator of nature but as one who can improve upon it, presenting an idealized vision. The essay was written in response to a growing trend of criticism against poetry during a period when prose was gaining prominence in literary culture. Sidney contends that poetry, more effectively than philosophy or history, possesses the unique capacity to transmit virtue.

- Sidney's *Defence* is a deeply practical and moral argument, rooted in humanist ideals of civic betterment and and individual improvement. His central contention that poetry can "teach, delight, and inspire moral virtues" and "transmit virtue" more effectively than philosophy or history isn't merely an aesthetic claim but a strategic move to justify poetry's societal utility. This approach reframes poetry from a potential moral hazard, as Plato had feared, into a moral guide, thereby securing its place as a valuable, even essential, art form in English society. This pragmatic orientation reflects the broader aim of much Renaissance literary criticism: to establish the social and moral utility of literature in a rapidly changing intellectual and religious landscape, combating puritanical objections and elevating poetry's status.
- The assertion that the poet is a "creator of imaginaries" who can present a richer tapestry than nature itself directly challenges Plato's view that poetry is an imitation twice removed from truth. Sidney argues that the poet improves upon nature, creating ideal forms that inspire virtue. This elevates the poet from a mere imitator to a quasi-divine creator, capable of presenting a more perfect vision than reality itself, showing what *should be* rather than merely what *is*. This concept was foundational to the ambitious and often idealized nature of much Elizabethan poetry and drama, which sought to present not just what is, but what could be or should be, influencing the development of genres like epic and romance and contributing to the era's artistic confidence.

## 2.3. George Puttenham: *The Arte of English Poesie*

Published in 1589, George Puttenham's **The Arte of English Poesie** is widely recognized as the first comprehensive, full-scale work of poetic criticism in England. The work is meticulously structured into three distinct books: "the first of poets and poesies," which provides a general history and discussion of various poetic forms; "the second of proportion," which addresses prosody and the measures used in English verse; and "the third of ornament," focusing on rhetorical figures and stylistic embellishments.

The systematic approach of *The Arte of English Poesie* indicates a significant move toward codifying and systematizing English poetic practice, rather than merely defending poetry in general terms, as Sidney did. This work focuses on how to write effective English poetry, providing practical guidance for aspiring poets. This codification reflects a growing maturity and confidence in English as a literary language, moving beyond the initial "defense of the vernacular" to active instruction on its proper and effective use. It contributed significantly to the standardization of poetic forms and techniques, crucial for the flourishing of Elizabethan poetry, by providing a theoretical framework and practical handbook for writers.

## 2.4. Samuel Daniel: *A Defense of Rhyme*

Samuel Daniel (1562–1619), a notable poet and historian, authored **A Defense of Rhyme** in 1603. This work stands as a significant piece of literary criticism, specifically defending the English poetic tradition and the use of rhyme against the prevailing classical standards that often favored quantitative meter.

Daniel's *A Defense of Rhyme* represents a crucial moment in the vernacular's assertion of independence. While the Renaissance saw vernacular languages begin to take over Latin's cultural role and figures like Du Bellay linking vernacular use to patriotism, Daniel's work explicitly defends "the English poetic tradition against classical standards." This signifies a shift from merely *defending* the vernacular's right to exist to actively asserting its equal validity or even superiority compared to classical forms, particularly concerning rhyme, a distinctly non-classical feature. This debate over rhyme versus classical quantitative meter, advocated by groups like the Areopagus (discussed later), was a critical battle in the development of English prosody. Daniel's defense of rhyme demonstrates a growing confidence in the unique strengths of the English language and its poetic traditions, paving the way for the rich rhyming poetry of Shakespeare and others, and asserting a national literary identity capable of standing independently of strict classical rules.