**3.4. Sir Philip Sidney** (1554-1586)

[Next](http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/hypercritica/03.Renaissance/Renaissance.3.5.html)

[Previous](http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/hypercritica/03.Renaissance/Renaissance.3.3.html)

3.4.1. Life, Work and Sources

3.4.2. Poetry: its nature and aims

3.4.3. The Poet

3.4.4. The Poem: Genres

3.4.5. The Poem: Prosody and Diction

3.4.6. English Poetry

**3.4.1. Life, Work and Sources**

Sidney was the son of an illustrious family. He received a solid education, based on the medieval *trivium* (Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic), and the classical languages and literature. He travelled widely through Europe, and met in person many of the leading humanists of all countries. Early in his life he developed Protestant sympathies, and he was active in the politics of his country, aiming at establishing an international Protestant league against Spain. He died in the Netherlands, in a skirmish with Spanish forces while on mission for the Queen.

Sidney is remembered for his sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* and for his pastoral novel interspersed with poetry, *Arcadia.* He did not write for publication; the *Defence* was probably written in the early 1580s, and it circulated in manuscript copies before it was published posthumously in 1595 in two separate editions under two different titles: *An Apology for Poetry* and *The Defence of Poesy*.

Sidney's aim in writing the *Apology* was to justify that a sensible and comprehensive control over human affairs can be learnt from poetry. Poetry is not a contemplative but a practical activity: it is designed to teach. Sidney links the Reformation with the advancement of learning, and this with poetry. Poetry, then, has a direct usefulness to the building of the nation; writing good poetry is a patriotic enterprise.

Three traditions of critical thought mingle in Sidney:

· The Horatian-Aristotelian combination current in Italian poetics. Aristotle is seen as a support to Horace, but on the whole he is not a major influence on his own yet. The first English version of Horace's *Art* was published in 1567; later, Ben Jonson was to make his well-known verse rendering. Horace reaches Sidney directly; we do not know whether it is the same with Aristotle. He certainly knew some of his Italian commentators.

· The classical rhetorical tradition, whose main figure is Cicero. This tradition had lived on during the Middle Ages in the *trivium.* Following a medieval tradition and encouraged by Cicero, the Humanists subsume poetry under rhetoric. Poetry is seen by many as a variant of ornamented prose. In England, Ascham and Wilson present this account. Sidney opposes it: he sees rhetoric as merely a "serving science," an instrument of other disciplines. Poetry is more than rhetoric: it is a special kind of knowledge and creation for Sidney, even though he is careful to make poetry the vehicle of morality and religion.

· The Platonic, or rather the neo-Platonic tradition as transmitted by Boethius and Ficinus. These neo-Platonists admit that the beauty of objects is a way of ascending towards the divine beauty.

We may recognize in Sidney a Horatian background reinforced by Aristotelian and Ciceronian technicalities as well as by the Platonic Ideal. The plan of the Apology is as follows: first an encomium of poetry in humanist terms, underlining the authority of the ancients. There follows a comparison between poetry and other disciplines of knowledge, with a refutation of the current objections against poetry, a discussion of poetic forms, and lastly, an examination of the state of English poetry.

**3.4.2. Poetry: Its nature and aims**

Sidney's *Apology* follows a line of Humanist vindication of poetry which is already old by the time he writes (though not so much in England). Dante and Petrarch had rejected the low estimate of poetry current during the Middle Ages, and Boccaccio had identified poetry with high-toned, serious-minded and learned poetry. Some chapters of the *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* set the tone for the numerous essays written for the next three centuries demanding a prominent place of poetry among the other disciplines of learning. Still, we see that in Sidney's time poetry was condemned by some Puritans; philosophical attacks against poetry (Cornelius Agrippa, *De vanitate et incertitudine scientiarum,* 1527) were not lacking either. It is obvious that the defense of poetry was the critical task proper of the age.

To Sidney, a man with an acute political and religious sense, the highest sciences are those which teach virtuous action in the political or the ethical sphere. These are history and moral philosophy. Theology he refuses to consider alongside human learning; it has for him a sphere of its own outside which it cannot stand comparison. His comparison of poetry with history and with philosophy is based on Scholastic psychology, which distinguishes three main faculties in the human mind: imagination, reason, and memory. The different kinds of learning are directed to one or another of these faculties:

**(26)** enriching of memory (i.e. history), enabling (or strengthening) of judgment (i.e. philosophy), and enlarging of conceit (i.e. poetry).

Enlarging of conceit: that is, expanding the human mind and improving ideas. In order to present this concept in a lively way, Sidney depicts character-sketches of the historian and the philosopher which are close to caricatures.

During the Renaissance there was not much theorising on metaphysics, but there was an acute interest in applied philosophy. "Much of Renaissance achievement lay in diffusing over all human activities the intense, highly specialised acquisitions of philosophy in medieval times" (Shepherd 31). Sidney presents a typical Renaissance attitude in seeing the man of letters as the model for learning, and not the abstract philosopher, who is caricatured as a mixture of Scholastic pedant and minor Greek philosopher. Practical, useful and effective knowledge, leading to action, is valued more highly than abstract theory.

The Humanists tend to establish comparisons between history and poetry. We saw that Castelvetro defined poetry as an imitation of history; Lorenzo Valla sees in history the source of both poetry and philosophy. Sometimes these opinions are reversed, but all the disciplines are seen as closely related. History is valued for its rhetorical power, apart from its factualness. It is seen as a school of examples and morals. And of course there is an increasing political, nationalistic interest in the writing of history.

Sidney distrusts too high a rating of the moral and educative value of history. He stresses that it deals with particulars, and not universals, an opinion already advanced by Aristotle. History is not then guided by a rational principle, but by mere facts which may contradict what is morally desirable. Poetry, on the other hand, supplies that rational organization and so it is a reliable moral guide; its examples are more ideal than those of history because they are not tied to fact and can be modelled on pure moral intention.

One main argument for Sidney's defense of poetry is that all sciences depend on nature, but that poetry is a higher activity than science. All sciences are dependent on nature, but poetry builds a nature of its own:

**(27)** Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature, as the heroes, demigods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich a tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.

We see that poetry presents a "golden world", that is, an ideal world which brings out the potentialities of the real one. According to this conception, poetry gives examples, but not merely in the way of allegory, veiled theology or moral philosophy. "To Sidney . . . poetry was an exercise of the free creative faculty, in which the poet transcended the limitations of actual life, yet succeeded by means of his fictions in giving a delightful and inspiring revelation of ideal and universal truth." It is, fundamentally, a neo-Platonic position. Sidney does not see that this idea is contrary to Plato's views. At first sight, the theory is not too far from Aristotle's, though it seems to lean more to the side of idealization --Aristotle also accepts realistic poetry. Sidney quotes Aristotle to support his idea that poetry works with universal concepts, and not with particulars, that it aims at universal value. But while Aristotle's universals are generally cognitive, Sidney's universals are moral. Sidney's theory of poetry as the production of another nature derives from Scaliger, but Sidney adds religious and transcendental overtones coming from neo-Platonism theories of the ideal world.

Many of the scholastic accounts of poetry gave it a humble place among the sciences, and often equated fiction with lies. For instance, Conrad of Hirsau praises Virgil in the following terms:

**(28)** There has never been a [greater] author in terms of style and metre, and no one, when he ought to have told the truth, nevertheless lied in a more polished and civil fashion.

One of Sidney's main arguments in defense of poetry is his riposte to the accusation that poetry is a kind of lie:

**(29)** The poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false . . . . But the poet (as I said before) never affirmeth. The poet never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writes . . . . And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not. (124)

Sidney's argument, based on the difference in intention, might derive from Augustine's definition of lying. At first sight, this may sound like a good riposte. It is indeed a primary and essential justification of fiction against the obtuse accusation that it does not present us with factual truth, a justification that apparently has to be repeated at regular intervals. But taken as a whole it is a highly problematical assertion, and it does not solve the problem of the relationship between fiction and truth. The poet *does* affirm after all, because there is a logical relationship between fiction and reality. Otherwise, he could not teach, and Sidney assumes that he can. Saying that poetry does not affirm may be problematic if taken literally -it might imply that poetry need not have any relationship of congruence with the rest of reality: it would be a theory of art for art's sake. Some of the assertions in the *Apology* take a dangerous approach to that view. Poetry would be not an interpretation of reality, but an alternative, improved reality. There is a risk of contradiction with Sidney's main aim in writing the treatise: to show that this congruence exists, and that poetry is a mode of knowledge which provides us with a better understanding of the real world.

In fact, according to the main argument of Sidney's theory, the discovery of inherent reason within nature produces an imitation which betters nature, but the notion of creation *ex nihilo* is absent. The poet's activity is not seen as one of creation; it is rather a discovery or recognition of a pattern which was already there in an imperfect way. It is arguable, though, that Sidney does not develop a fully consistent view of the relation between poetry and reality. And of course poetry may be badly used, and not help us in discovering the truth: it may deal with *phantastiké,* with unworthy objects, instead of guiding us along the patterns of God's creation. As any instrument, poetry is dependent on the moral nature of he who uses it.

Sidney condemns aestheticism as something which jumps out of the natural order of things. Things must be content with their place, and subservient to the whole of God's scheme: even a purse, beautifully embroidered though it may be, must answer to its original function, keeping money inside (*Arcadia* ). Everything in nature is directed to an end, and nothing is an end in itself. Art must therefore be used to hide art, and shoew that both poetry and nature are subject to decorum. Sidney believes that poetry can provide a grasp of the design governing the whole.

Sixteenth-century interpretations of Aristotle and Horace lean towards didacticism; it is always Horace's third possible aim for poetry (to please *and* teach) which is quoted, repeated and emphasized (although there are some exceptions to this view, like Castelvetro).

Sidney defends usefulness in poetry. Delight is instrumental to the main purpose, but it is a good in itself as well. This assertion of pleasure is also a typical phenomenon of the Renaissance: we may think of Lorenzo Valla's *De voluptate* (1440), a vindication of pleasure and of active life which goes against all the medieval ideals. Delight is good for Sidney, because it derives from the recognition of harmony, perfection or goodness. It appeals then not merely to the senses, but to the understanding as well. Poetry can catch some of the delight of the senses by means of the words, which substitute sense experience. It also provides, of course, an intellectual delight.

But the main characteristic of poetry is its power to move. Moving has two senses: stirring the emotions of the reader and inducing him to action. To move does not mean to perturbate the hearer in any way, but rather to persuade him to do something. Sidney would agree with Puttenham's claim that

**(30)** poets from the beginning were the best persuaders and their eloquence the first rhetoric in the world.

Moving is a higher aim than teaching, because its effects are seen in actual action. We may think here of this threefold aim of poetry (teach, delight and move) similar those set by Cicero to the accomplished orator. The Christian reformulation of this doctrine by St. Augustine had set as the sole aim of the discipline to move men to holiness. Renaissance theory of literature still shows a strong rhetorical influence in seeing moving and conviction as the main end of poetry. Since poetry is more moving than both philosophy and history, poetry for Sidney "in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman." The idea that poetic style is more affective and moving, that it is more fit to lead the emotions of people who cannot reach the abstractions of philosophy, is a commonplace of medieval scholasticism. According to Henry of Ghent,

**(31)** in the speculative sciences, where the main aim is the illumination of the intellect, one must proceed by way of proof and in a subtle manner, but in moral matters, where the goal is an upright will and that we should become good, one must proceed by persuasion and use of figures.

Sidney has probably inherited this conception. It originates in the *Ethics* of Aristotle, and it is consonant with Sidney's conception of poetry as an instrument of ethics. However, Sidney's views on poetry should be distinguished from Aristotle's, since they are much more heavily rhetorical. Aristotle "never suggests that poetry is an effective way of communicating a kind of knowledge that could also be communicated (but less effectively) by other kinds of discourse." At the basis of this conception is the idea that poetic techniques are only a means of presentation, a "form" which is added to a pre-established "content." Renaissance theory does not conceive of poetry as a means of discovery, and divorces form from content.

**3.4.3. The Poet**

Sidney dismisses (as Scaliger before him) Plato's condemnation of the poets in the *Republic,* and commends instead what he believes to be the praise bestowed on the poet in *Ion,* even though he points out that the claim of divine inspiration is excessive. It is characteristic of Renaissance theorists that they tend to present Plato as a defender of poetic inspiration; for them, Plato condemned only the abuse of poetry. Sidney does not favour much any theory of inspiration. The Roman name given to the poets, *vates* or prophets, he adduces as a proof of reverence bestowed on them, but acknowledges that in itself it is superstitious.

There is a tendency in neo-Platonism to draw a parallel between human and divine creation: "What God creates in the world by His thought man conceives in himself by intellectual act and expresses it in language, puts it into his books and makes a copy of it using earthly materials" (Shepherd 62). How is this to be effected? Ronsard, Tasso, Puttenham, Chapman, and many other poets and critics in the Renaissance advocate the old inspirationalist theory in *Ion,* which at the time is taken to be an exaltation of poetry, and speak of the "divine fury" of the poet. "Possessed by this fury, a poet's spirit was thought to rise to a direct awareness of the divine harmony and acquire a supernatural wisdom." Willis notes that poetic fury is not to be understood as pathological madness, but rather as a state of exaltation induced by intense concentration. Others speak of direct divine inspiration. For Spenser, poetry was

**(32)** no art, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct, not to be gotten by labour and learning, but adorned with both, and poured into the wit by a certain *enthousiasmos* and celestial inspiration.

Giordano Bruno wrote in England and dedicated to Sidney his work *De gli Eroici Furori* (1585). But the dedication, though not as unwelcome as Stephen Gosson's, was equally misapplied, because Sidney himself did not adhere to these doctrines of inspiration and had satirized them in *Astrophil and Stella:*

**(33)**

I never drank of Aganippe well,

Nor ever did in shade of Tempe sit;

And muses scorn with vulgar brains to dwell;

Poor layman I, for sacred rites unfit

Some do I hear of poet's fury tell,

But (God wot) wot not what they mean by it. . . .

(from Sonnet 74)

Sidney believes that the poet has an insight into the proper nature of things, but this insight comes from right reason, not from any kind of fury or madness. It is a controllable force. Sidney's doctrine may have some neo-Platonic traits, but it is a very reasonable brand of neo-Platonism, similar to that applied to painting by the Italian painter and theorist Zuccaro. The ideas in human mind are all right the images of the divine ideas, but they have a low origin: they are derived from sense, and they are not "substantial", like the divine ones, but "accidental."

Poetry, then, is a vocation, a rational activity, not a divine gift in any other sense than the reason common to men is divine. But "orator fit, poeta nascitur": poetry must lead, and not be led. It is an "unelected vocation," and one which ought to be a demanding one, Sidney implies as he exhorts his fellow-poets to more self-discipline. More work and less heroic fury: this is Sidney's classicist advice.

But there are more romantic elements than this in Sidney's theory of poetry than this counsel would warrant. Towards the end of the *Apology*, Sidney complains that in the lyrical poets of his time Sidney finds a general lack of energy which betrays a lack of passion:

**(34)** many of such writings as come under the banner of unresistible love, if I were a mistress, would never persuade me they were in love. (175)

Persuasion may be the end of love lyrics, but to persuade one must move, and one does not move by mere imitation and study, without energy. Persuasion is therefore linked to *expression* and to a renewal of the rhetorical tradition. Sidney opposes using conventional rhetorical ornaments becayse they work against the main aim of poetry: worn-out resources are no longer convincing. The poet must find a new and more vivid expression, something which only the poet's personal experience and subjective enthusiasm can provide. This conception is not much stressed in the *Apology,* but it is a suggestive theme in *Astrophil and Stella* (SEE PHOTOCOPIES):

Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,

That the deare She might take some pleasure of my paine:

Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,

Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine,

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,

Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine:

Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow

Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sunne-burn'd braine.

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay,

Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Studie's blowes,

And others' feete still seem'd but strangers in my way.

Thus great with child to speake, and helplesse in my throwes,

Biting my trewand pen, beating myself for spite,

"Foole," said my Muse to me, "looke in thy heart and write."

(I)

This poem is written at the start of a tradition which favours original invention over imitation of previous authors, a tradition which will not come to the foreground of literary theory until the Romantic age. It is significant that we find this statement in a poem, and not in Sidney's purposed theoretical formulation of his poetic principles; sometimes a writer's theory and his practice are not completely coordinated. In the *Apology* the classical tradition is given a much more prominent role. And it is only *feeling* that Sidney is favouring; of *imagination* he is more distrustul, because he links it to pestilent desires.

In the *Apology*, the poet is dealt with only as an embodiment of his art. Sidney does not pay much attention to the personality of the poet, and is not much concerned with his mental states. The poet has the dignity of his craftÊhis ideal must be one of great seriousness. He has the public role of a teacher, which he is to perform in the activities of his life as a courtier, after the ideal formulated by Castiglione and Elyot. Being a courtier is not a restricted ideal at that time: the ideal courtier is a man of learning, a man of fashion, good manners and witty conversation, a lover, a politician and a warrior.

The poet is not committed to publication. The aristocrat Sidney favours the kind of restricted and privileged audience he enjoyed during his lifetime; the *Apology* itself was designed for restricted circulation in courtly circles. At the end of the treatise, Sidney indulges in a half-serious, half-playful call to the reader, asking him to become a defender of poetry, too:

**(35)** Thus doing, your name shall flourish in the printer's shops; thus doing, you shall be of kin to many a poetical preface; thus doing, you shall be most fair, most rich, most wise, most all, you shall dwell upon superlatives. (142)

**3.4.4. The Poem: Genres**

Sidney stresses the importance of decorum: the differences between the poetic genres must be preserved. This difference in form is linked to a difference in end: each kind of poetry and each genre follows different aims and is designed to please a different kind of public. There are three main kinds of poetry: religious, philosophical, and imaginative poetry. This last kind is the most properly poetic one, and the one Sidney is most concerned with. It is subdivided into several genres. Sidney's list of genres is typical of the Renaissance, partly based on metre and partly on subject matter. It follows an order of preeminence, and includes Heroic Poetry, Lyric Poetry, Tragic Poetry, Comic Poetry, Satiric Poetry, Iambic Poetry, Elegiac Poetry, Pastoral Poetry.

Each genre has its own end and its own merit: **pastoral**, for instance, is interpreted by Sidney as an essentially allegorical genre which sings of virtue and politics under cover of talesÊthis is certainly the case in Spenser's *Colin Clout* and in Sidney's *Arcadia.* ***Elegy*** sings the evils of the world, **iambic** poetry (the epigram) decries villainy, and **satire** makes us reflect on our own folly.

**Comedy** imitates the common errors of life. Through it we get an experience of vice and learn the effects which are to be expected from it. It shows evil characters and doings, but that does not mean that it teaches evil; Sidney compares it to a mirror which must show truth: this means that it is a realistic genre, instead of an idealized one like tragedy and epic.

**Tragedy** is interpreted by Sidney in the standard fashion of his age: it shows the uncertainty of human fortune, and gives advice to kings and tyrants. To this medieval idea, he adds the Aristotelian idea that the function of tragedy is to cause pity and fear, or, as he puts it, "admiration and conmiseration." But the emphasis is on moral teaching rather than on emotional catharsis, and so the theory not quite Aristotelian. Sidney expounds the doctrine of the unities of space and time, which had been developed in the continent by Robortello, Scaliger, and Castelvetro; but he presents these rules as sensible recommendations rather than as inviolable precepts.

**Lyric** is rated in the *Apology* rather more highly than in other Renaissance treatises, maybe because Sidney himself was an outstanding practitioner of the genre. Anyway, there is a general move in the Renaissance to recognize the seriousness of lyric poetry. The aim of lyric is for Sidney to praise virtue, give moral precepts and sing the praise of God; it teaches honourable enterprises and is the enemy of idleness. It is striking that most of Sidney's lyrical production (and most of what we consider lyric poetry) falls outside this definition. As we can see, Sidney is so eager to demonstrate the didactic purpose of all genres that he distorts actual practice. But in Sidney's own poetry we can find the traditional objectives of instruction and delight combined with a more urgent affective goal, which touches the poet himself. The close link between lyric and subjective feeling is clearer in Sidney's poems than in his treatise, althought here he insists on the need for sincerity and he condemns the tendency to rhetorical and insincere forms. He calls for a less elaborated, more direct lyrical style.

Like most Renaissance theorists, Sidney places **epic** poetry foremost in his list of genres. The model to follow is the *Aeneid*. Heroic poetry moves men with example and makes virtue triumph. It is the most idealized of all the genres, and therefore the closest to the essence of poetry within Sidney's conception. It was surely his early death what prevented Sidney from attempting the writing of a protestant epic, a work which would have fulfilled all the ideals of poetic relevance and high seriousness that the neo-Classical theory ideally demands from literature.

**3.4.5. The Poem: Prosody and Diction**

It results from Sidney's definition of poetry that verse form is ancillary, not essential to poetry, as Minturno had held against Scaliger. Verse is the most adequate form for poetry, since it is more harmonious and dignified, but

**(36)** It is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet, no more than a long gown maketh an advocate.

Imaginative writings in prose can also be called poetry. Metre is appropriate because it reflects the harmony of the Universe. It is also a good mnemonic resource and helps poetry in teaching; besides, it favours the alliance of poetry with "divine music." But in the last analysis it is only an ornament, not a necessity. It is "feigning" together with teaching that makes a poet, and not verse. A shortcoming of this way of putting it is that verse seems something which is added to a pre-existing meaning, instead of helping to constitute that meaning.

The rhythm of modern verse, he says, is based on "number, with some regard of the accent," and on rhyme. Sidney was one of several poets who tried to adapt the Classical measures to English. One reason is that he was aware of the danger that the mechanical necessity of rhyme may distort the coherence of the poem. Like Gascoigne, Sidney argues that rhyme must be founded on reason. In submitting sound to sense, a writer declares the rationality of poetry.

In spite of his defense of classical poetry, Sidney's views are not extreme. He accepts and uses rhyme, and he believes that the English language is fit for both types of versification, the classical and the modern one, because of the free position of the accent in its vocabulary (as compared to French, for instance). He seems to think that classical verse can be adapted to English substituting accent for quantity. Other attempts at using classical prosody in English were a failure, because the English ear perceives accentual and even syllabic rhythm as more significant than any metrical pattern resting on an alterance of long and short vowels.

There were two general attitudes to style current in Sidney's time:

· That good style consists in an elaborate, difficult and ornamented language, different from the simplicity of everyday speech.

· That the best style is simple and direct, that ornaments only serves to hinder the clarity of truth.

In rhetoric as well as in poetry, Sidney leans moderately to the second position. He opposes the extremely ornamental diction of Euphuism, even though he advocates a polished aesthetic use of language. Words, he thinks, should remain transparent and be comprehensible to the hearer. The ideal is (as in similar proposals in Italy, France, or Spain) that of the conversational speech of courtiers, in which art is used to hide art, instead of showing it, and the result is both simple and polished. The rhetorical tradition of Cicero and Demosthenes, Sidney believes, will no longer carry out the aim of poetry, which is to persuade, because its resources are now evident: there is a surfeit of rhetoric. Conviction will only come through sincerity, and this cannot exist together with rhetoric. However, Sidney himself did not always write according to the principles he preached. His novel *Arcadia* (1580),inspired in Sannazaro and Montemayor, is written in a florid style which often out-Lylies Lyly.

**3.4.6. English Poetry**

In the *Apology* we find one of the earliest surveys of English literature. Apart from the usual complaints that poetry has fallen from an earlier state of preeminence and that contemporary poets are cold and rhetorical, Sidney presents us with the "great tradition" of English poetry up to his time: among medieval poets he values Chaucer (though he mentions *Troilus and Criseyde* rather than *The Canterbury Tales),* and he shows an appreciation for medieval romances and ballads uncommon in a Humanist. Among his contemporaries he praises the Earl of Surrey, and Spenser, though he does not approve of the archaic diction of the latter.

As concerns drama, he complains that English tragedies and comedies, even the great *Gorboduc* , are faulty as to the classical rules of space and time: the English stage is fond of dramatising many episodes which should instead be narrated in a messenger speech, or suppressed altogether by plunging *in medias res*. He calls for a strict verisimilitude of the action represented on the stage, and for less reliance on the fancy of the spectator. Besides, he says, Englishmen are too fond of farce, and spoil their tragedies by turning them into tragicomedies. The aim of the stage (even in the case of comedy) for Sidney is to produce delight, rather than laughter:

**(37)** delight we scarcely do but in things that have a conveniency to ourselves or to the general nature; laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature. (136).

Comedy is more polished and intellectual than farce. It makes us laugh by exposing human foibles, not through mere clowning; laughter should come from its satiric aspect. As to tragicomedy, it is not rejected outright; only the sudden breaches of tone which spoil the tragic effect. The test is the emotional effect, the quality of the dramatic illusion produced, not a blind submission to the rules.

Sidney concludes with a profession of faith in the future of English language, and analysing its advantages (mixed vocabulary, simple grammar, sweet sound) which will make it capable of producing great literature in the future. The *Apology* itself, because of its intrinsic merits and its historical significance, lives up to this expectation. One of its merits is to have made literary criticism readable and entertaining for the English audience of the Renaissance; many of its ideas were influential on writers like Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

**3.6. Ben Jonson** (1572?-1637)

[Next](http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/hypercritica/03.Renaissance/Renaissance.3.7.html)

[Previous](http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/hypercritica/03.Renaissance/Renaissance.3.5.html)

3.6.1. Classicism

3.6.2. Dramatic theory

**3.6.1. Classicism**

Ben Jonson is not only a playwright, but also a critic who commented on his own plays and took care to collect them in a definitive edition, an uncommon practice at the time (1616). He was also the first Englishman object of a critical monography, *Jonsonus Virbius* (1638). Jonson's thought is influenced by Sidney, but he presents us with a more severe brand of classicism than the one we had found in Sidney. Sidney stressed idealization and passion; Jonson will insist on imitation and regularity instead. His moral purpose is also more explicit. Jonson's plays are much more respectful of the unities than Shakespeare's, even though there is scarcely a single one in which they may be said to remain intact *(vide* Dryden on *The Silent Woman).* Jonson's classicism is *native;* it is not an extraneous foreign element, but rather blends easily with the English tradition, of which it is a logical evolution. Much of this easy implantation comes from the nature of Jonson's talent: he is caustic and vulgar, *obscene* yet at the same time *moralising.* He does not deal with unknown places or attitudes, but rather with London and *now.* This topical character of his plays is also found in his criticism, and it is a great obstacle to its comprehension, because he is always referring to some current topic which is obscure to us now. Jonson also has the self-righteous and confident tone of many neo-Classics after him.

Jonson was a kind of literary dictator in his circle of the Mermaid Tavern, which included Shakespeare. Being energetic and overbearing, he became involved in literary disputes such as the Playwright's Quarrel (1599-1602), but he never wrote a theoretical work stating his principles. Much of his criticism, as is usual in the early seventeenth century, is dispersed in his poetical works: prologues, memorial verses, satires, essays in verse. . . The thing most resembling a book on literature written by Jonson was published posthumously (1640) under the long-wound title *Timber: or, Discoveries; Made upon Men and Matter; as they have flow'd out of his daily Reading, or had their refluxe to his peculiar Notion of the Times.* It is a miscellany of late writings (mostly 1620-35) which includes political and moral writings, satire, drafts for future works, and lecture notes -it seems that Jonson was a professor of rhetoric at university for one year. Two thirds of the whole, however, consists in literary criticism, dealing with rhetoric, poetry, and drama. Only the ideas are not Jonson's, at least not exclusively. The greater part is a series of verbatim quotations from classical sources, which we may however take to express Jonson's literary creed. He also borrows from some contemporary critics, such as Daniel Heinsius, Pontanus, and Hoskins. The exposition is aphoristical throughout: rules of thumb, practical advice for composition, and sententious comments on previous authors. Jonson's neoclassical doctrine consists more of practical principles and concrete advice than of systematic theories.

The qualities of style in oratory and letter-writing favoured by Jonson are the ones appreciated by most Renaissance critics: brevity, perspicuity, vigor and discretion. He rejects artifice, recalling the ancient phrase *oratio imago animi:*

**(39)** Language most shows a man: speak, that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired and inmost parts of us, and is the image of the parent of it, the mind.

Jonson is the enemy of obscurity:

**(40)** As it is fit to read the best authors to youth first, so let them be of the openest and clearest, as Livy before Sallust, Sidney before Donne.

The tone of Jonson's comments on specific authors is more personal than in most Renaissance critics. He appreciates Spenser's subject-matter, but he opposes his 'Chaucerisms': "in affecting the ancients he writ no language." Moreover, the allegory of the *Faerie Queene* is too complex and confusing. Indeed, Jonson seems to believe that English poetry needs some guiding principles: Donne deserves hanging for not keeping his accents in place. And when he is told that Shakespeare, whom he admires "on this side Idolatry", never blotted a line while composing, he answers "would he had blotted a thousand." Jonson is all for classical restraint: Shakespeare had the use of his wit, he said, but the power to restrain it was beyond him. We see here a typical notion of neoclassical criticism: that an author needs not a principle of dynamism and creation within him, but also a principle of restriction: he needs to be a critic of his own invention. The idea that "Shakespeare wanted art," that he could not control his writing, was to be a commonplace of neoclassical criticism of Shakespeare. But Jonson had no quarrel with Shakespeare: he sets him above all English writers, and writes that "He was not of an age, but for all time."

All this may provide some examples of the kind of critical observations which are to be found in Jonson, especially if we keep in mind that even these famous observations on Shakespeare are drawn from classical sources. This is the practical application of an important theoretical principle of Jonson's : imitation.

A poet, Jonson states, needs inspiration. But actually he allows a smaller role to inspiration and invention than either Sidney or Bacon. He immediately places the greater stress on exercise, study, imitation and art (technique). Imitation does not mean servile subjection:

**(41)** Nothing is more ridiculous , than to make an Author a *Dictator* as the schools have done Aristotle.

Imitation, Jonson says, is not plagiarism. It is Jonson who introduces the word "plagiarism" into the English language. He borrows it from Martial, who had used it playfully referring to literature (*plagiarius* meaning originally a kidnapper). Of course, the concept of plagiarism such as it is used today is still unthought of in Jonson's time. The use of models, in Jonson's view, involves their assimilation and invites their improvement. In any case, we have to discover the application which the general truth which can be extracted from the Classics may have in our own time.

**3.6.2. Dramatic theory**

Jonson's ideas on drama are close to Sidney's. His main statement about comedy is that it has a moral, rather than a libelous intent. Of course, he is not being original: he follows Horace and Minturno here. But it was important to take this position at a time when comedy and farce were intermingled to a degree which made their status problematic. Comic poetry, he says, is nearest to oratory among all literary genres. It portrays and stirs the affections; its end is to teach; laughter is only a means, not the end of comedy. Jonson seems to regard comedy as an essentially satiric genre: he does not care much in theory about its entity as an artistic object, apart form his advocation of the rules.

Jonson is best known for his theory of the comic humours:

**(42)**

When some one peculiar quality

Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw

All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,

In their confluctions, all to run one way,

This may be truly said to be a Humour.

This results from the blending of medieval physiognomy (with its four humours: sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholy), a study ever fashionable, and the Plautine tradition of characterization, as revived by the Humanists. A humour is a type, but a somewhat peculiar and individual one; it is curious that Jonson demands both types and realism, because his humours are so narrow that they suggest caricatures of individuals rather than the "general nature" of neoclassical types. However, not all of his characters are humours, and so Jonson's practice goes beyond his theory.

An enthusiastic advocate of literary reform, Jonson disliked the current dramatic fashions which favoured tragicomedy, fantastic comedies and history plays. The business of the stage should be with none of these,

(43)

But deeds, and language, such as men doe use;

And persons, such as Comoedie would chuse,

When she would shew an Image of the times,

and sport with humane follies, not with crimes

(Prologue, *Every Man in his Humour* )

The solution for drama lies in greater realism, and this is linked to imitation of the great comedians of Antiquity, Plautus and Terence. "The curious irony of this reform is that his 'type' satirical figures appear to belong to the same order as the 'type' tragical figures of Marlowe. In general he approximates more to Molière than to Shakespeare, and anticipates the artificially patterned figures of Restoration comedy."

Jonson's plays, tragedies or comedies, do not always respect the unities, something he considers a concession to contemporary audiences. The essential qualities of tragedy named by Johnson are Senecan rather than Aristotle:

**(44)** truth of argument, dignity of persons, gravity and height of elocution and fullness and frequency of sentence.

Indeed, the Aristotelianism in Jonson is more apparent than real; his conception of drama is too moralistic and rhetorical for that, and he does not formulate a theory of universalization. However, his emphasis on reason, order and realism make him the first of the English neo-Classics, and his example will be followed in the second part of the 17th century. Some have accused him of being a pedant, and think that his theories are too narrow and regulative to account even for his own practice: *"* Ben Jonson the poet and dramatist shared an uneasy bed with Ben Jonson the scholar and critic. What the artist would have done excellently by instinct the critic required to be done less excellently by rule: so Ben Jonson has engaged the attention of persons and periods that are disconcerted by sheer creative fecundity and prefer writers with theories that can be discussed."

**4.1. French influence**

4.1.1. Pierre Corneille: The Dramatic Unities

4.1.2. Nicolas Boileau

During the 16th century, Italy had been the main influence on critical ideas. But in the early 17th century the authority shifts to France.French taste and fashions are exported to all of Europe; in the case of Britain, there is the additional circumstance of the exile of the court and nobility during the Commonwealth.

Neo-classical thought becomes generally established as the century advances. While the best works of the Italian Renaissance had been written outside the principles of neo-classicism, it is the other way round in France, where many of the leading writers are consciously following the principles dictated by the critics.

Corneille and Boileau are both courtly poets, working under the system of patronage. This situation will gradually change, due to the eventual development of popular genres in drama and narrative which are financed directly by the public. The system of patronage will gradually be frequently replaced by a the subscriptions to a project before publication. Johnson's unsuccessful address to the Earl of Chesterfield, his independent success and his subsequent refusal of patronage have acquired a symbolic status in English literature.

**4.1.1. Pierre Corneille** (1606-1684)

Corneille was the leading French tragedian of the mid-XVII, an age when France is becoming the center of fashion and culture in Europe. The French critics like Le Bossu (*Discours du poème épique*) and Aubignac (*La Pratique du théâtre* ) are now developing a rigid literary creed, demanding strict submission to the classical canon. Corneille is both a victim and a theorist of neo-Classicism. Some plays of his, like *Le Cid,* were criticised for taking liberties with the unities, and Corneille stated his views on the subject in his three *Discours du poème dramatique* (1660), which had a direct influence on Dryden's dramatic ideas, and of which the most significant is the "Discours des trois unités." Corneille sees the problems of dramatic theory from the practical viewpoint of a playwright, and this leads him to take a more liberal attitude than his critics. He anticipates Dryden in discussing the theoretical points using practical examples from his own plays and from the classics, pointing out the defects he finds in both where necessary. Corneille is not rigidly prescriptive on this subject. "Corneille tries to refer rules of dramatic art to common sense and to the situation of the audience as well as to Aristotle," and is aware of what Aristotle said and did not say on this point, "but believes that something like unity of place follows logically from unity of time and unity of action" (Adams 218). In fact, the advice he gives on composition is appropriate for the kind of drama he wrote.

*The Unity of Action*

As Aristotle said, the plays must have a unity of action. But "the term *unity of action* does not mean the tragedy should show only one action on stage"(*Three Unities,* 219). Corneille understands it as referring to a unity of *obstacle to plans* in comedy and of *peril* in tragedy. If there are several elements which carry about this function, they must be logically linked. That is, there may be several actions which are incomplete and which reach completion only when the play is seen as a whole: they are subordinated to the main action. These incomplete actions will keep the minds of the audience in a "pleasant suspense" . "There must be only one complete action, which leaves the mind of the spectator serene"(219).

The logical linkage of the actions also implies that each act has to prepare the developments which will take place in the next one. What happens on the stage must be necessary, not the product of coincidence, of some sudden change of mind, or of the intervention of the *deus ex machina* . If possible, the passage from one scene to the next must not be abrupt: it must also submit to an appearance of necessity.

Corneille repeats the Aristotelian and Horatian ideas on the parts of the action (complication and resolution) and the use of narration. If possible, this has to be restricted to events happening behind scenes while the action is taking place. Events previous to the action must be used as little as posssible.

The play ought to be divided in 5 acts, and not in three, as the obstinate Spaniards will keep on doing. Each act should contain a greater part of the action than the previous one. The first should not advance the action, but prepare the second while it shows the moral nature of the characters and informs the audience of the situation of the story. As we said before, Corneille insists that the exits of the characters have to be accounted for; the entrances seem natural even if they are not explained, but they will have to be justified if a there are two or more by the same character in the same act. So, Corneille is not only repeating but also developing the classical doctrine of verisimilitude and unity. Elements such as the "liaison des scènes" are not found in classical theory. He also justifies the use of stage directions, which did not exist in the Classics, for the benefit of the reader and the director of troops.

*The Unity of Time*

Corneille thinks that 30 hours is a more reasonable limit than just 24; it may be broadened if necessary. He believes that following too strictly the unity of time may lead to more defects and incongruities than those which result from a subtle compression of story-time (he sets Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* as an example of absurd subjection to the rule of time: the fall of Troy and Agamemnon's return occur at an interval of a few minutes). The best solution for dramatic time, Corneille believes, is to leave it indeterminate to the audience whenever possible. The audience will not think of it unless they are made aware of incongruities. Time indications are always clumsy in plays, Corneille believes, and it is better to leave them out. All acts must cover a similar amount of story time, but the fifth has the privilege of acceleration. The acts must be continuous, if possible, but any amount of story-time may be consumed during the intervals. And a good justification to include all the events we need in the short time we are allowed is to choose for our play a day both illustrious and long-awaited. This subject is, moreover, a great ornament to a poem.

*The Unity of Place*

The requirement for a unity of place, Corneille notes, is not found in Aristotle or in Horace, only it seems a logical consequence of the unity of time. The closer we keep to a unity of place, the better, but there is a danger of its leading to absurdities, and so Corneille allows: "I should be willing to concede that a whole city has unity of place" (225). Only, the changes of place have to be made during the intervals between the acts. They must not be mentioned or shown through setting. As in the unity of time, Corneille believes that the best is to leave the place of the action undetermined: it must be an ideal "theatrical place," fictional, at once private and public, according to the needs of the action.

French playwrights developed the so-called "liaison des scènes," the linking-up of scenes, to emphasize the unities of time and place. The characters must come to the stage or leave it for some reason having to do with the plot, and the characters must meet in some way so that the audience knows that there is no change of place nor of time from a scene to the next. In this way, Corneille says, continuity of presentation helps shape continuity of action. He acknowledges it is not a rule: it is only an embellisment. But audiences have grown so accustomed to it that it has become something like a rule. This is a recognition that there is an authority of practical response in the audience, as well as the authority of the Ancients.

There are three possible links which can be established between one scene and the next: the characters in one scene may hear the others coming, or they may see them coming, or they may meet for some time and speak. Corneille believes the last is the better, though he tolerates the second one too. The first, however, liaison through sound, is to be avoided.

As is the case of Dryden, Corneille defends his relaxation of the rules against critics, saying that it is easier to criticise than to write a successful play following the rules strictly. We may note that this relaxation of the rules leaves them more or less where Aristotle had defined them originally; only more specified.

**4.1.2. Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux** (1636-1711)

Boileau is not an original critic. He follows a tradition that includes the critical work of Malherbe and Chapelain. Boileau and René Rapin were French critics whose influence is stronger in Britain towards the end of the 17th century.

Boileau's most famous work, *L'Art poétique* (1672), is written in the tradition of the Horatian epistle, with a somewhat more systematic structure. Its more direct model, however, is Vida's latin poem in three cantos *De arte poetica* (1527), as well as the swarm of epistles, poems and treatises which followed. But while Vida's work was not successful poetry, Boileau's is at once poetical and theoretical. Its great success stimulated the fashion, which continued well into the 18th century. It was translated into English by Dryden and was imitated by many English writers in the late 17th and early 18th centuries (Rochester, Mulgrave, Roscommon, Granville, Wesley, and last but not least Pope in his *Essay on Criticism* ).

The work is divided into four cantos. The first deals with general advice on the nature of poetry. Both talent and inspiration are necessary: hard work is not enough. Preciosism, exaggeration and farce are extremes which must be avoided; also, rime and reason must fit each other. Like Horace, Boileau gives a miniature treatise of versification and a history of (French) poetry. It is significant that he ignores the Middle Ages.

The second canto defines the minor lyrical and satiric genres: idyll, elegy, ode, sonnet, epigram, satire, song, etc.

The third deals with the major genres: tragedy, epic and comedy; he follows all the classical ideas of Horace + Aristotle, often simplifying them (above all Aristotle, whose systematic interests are beyond Boileau): to move and to please, verisimilitude rather than truth or improbability, decorum everywhere, etc. There is, however, a significant emphasis on *pleasing* , practically ignoring the didactic element of poetry which is often emphasized by Renaissance classical doctrine.

The last canto includes more general advice and an eulogy of the king, his patron. Boileau lives in an age of literary patronage, and takes for granted the role of the poet as a parasite and apologist; in this, as in many other things, he looks extremely conservative to us.

This scheme leaves many lacunae: Boileau does ignores the novel, the opera, the fable, and even the kind of didactic poem he is writing. Actually, the author is trying to be clever and entertaining, rather than systematic, and he introduces digressions, classical references, etc. just for the sake of variety and taste.

Rationalism is the predominant philosophy in France and it has an influence on aesthetics; even Pascal, who opposed his "esprit de finesse" to the "esprit de géometrie" believes that there are rules to please, as well as rules to prove. Only, "reason" is used in an arbitrary way, and many things are termed reasonable which we might wish to call *conventional.* Boileau is best known as the apologist of rule. This is clearly seen in the *Art poétique,* but we must not forget that he also allows a Longinian freedom to the truly great genius. Towards the end of the XVIIth century, he wrote a series of meditations on art under the title *Réflexions sur Longin.* He contributed a great deal to the diffusion of the Longinian principles. Now he thinks there are rules, but "when a passage in a discourse is admired by all, one must not look for reasons, or rather vain subtilities, to prevent this admiration, but rather manage to find the reasons of the admiration." And he wonders "whether the basic rule behind all rules is to please." Indeed his readiness to please may seem too far-fetched at times. You must only write that which is sure to please. More than that: while discussing poetic diction, one of his hobby-horses, Boileau submits thought and reason to diction:

Nothing is more debasing of a discourse than low words. Generally speaking, it is better to suffer a low thought expressed in noble terms than the noblest thought in the world expressed in low terms. The reason is that not everybody can judge of the rightness and shape of a thought, while practically nobody . . . ignores the vulgarity of words.

"Boileau argues that expression follows thought and that before writing we should learn to think" (Adams 258). We can compare this conception to Hobbes's idea that only what is clearly understood is a fit subject for poetry. This is a view which divorces language and thought, and it is not much favoured in our century: since the Romanticism (and since Vico, Croce, Sapir, Whorf) we prefer to think that language and thought help shape each other. Boileau says that form and content must be related (so, he opposes senseless rhyme and superfluous decoration), but his very assumptions tend to split them.

Boileau does not owe his fame to his genius, but to the circumstance that both his virtues and his limitations coincided with those of his age. (Hall 60). He is commonsensical, he insists on moderation, imitation and convention. Like Horace, he seems at times not so much concerned with defining the principles of literature or with teaching how to write, rather, his tone is worldly-wise, giving advice on how to prevent the poet from making a fool of himself. He is not an inventor, but he gives clever and catchy formulations of old principles. Boileau is not too subtle or deep as a thinker. But he has a keen sensibility and wit, and he is not as dogmatic as he looks. There are no good books, he believes, which are rejected by the public. His emphasis is on restraint, but the artist must have freedom to touch.

**4.2.1. Dryden as Critic**

Dryden was the major literary figure in both literature and criticism of during the Restoration and later 17th century, and the most influential critic of the whole century. Criticism during the Jacobean age and the Commonwhealth will fail to justly appraise or even recognize the great works of the age. It is an undeveloped genre, and the information about literature often consists of a "roll-call" of authors, a bare list of names and works with some laudatory comment appended to them. There is not even a single detailed study or commentary of a literary work. Dryden will do much to change this situation; his success is also the success of criticism in English letters.

Being a writer as well as a critic, Dryden always wrote criticism to some practical end concerning his own works. Much of his critical work is to be found in prefaces to his own works. Besides, he was a professional writer. He was not a nobleman writing for his pleasure: he had to live from his work and in the age he wrote in this meant that he had to find some patron or other to take him under his protection. He had to flatter, and this explains not only the nature of his writing, but also sometimes that of his criticism. Sometimes his reasoning is flawed by this need to flatter. As in the critics we have studied up to now, we find in Dryden an interest in the general issues of criticism rather than in a close reading of particular texts (although he will provide one of the first of such readings, that of Jonson's *The Silent Woman*). He wants to rely on both authority and common sense, and often seems at a loss when the two seem to go against each other.We call Dryden a neoclassical critic, just as Boileau, although in fact there are wide differences between them. Dryden meditates on the neoclassical rules, which he feels to be right in the main, but then he also wants to find a critical justification for the great tradition of English poetry, which lay beyond those rules. It is to his credit that he thought over the principles of French neo-Classicism and did not apply them mechanically to the English letters. According to T.S. Eliot, Dryden's great work consists not so much in the originality of his principles as in having realized the need to affirm the native tradition, as opposed to the overwhelming French influence. His best-known work, the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy,* partly reflects this tension in Dryden's commitments. Its dialogue form has often been criticised as inconclusive, but actually, as in most dialogues, there is a spokesman more weighty than the others. Dryden carries about his task with efficiency, stating his own ideas but leaving some leeway for difference of opinion. Neander's overall statement on the rules is that they can add to the perfection of a work, but that they will not improve a work which does not already contain some degree of perfection or genius in it. And we may find writers like Shakespeare, Dryden believes, who did not follow the rules but are nevertheless obviously superior to any "regular" writer. Shakespeare disconcerts Dryden, who recognises his superiority but is more at ease with Ben Jonson. In Dryden, then, we find a "liberal" neoclassicist, although he is most coherent when he is dealing with that which can be understood and reduced to rule. His relaxation is to a great extent both a refusal to believe in the universal application in the neoclassic principles and an inability to provide new and more comprehensive principles. Because his most cogent statement on the rules (following Rapin) is that

**1.** [i]f the rules be well considered, we shall find them to be made only to reduce nature into method . . . they are founded upon good sense and sound reason, rather than on authority.

Dryden is not a great analyst of texts nor an important literary historian, but some of his works are significant steps in the development of both directions in criticism. Dryden's importance as a critic comes from his place in history at the start of the long neoclassical era, whose principles he helped determine; he contributed a great deal to raise the standards of criticism and to define the role of the discipline. As he says himself,

**2.** they wholly mistake the nature of criticism who think its business is principally to find fault. Criticism , as it was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant a standard of judging well; the chiefest part of which is to observe those excellencies which should delight a reasonable reader.

And of course his ideas also give us insights into his own work.

**4.2.2. The Poet and the Creative Process**

The way the work is "moulded to shape"is through "fancy moving the sleeping images of things towards the light, there to be distinguished and then either chosen or rejected by the judgement." In Dryden, and indeed in all the 18th-century critics after him, fancy is sometimes synonymous with imagination and sometimes identified as a special kind of imagination. "Wit" is also used to refer to this faculty. Fancy and imagination will become different concepts in Coleridge. So we have two opposite principles at work in the writer's mind: fancy and judgement (cf. the different accounts of the creative process in Sidney, Bacon, and Hobbes). We may note that fancy is subordinate to judgement, although it seems to be assigned a more relevant role than in Hobbes' theory. Fancy is synthetic, while judgement is analytic, as Hobbes had said and Locke will reaffirm.

Of course, Dryden has to give fancy its due in the composition of a work. But it is something he mistrusts. It is too lawless, and there is a danger that it may get out of hand. Strictures placed during the process of composition, such as the rules or the use of rhyme, are a good means to restrict the impulse of fancy and allow judgement to become dominant. While writing, "fancy, memory and judgement are then extended in the rack" (*Orrery* 2). Writing is a painstaking activity, one which demands the utmost of the writer's capabilities.

In the preface to his poem *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), Dryden gave an account of the phases of the creative process, which we can profitably compare with the *inventio* , *dispositio* and *elocutio* of classical rhetoric. To compose an epic poem, he says, a poet needs wit. "Wit" in the eighteenth century did not suggest the gift of the quick repartee or the *bon mot,* as it does today; rather, it stood for the creative faculty of the human mind, above all the aspect defined by Hobbes as "fancy," the ability to see the resemblances between different objects. Dryden defines wit as imagination, as the ability to find the right memory or the right metaphor we are looking for:

**3.** But to proceed from wit in the general notion of it to the proper wit of an heroic or historical poem, I judge it chiefly to consist in the delightful imaging of persons, actions, passions, or things . . . it is some lively and apt description, dressed in such a colours of speech, that it sets before your eyes the absent object, as perfectly and more delightfully than nature. So then, the first happiness of the poet's imagination is properly invention or finding the thought ; the second is fancy, or the variation, deriving or molding of that thought, as the judgement represents it proper to the subject; the third is elocution, or the art of clothing and adorning that thought so found and varied, in apt, significant and sounding words: the quickness of the imagination is seen in the invention, the fertility in the fancy, and the accuracy in the expression. (10)

Writers in dramatic style, such as Ovid and all playwrights, must excel in invention and fancy; those speaking in his own voice, like Virgil, must cultivate their expression. So, there are different creative faculties in the human mind, and each kind of work may demand a special development of one or other. Dryden feels at times the need to specialise: he wrote works in practically all genres except the novel, but he seems to think that each writer excels in a particular kind of writing. He complains that the Ancients were either tragedians or comedians, and that it is easier to attain perfection in this way, writing only the kind of thing one does best. This natural gift has to be controlled by technique. The good writer must be a born genius (here Dryden refers us to Longinus), and he must know the emotions he is depicting. But he must not be carried away by them because probably the audience would not follow him. Dryden believes that poetry is an art for witty men, and not for madmen. Passion would blur the differences between characters, and it is judgement which keeps them separate. We can compare this analytical labor of the judgement to Hobbes once again. Dryden's interest in the successful objectification of the poet's emotions is an interesting prefiguration of later aesthetic theories (e.g. Schopenhauer's).

Of course we have the classical models to guide us. To copy their ways is not a fault, rather a virtue. In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* we find this phrase as a commendation of Ben Jonson: "He was not only a professed imitator of Horace, but a learned plagiary of all the others" (28).

But true imitation must be original and improve the models. Dryden believes that poetry has a historical development, and he wishes "that poetry may not go backward, when all other arts and sciences are advancing." We may profit from the models and the experience of the ancients and try to go beyond them. All great writers have borrowed from others, without their being less original for it. He traces the Homeric influence in Virgil, for instance. The neoclassical era is not particularly sensitive to originality and invention, but nevertheless Dryden believes that other things being equal, originality is to be preferred to good imitation, and is a greater proof of genius.

One word on the subject of progress in literature: Dryden, as many other critics of his time, seems to believe in a cyclical alternance of barbarian ages with ages of refinement and progress. They believe themselves to be in the equivalent of the Roman empire. Shakespeare is Dryden's Homer, and Jonson is his Virgil. He does not seem to believe that the heighths of the classical age can be reached again; even the language is too unstable for great works and inferior to Greek. Like Pope, Dryden believed that writing in English is like writing on sand, compared to the writing on marble of the Ancients.

**4.2.3. Prosody and Diction**

Rhyme is for Dryden something more than a mere ornament. It is a way of consciously controlling the process of composition: because of the superior attention it requires, rhyme demands a greater consciousness on the part of the poet, and less abandonment to the inspiration of his fancy. Rhyme

**4.** bounds and circumscribes the fancy. . . . the fancy then gives leisure to the judgement to come in, which, seeing so heavy a tax imposed, is ready to cut off all unnecessary expenses" (Dryden, *Orrery* 6).

Rhyme, then, is not a mere "embroidery of sense," it is a means of clarifying the thought.

We shall see that Dryden initially favoured the use of rhyme in plays when the appropriateness of this convention coming from France is being debated. Verse is right; it is only unnatural when it is forced. Rhyme is superior to blank verse, which Dryden believed was invented by Shakespeare. Paradoxically, he recognizes that it is blank verse which is the tradition natural to English. However, Dryden's statement on rhyme does not end here. We may note that he accepts blank verse in the less serious types of plays. And in later years, he was to modify his views, and he came to recognize that blank verse was a suitable vehicle for serious drama. In the prologue to *Aureng-Zebe* (1676), he admits to growing "weary of his long-loved mistress, rhyme"and recognizes Shakespeare's superiority. And in the preface to *All for Love* (1678), an imitation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* he admits that blank verse is more suitable for a Shakespearean imitation, even if it is a tragedy.

Maybe the neoclassical preference for the heroic couplet is the reason for this change: couplets of alexandrines, the staple of French classical drama, are all right for the French language, but the English heroic couplet does not lend itself so easily to the portrayal of conversation. It is best fit to long series of meditative or essayistic verses, and it is here where it will triumph; English drama reverts to blank verse and then to prose.

Dryden also writes a miniature history of modern prosody. Although he is a bit patronizing on Chaucer, he is readier than most people in his age to recognise his genius. However, at the time Chaucer's language was still unknown (Dryden laughs at the first news of a reconstruction of Chaucer's regular metrics in the preface to his translation), so Dryden does not recognize his merits as a versifier, and considers Waller and Denham (who are minor poets from our point of view) to be the first great versifiers of the English language. Waller is the inventor of the couplet: he "first showed us to conclude the sense most commonly in distychs"(*Orrery* 5).Dryden will insist on the connection between form and sense: in this way form will impose itself directly on sense. Couplets and quatrains must contain a unit of sense. On the other hand, he opposes the strict equality of syllables in all lines, a reasonable thing to do, since stressing certain weak syllables and making them count for measure is unnatural to English.

Dryden opposes Aristotle in believing that the soul of a play is not to be found in its plot, but rather in its author's language, in diction and thought. Dryden wants a literature written in a pure language, one which is free from neologism and pedantry alike. However, he accepts coinages from Latin. Like Swift whose complaints will be much the same, he longs for an academy with an authority to decide on linguistic matters.

We find in the age of Dryden a growing reaction against the Ramist conception of rhetoric. If rhetoric is just an addition of ornamental words, it is better to do away with it. The cartesian and the empiricist ideas coincide here. Fancy will seen as something which plays with words, while judgement defines the real relationships between things. One of the most notable phenomena of the age is the definition of the language of science in opposition to rhetoric. The Royal Society inspires the works of John Wilkins (*Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language,* 1668) and Thomas Sprat, who advocates a "mathematical plainness" in style: one word, one thing. These ideas will be satirized in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels,* where the wise men in Laputa carry with them all the objects they want to speak about and merely point to them. For Locke, the most influential philosopher during the eighteenth century, eloquence misleads judgement, instead of directing it. All these writers mistrust literature, poetry, rhetoric, which they consider empty words. There is a growing emphasis on reason which will be felt in literary theory as well.

**4.2.4. Character and Plot**

Dryden discusses character and plot as technical difficulties faced by the writer, sometimes working one against the other. This conception is very characteristic of British criticism. We can compare it with E. M. Forster's account in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), which describes how the plot seems to lead the writer in one direction and the characters in a different one. For both Forster and Dryden, it is the poet's art to respect both the decorum of the characters and the causally necessary, natural solution to the plot. The writer, Dryden says, is like a god to his characters, having prescience and power of determination. But it is difficult to use them in a way altogether convincing, working as a whole.

We may note that decorum and rule are for Dryden a means of giving formal integrity to the work: that is, they are not only content, but form as well; their aim is not to depict the world as it is, but to give unity to the work. Dryden, like many later critics, is conscious of two different tendencies present in a work: although he does not use these terms, we might call them the mimetic tendency (the relationship between an element in the work and reality) and the structural tendency (the coherence of the work imposing its own conventions, the concern for formal integrity).

He opposes the strongly conventionalized characters and plots of Roman comedies, asking for a wider imitation of nature, although he also appreciates the advantages of patterning and of structural simplicity in current French plays, and he believes some of Shakespeare's plays to be "ridiculously cramped"with incident. But the interest of the plot and the characters is also to be found in variety and not simply in a well-defined structure. In variety we recognize real life, and this is one of the advantages of the English approach to dramatic art.

The story itself is the least important part of a poet's work, the one which lends it most easily to imitation. It is a material which must be worked on, finding suitable characters and style. Aristotle, Dryden points out, placed plot first of all elements in a play as the basis on which the others are built, and not as the most important one to determine the quality of a play. For Dryden, it is the characters' language which is the most important element in a play.

Dryden repeats Aristotle's theory on the unity of action, but understanding it in a wider sense than many neoclassical critics. There can be unity in a play with two lines of action, if they are causally linked. Dryden introduces in English criticism the criterion of unity used by Corneille, the contrast between the suspense of the partial actions and the final repose of the mind of the audience when the whole of the action is completed. He demands that beginning, middle and end follow each other in a necessary way:

**5.** a fable ought to have a beginning, middle, and an end, all just and natural, so that that part which is the middle, could not naturally be the beginning or end, and so of the rest: all are depending on one another, like the links of a curious chain.

This does not happen, he says, in Spanish plots;

**6.** as in perspective, so in tragedy there must be a point of sight in which all the lines terminate; otherwise the eye wanders, and the work is false ("Grounds"167).

It is the moral that directs the whole action of the play to one centre.

Dryden also repeats Aristotle's doctrine on characters. Manners must be apparent (shown in action and discourse), suitable, resemblant, and constant. Characters derive from manners, but they must be a suitable composite of manners, and not be grounded on a single trait. We may compare this conception, once again, to E. M. Forster's well-known opposition between flat and round characters (*Aspects of the Novel).*

**4.2.5. The** *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*

In 1663, a Frenchman called Sorbière published a book on England, in which he made fun of the state of both the science and the arts in that country. Thomas Sprat, of the Royal Society, answered back with a treatise on the new science which was being developed in England. Dryden wrote his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), a meditation on the nature and conventions of drama which was an answer to Sorbière (who had criticised English drama for not following the unities) as well as to French dramatic theory and practice in general. It is a defense of the English theatrical ways, presenting them at least as an alternative to the classical and the French styles. Something can be said for them, and not just against them, and we may well think that Neander's arguments for English drama are the strongest. However, it is not clear which is the drama Dryden is defending, because he answers Sorbière's attack against current English theatre with an appeal to Ben Jonson and Shakespeare, the writers of the "last age", fifty years his predecessors. Dryden's comments on earlier playwrights are important not only in themselves, but also because they are at the start of a tradition of valuation of English literature, "dearest moments in the history of national self-appreciation" for Sampson. Dryden set the rules for Shakespearean criticism for the next century and a half; and if his admiration for Ben Jonson seems excessive to us now, we still use many of his views of the differences between both writers, in whom he saw an entirely different force at work. For us, there is little doubt that French drama in Dryden's time was superior to whatever was being written in England and to anything written for the English stage for centuries afterwards; Molière, Corneille and Racine are far better playwrights than the Restoration comedians (Congreve, Vanbrugh, Sedley, Wycherley) and they are above Dryden himself as a tragedian.

In any case, Dryden expounds in a fair enough way the reasons for and against the dramatic practice of both countries, as well as of that of the Ancients, and re-states the classical doctrine on drama. Dryden retains an openness to contrary argument which almost approaches scepticism, although it would be more accurate to define his views as probabilistic rather than sceptic (Wimsatt and Brooks 193). Dryden was accused of inconclusiveness, and he retorted with the *Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), and there he alludes to the Aristotelian difference between demonstrative and probabilistic arguments: the latter Aristotle had said to be proper to rhetoric. It is up to the talent of each fictional speaker to convince us of the rightness of his opinions. They are Crities, Eugenius, Lisideius, and Neander. Although Neander is generally recognised as Dryden's spokesman and as the more cogent speaker of all, all are allowed to have their say, and the dialogue is not brought to a conclusion through the victory of Neander's argument: we leave the four friends still debating the issues. And in the *Defence of the Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Dryden says that his argument is not demonstrative but probabilistic: it is up to the reader to decide which of the speakers he will side with. Crites defends and extreme Classicist position, although he is not blind to the merits of modern versification. Lisideius and Eugenius accept the same Classical premises as Crites, but say that modern poets have profited from the experience and imitation of the Classics and follow rules more exactly. Lisideius adds that the rules have been best followed by French drama, which is to be regarded as the model. Neander ("new man") insists on the need of liveliness-which he feels is lacking in Classical and French plays-rather than plain verisimilitude. He approves as well of Corneille's phrase, "il est facile aux speculatifs d'estre severes," and he is concerned with the excessive rigidity that critical principles, divorced of actual dramatic practice, tend to impose on drama.

**4.2.6. The Dramatic Unities of Time and Place**

The three unities, Dryden observes, ought to be followed in all regular plays. But he is tolerant enough with plays which are moderately irregular.

In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy,* Crites repeats the account of the unities given by Corneille (without his qualifications on the difficulty of the enterprise). The unities aim at verisimilitude; the space and time of representation must be as close as possible to those of the feigned action. Any distortion must be supposed to fall between the acts, plots have to begin "in medias res", narration must be restricted to events simultaneous with the action if possible, etc.

In time we find that the coincidence of times works all right in dealing with the precipitate events at the conclusion of a play, but makes the complication seem artificial or else rely too much on narrative.

Dryden follows Corneille in showing how the unities of space and time are mutually related, and regularity in one favours regularity in the other. This may be helped through the "liaison des scènes." Place (and time, too) remains the same inside each act,

**7.** and that you may know it to be the same, the stage is so supplied with persons that it is never empty all the time. (*Dramatic Poesy* 28)*.*

But the view of the question give by Crites is much qualified in the debate by the advocates of the moderns. The disadvantages of regularity are pointed out: there is a danger of narrowness and monotony. The "liaison des scènes" is only possible in French plays because their plots contain little action and their scenes are very long. This also demands an excessive use of monologue, which is unnatural. One main end of theatre, delight, is not sufficiently attended to in Greek or French plays.

**4.2.7. Rhyme and Verisimilitude**

Dryden held an interesting debate with his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard, on the property of rhyme in plays and its relationship to verisimilitude. Howard opposed the use of rhyme, which he believed to break the illusion of reality which any play ought to produce. Dryden defended the use of rhyme. He believes that the end of a play is not so much to give a faithful imitation of human life as to give a *heightened* image of reality. Rhyme works in that way: it guides the attention and gives greater tightness to speeches. Besides, Dryden says, blank verse (which was proposed by Howard as a subsitute for rhyme) is not "natural," either. Howard based his attack on rhyme on the principle that if a play is to trick our minds into a fictive reality, then the use of rhyme worked against that, because men do not speak in rhyme; we will not believe that it is the character who is actually speaking. Dryden's answer is categorical: we are never tricked in a play into believing that we are facing a real scene; and it is the author, not the characters, whom we consider to be speaking in the last analysis. In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy,* even Crites acknowledges that dramatic verisimilitude deceives us because we desire to be deceived, and that we know all the time that we are being deceived. We will have to keep this in mind when we discuss the definition of the audience's role as a "willing suspension of disbelief" in nineteenth-century criticism.

Howard was also against following of the three unities, also for the sake of verisimilitude: he believed that too much use must be made of coincidence to concentrate an action in so restricted a space and time. Paradoxically, Dryden holds the opposite: the unities produce an effect of verisimilitude.

Actually, Dryden's position is not incoherent; only, verisimilitude as such is not the only thing at stake here. Howard, we may note, is for a relaxation of the formalities of theatre: no rhyme, no rules, whereas Dryden appreciates the value which they have in the making of a work of art, because of the tightness they impose on experience, the concentration, the dramatic intensity, the heightened attention of the audience. Dryden sees that the essence of art is more than just imitation of real life. Drama is not *trompe-l'il,* that extreme of mimetic trickery. Verisimilitude is all right, it is relevant to the question, but we need something more than just verisimilitude, something which rhyme and a concentrated action help to shape. A tragedy is always natural as a tragedy:

**8.** The plot, the characters, the wit, the descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them with proportion to verisimility.(*Dramatic Poesy* 71)

Verse , then, is natural to tragedy, even if it is not natural to life:

**9.** Verse, 'tis true, is not the effect of sudden thought; but this hinders not that sudden thought may be represented in verse. (72)

**4.2.8. Delight and Instruction**

In his definition of a play in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy,* Dryden says it is

**10.** a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind. (25)

So, once again we meet a version of the Horatian *"*"productive delight."Elsewhere Dryden writes:

**11.** these two ends may be thus distinguished. The chief end of the poet is to please, for his immediate reputation depends on it. The great end of the poet is to instruct, which is performed by making pleasure the vehicle of that instruction; for poetry is an art, and all arts are made to profit.(*Answer to Rhymer* 148)

But in later pronouncements, Dryden asserts that

**12.** delight is the chief, if not the only end of poesy; instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights,

or that instruction is the end of tragedy,

**13.** but in comedy it is not so; for the chief end of it is divertisement and delight, and that so much, that it is disputed . . . whether instruction be any part of its employment.

Dryden does not believe comedy to be grounded on any serious principle such as moral instruction. Here Dryden sides with Heinsius in declaring that comedy has amusement and delight as its only aim, far from the serious concerns of tragedy. Comedy works not on the best impulses of the audience, but on the worst, making them laugh. The pleasure coming from comedy is a "malicious pleasure"; comedy may instruct, but it is a secondary purpose: its main duty is to please. But he often changed opinions on this subject, alternately stressing or playing down the responsibilities and moral requirements of drama. In this sense he is not the typical neoclassical critic. The general attitude towards comedy is that it ought to provide moral instruction. Sidney and Jonson had even defended comedy without laughter. Others defend, of course, laughter, such as Molière and Pope. Dryden affirms that Ben Jonson did not require creative wit, being satisfied with humour. He believes that as far as wit is concerned, modern playwrights are superior to Jonson. His characters are funny, but not witty. They do not make us laugh willingly: we laugh at them. They are at once more realistic, and more approximate to real conversation. Dryden distinguishes between a comedy of wit and a comedy of humours, and he prefers a mixture of the two.

In *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*, written in his old age (1693), Dryden asserts that pleasure is only a secondary end to poetry. It is only a means to the real end, which is instruction. Conversely, the aim of the poet is to please, but not everything that pleases is good. Dryden believes that the quality of a work is inherent to it, that it comes from its having certain qualities; he mistrusts to some extent the judgement of the audience. The dramatist must not be a slave to the taste of the audience.

So we find in Dryden all the gamut of combinations between the poles of delight and instruction. Instruction comes unconsciously from the admiration produced by the events in the plot. The soul of the spectator is wound insensibly into the pratice of that which it admires.

In the late 1670s, Dryden receives strong influence from the French critics Boileau, Rapin and Le Bossu, and also from the extreme classicism of another Englishman, Rymer. In his *Tragedies of the Last Age,* Thomas Rymer had introduced the term "poetic justice" and had insisted that it had to be respected in all plays. Many were ready to agree with him for a long time, such as Dennis, and Addison, who still exaggerate the concept. Rymer launched some silly attacks on Shakespeare, criticising him for his moral faults and his ignorance of the unities. Dryden had a respect for Rymer which we cannot understand today: but then we must not forget that Dryden himself was a great rewriter and "improver" of Shakespearean plays (*All for Love, The Tempest, Troilus and Cressida,* etc.). But Dryden, while accepting poetic justice, is not an extreme advocate of it. And he makes some interesting observations on the conflicts it arises in tragedy, when it runs against sympathy. The aim of tragedy is to instruct by example. Dryden proposes love as the most suitable theme to move the pity of the audience, a subject which "was almost unknown to the Ancients." The poet must labour to arouse pity for the criminal, and not for the victim, and terror must come from the punishment of the criminal we pity: this idea introduces some complexity beyond the simplicity of poetic justice.

We may note that the favourite theatrical emotions of the Neoclassic age, when a new ethics of benevolence is developing, are poetic justice, pity, melodrama, the pleasure of compassion of injured innocence. All are in direct opposition to Aristotle's catharsis and his basic requirements for tragedy. Now a sentimentalized version of catharsis is fashionable : it is understood to be the abating of pride and anger through fear and pity. The stage is ready for the development of sentimental drama and bourgeois tragedy or melodrama (George Lillo, *The London Merchant,* 1731; Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers,* 1722).

**4.2.9. Satire**

Dryden wrote a long essay on satire: *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693). He follows Horace and the French critic Dacier, who had undertaken a similar enterprise before.

Dryden's definition of satire, following Daniel Heinsius, has a strong Aristotelian flavour:

**14.** Satire is a kind of poetry, without a series of action, invented for the purging of our minds; in which human vices , ignorance and error, and all things besides, which are produced from them, in every man, are severely reprehended; partly dramatically, partly simply; but for the most time figuratively and occultly. . . . It ought only to treat of one subject; to be confined to a particular theme, or, at least, to one principally(*Satire* 268-269).

Satire is not libel or slander: it is concerned with the castigation of universal vice through its manifestation in individuals (cf. A's comedy vs. lampoon or poetry vs. history). Nevertheless, satires will still be concerned with attack to particular persons on concrete occasions (f.i., Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* ).

Dryden traces the independent development of satire in Greece and Rome, the similar restrictions placed by law upon it, the influence on Roman satire not of Greek satire, but of Greek Old Comedy. He classifies the types of satire, following those previous writers, according to the poet who first developed them. We have then Menippean (or Varronian) satire, which mixes verse with prose and serious philosophical matters with pleasantries, parodies and obscenity. The term became popular once more with Northop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism.* Frye expands the term to include works of intellectual or philosophical parody and disquisition such as Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy,* Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes,* Voltaire's *Candide,* Swift's *Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver.*

The other main styles in satire were developed by Persius, who writes invective and insults against vice rather than satire, and above all by Horace and Juvenal. Horace is more profitable, and Juvenal more delightful. Also, they castigate different things: Horace folly, Juvenal vice. Horace's instructions are more general:

**15.** [Horace] had found out the skill of Virgil, to hide his sentences to give you the virtue of them without showing them in their full extent, which is the ostentation of a poet, and not his art"(*Satire* 256).

However, Dryden finds that Horace's wit is insipid, and that Juvenal is sharper. Horace specialises in fine mockery, Juvenal is more direct and pungent. Dryden's conclusion is that although Horatian satire is the best kind of satire, both in tone and in objects, Horace has carried it to less perfection than Juvenal, who writes more successfully an inferior kind of satire.

**4.2.10. Translation**

Dryden's creative work shades off into his imitations and his translations. He was not only an important translator in his age, but also a theoriser of translation, above all in his later years. He translated from Boileau to Chaucer an Boccaccio (*Fables* ).

In the preface to his translation of Ovid's *Epistles* (1680), he distinguishes three kinds of translation (a distinction similar to that made by Ascham in his *Schoolmaster* ):

· *metaphrase* is "turning an author word by word and line by line from one language into the other."This is not always possible, and moreover the sense is often obscured.

· *paraphrase* is "translation with latitude," which nonetheless preserves the original sense.

· We have *imitation* when the author abandons both the words and the sense of the original whenever he thinks it fit. There are some authors who cannot be translated, only imitated. Indeed, it is impossible, he says, to translate poetry literally. We must keep to the most faithful translation whenever we can, but this is not always possible. So, the translator of poetry must be a poet as well as an accomplished speaker of both languages.

**16.** A translator is to make his author appear as charming as possibly he can provided he maintains his character, and makes him not unlike himself. (195).

It is a difficult enterprise, and the good translator has a previous experience both as critic and creator.

## 4.4. Samuel Johnson

(1709-1784)

[Next](http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/hypercritica/04.Neoclassical/Neoclassical.4.5.html)

[Previous](http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/hypercritica/04.Neoclassical/Neoclassical.4.3.html)

Johnson was a poet, biographer, lexicographer, and an essayist on criticism and morals (*The Rambler , The Idler* ); he was the most influential literary figure of his lifetime in England, and he is the hero of one of the most acclaimed biographies ever written, his friend Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* .

Johnson is the last important critic of the neoclassicism, in an age where pre-Romantic ideas are more widely accepted than neoclassicism. Johnson is usually less dogmatic and more eclectic than Pope in his assertion of the neoclassical values. Moreover, sometimes Johnson's claims are contradictory: for instance, he wants at once realism and poetic justice on stage. He is not a consistent theorist, but rather a practical critic of penetrating insights, honesty and common sense. In Johnson we can witness both the dead weight of a tradition and the signs that a new conception of literature is emerging. Johnson had a strongly classical mind, and a great desire for order and coherence. But he had very little patience with whatever he perceived to be false, useless or pretentious, and he made short work of many neoclassical prejudices. He has become an emblematic character among literary critics, as a personification of English common sense and distrust of vague abstractions or fantastic theoretical systems. One anecdote told by Boswell exemplifies this hard-core common sense, with both its advantages and its limitations. The following anecdote from Boswell exemplifies this hard-headed no-nonsense theory, which has its limitations as well as its virtues:

**1.** After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it *thus."* (Boswell 162)

A large part of Johnson's criticism consists in rejecting what he sees as logical absurdities both in criticism or in literature. His common sense leads him some times into narrowness, because he tends to interpret poetical or critical conventions too literally; no doubt he also does away with a lot of nonsense and rubbish.

One main critical statement is the preface to his edition of Shakespeare's works. His judgement on Shakespeare is similar to Dryden's. He recognises his greatness in spite of being unable to reduce him to his principles, and in spite of his admiration is often narrow in judging him: he complains that Shakespeare is not moral enough, that he cares so much to please and to portray life that he seems at times to be writing without moral purpose. He also complains that Shakespeare has no sense of geography or history, and too often puts high-sounding speeches in situations where they are out of tune. And he has a pernicious love for puns which makes him spoil his best effects. Shakespeare is ready to abandon all artistic purpose for the sake of wordplay. Besides, he adds, Shakespeare's plays are incorrectly designed and he does not submit to decorum. But Shakespeare remains the greatest: with all his defects, he is a force of nature which no careful writer han hope to surpass.

However, Johnson was the one who rejected once and for all the doctrine of the unities; Shakespeare, he says, was right in paying no attention to them. Johnson rejects classical dramatic doctrine in the name of common sense, the same common sense that was said by Dryden and Pope to have established it. He maintains the unity of action, but sacrifices the unities of time and place to the higher pleasures of variety and instruction, which are best attained without them. He also accepts tragicomedy, as being more pleasurable than both tragedy and comedy, and having the same didactic potential. "I am almost frightened at my own temerity,"Johnson says.

His main work in practical criticism is found in *The Lives of the Poets* (1777), dealing with Savage, Cowley, Milton, Gray, Dryden and Pope, among many others. There is a balance of biography and criticism in this work, as Johnson is interested not merely in the poet, but in the man as a whole. This is already revealing of a new attitude towards poetic creation. We may note that he is sound enough while writing on neoclassical poets, seeing their defects as well as their merits, but that his prejudices as a Royalist make him undervalue Gray, who was a democrat and a pre-Romantic, and Milton, a Puritan and regicide.

Didacticism is still important for Johnson. Fiction he defines as "truth invested with falsehood."Witness also his definition of poetry:

**2.** Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason.

In an essay on fiction Johnson grounds critical judgement on morality. Realism can be dangerous if it is not moral. Not everything in nature is fit for representation: art must imitate only those parts of nature which are fit for imitation. The artist must polish real life and offer us an ideal image. Vice, if it is shown, must inspire disgust.

In his novel *Rasselas* , Johnson further develops his ideas on imitation:

**3.** The business of a poet . . . is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind.

The poet must not only have a wide knowledge, but also magnify his attention to have an increased perception of similarities in nature; they must be free of prejudice and must be able to rise to eternal and transcendent truths.

**4.** He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place. (328).

In his *Preface to Shakespeare* , Johnson asserts that

**5.** Nothing can please many, or please long, but just representations of general nature. (330)

Shakespeare is a "faithful mirror of manners and of life," but what he shows are not particular manners: he depicts not the individual, but the species. This idea has of course a long Aristotelian and neo-Platonic ancestry; it is being strongly emphasized at the time by Reynolds in his discourses on the theory of painting (*Discourses on Art,* 1770-86). Poets or painters should concern themselves with the representation of "general nature", rather than particular experience; oddities or personal whims (*Tristram Shandy* is one of Johnson's examples) will not do. Particulars are that which is limited to a given age or place (Johnson : the Puritans in Butler's *Hudibras* ). Universal is that which is common to all ages and countries. In opposing the elaborate conceits of the metaphysical poets, Johnson asserts that "great thoughts are always general." The passage describing "metaphysical wit" is one of the best known passages in the English critical tradition:

**6.**Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors;* a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, [the metaphysical poets] have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased. (*Life of Cowley).*

Sublimity or greatness in poetry is for Johnson dependent on essentials, and not to details (cf. Longinus against picturesque detail as detracting from sublimity). This is opposed to the ideals of the Romantic critics that will follow immediately after him. The Romantics would rather insist on dwelling on particular experience and on minute detail as its proof. But in fact the opposition is less acute than it looks at first sight: the neoclassical standard of universality, of "general nature," is never well defined; it subsumes many different concepts (ideality, actual frequency, intelligibility, essence, etc.). Johnson's "species" or generality which must be examined by the poet is not a Platonic universal, but rather a generalization from the average sense experiences. This we must associate to his demand that the poet have an encyclopedical knowledge, and write free from the prejudice of his age and nation. While for the neo-Platonics the knowledge of general ideas is achieved through some kind of direct inspiration, through their inborn presence in the mind of the poet, Johnson insists on the need of long experience in the world before being able to deal with general truths. This is in the spirit of empiricism. His reaction against the rules, too, is in the spirit of empiricism: here he appreciates "nature" over "convention", and opposes those critics who can't distinguish between the two.

Johnson is remarkably sensitive to the feelings of the public. His discussions of drama are usually grounded on the feelings or effects of the audience: he says that the difference between a tragedy or a comedy depends on their effect, not their structure. Johnson thinks that the common public is usually right on issues which have been long debated. Even his own definition of wit, the one he prefers over metaphysical wit, is dependent on general consensus and common experience:

**7.** If by a more noble and more adequate conception that be considered as wit which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just; if it be that which he that never found it wonders how he missed, to wit of this kind the metaphysical poets have seldom risen.

Johnson may have endorsed the principles of Neoclassicism, but in reality he is a transitional critic, and he is not alien to the influence that empiricist philosophy has on critical thought in this age. And his personal taste often reveals a sensitivity towards detail, the picturesque and the individual (for example, biography and personal morality, as opposed to philosophy) which appears obscured in his theories. There is often a gap between Johnson's theoretical concepts and his actual critical judgements: his judgements seem to be independent of the theories he is supposed to be applying. For instance, he repeats the traditional Neoclassic view of style as ornament. He defends the ideas of different levels of style, of specifically poetic diction. But in practice he also holds a different, more modern conception of style. In Johnson's practical criticism, style is seen as a way of perceiving the world. This can be seen above all in his rejections of poetic clichés and worn-out, trite expressions which derive from previous literature and not from personal experience.

This is in the line of the general shift form a conceptual, taxonomic view of style (that best exemplified by Ramism) to the perceptual, experiential view of literature which is foreshadowed in the concern of the late 17th century for a more intelligible and persuasive oratorical style, a view which is developed by the aestheticians of the 18th century and surfaces in the Romantic movement. Poetry makes familiar things new and new things familiar (Cf. Horace, but Wordsworth and Shklovski too) by creating an image of a mind in action. Johnson says that art is imitation, and that we can imitate either the object perceived or the process of perception. His criticism of the metaphysical poets is that their works imitate neither the object nor its impression. This "mimetic principle" is often used by Johnson as a criterion of unity, when he is opposing the intrusion of mannered styles.

So, Johnson is superficially a neoclassical critic, above all in his explicit theoretical statements. But in his personal taste and his practical criticism, we can see that he is in fact a transitional critic, just like many others which will be dealt with now. "His stylistic criticism, and probably in some degree his personal taste, reveal the strain of a contradiction which he did not perceive." This is to a certain extent the contradiction of his age; we will see now the emergence of this new literary standard in the esthetic though of many other writers apart from Johnson.

**4.5. 18th-Century Aesthetics**

[Next](http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/hypercritica/05.Romantic/Romantic.05.html)

[Previous](http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/hypercritica/04.Neoclassical/Neoclassical.4.4.html)

4.5.1. Introduction

4.5.2. Joseph Addison

4.5.3. Edmund Burke

4.5.4. David Hume

4.5.5. G. E. Lessing

4.5.6. Immanuel Kant

**4.5.1. Introduction**

We are going to deal now with a different aspect of eighteenth-century criticism: the pre-romantic elements. Pre-romanticism is largely contemporaneous with neoclassicism in England, and provides a complementary perspective. Pre-romantic tendencies became dominant towards the second half of the eighteenth century. The difference between the neoclassical and the pre-romantic aesthetic could be summarized thus:

*Neoclassical Pre-romantic*

Conceptually based Perceptually based

Taxonomic Experiential

Abstract and general Subjectivist

Rational Emotional

In many of Johnson's contemporaries the shift from the traditional, conceptual, neoclassic standards to a new cognitive and perceptual grounding of literature is clearer than in Johnson himself, because they are less concerned with classical theory and more with the actual experience of the audience. Pre-romantic aesthetics are often linked to the influence of Locke's empiriticist philosophy. Elements of empiriticist pre-romanticism can be found in Addison, Hume, Burke, Alexander Gerard, Lord Kames, Joseph Priestley, Hugh Blair, James Beattie, Edward Young, Richard Hurd, Joseph Warton, Archibald Alison and Adam Smith (also the founder of political economy). Their theories are *aesthetic*, that is to say, they deal with the object as it is perceived, and *sentimentalist* : they are concerned above all with the emotions awakened in the receiver. Empiricist critics place the source of aesthetic emotion in fancy, not in the judgement of the audience. They are not too much concerned with the moral value of art; they are trying rather to explain the *pleasure* produced by art, a pleasure without any pretensions to deep meaning. Addison affirms that aesthetic pleasures do not have any cognitive value. The French critic Du Bos holds that reading poetry is different in motive from reading history or any genre concerned with practical teaching. Poetry is appreciated by its style rather than its teaching. The main end of literature for the empirical critics is to please. Poetry has somehow retreated from its pretensions to rational knowledge. Sometimes, they include teaching in their definitions, but only as a *means*. Or moral value is present only in a shadowy way: Shaftesbury speaks of the refinement of the moral sensibility which is effected through taste. Even when an ultimate moral value is still recognized, pleasing is said to be the end which differenciates literature as such among the belles-lettres. Warton, Gerard, Hurd and Twining are downright hedonists: not the first, however, since hedonism had already appeared in the theories of Castelvetro, Cowley, Temple, St. Evremond and sometimes Dryden. But for the first time we find a whole school that does not take for granted the need of direct moral instruction in fiction. We find instead a theory of the so-called "moral sense" (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Gerard, Kames). This sense is seen as distinct from judgement or knowledge: it is rather a question of feelings, of emotions, which are believed to be moral in themselves. Here we have a crude theory of the unconscious influence of literature (already foreshadowed in the "sugared pill" theory, which however was never really taken seriously). Literature may educate our morals, but it is by acting on our emotions, not on our judgement. Johnson himself always insists on the role of judgement in the perception and comprehension of a work; in this sense he is more classical than these critics.

So, we have on the one hand the traditional, neoclassical, conceptual standard: a work has unity because it is subject to a design transmitted by literary tradition, and its style is correct because it is the style generally accepted by this tradition to deal with a given subject. On the other hand we have the perceptual standard: form and style are an organic growth which is transmitted to the work from the direct experience of the subject, the artist, the writer. The work has order because it reflects an orderly process of thought. Critical thought in the 18th century had come to rely more on the latter, on rule, imitation and tradition, while the latter was more organically related to the philosophy and the taste of the time and formed an undercurrent which will become the romantic reaction against neoclassicism. Poetry will no longer be seen as ornamented language, "ornament" is rather the necessary reflection of an individual sensibility and mode of conceiving.

We find throughout the Neoclassical age an underlying opposition between elaborate styles and natural styles (the standard classical *locus* being the opposition between Lysias vs. Demosthenes). Dryden, Pope and Johnson view Shakespeare as a somewhat savage and disorderly product of nature, but they recognize his greatness and abundance. Johnson said that "Corneille is to Shakespeare as a clipped hedge is to a forest." Johnson, particularly, argues that elaborate styles estrange the poet from an immediate knowledge of nature and prevent his reaching the highest effets of art. Johnson draws an opposition between clear minds and minds distorted by "wit" and verbal elaboration, like Cowley. "Refinement entails a departure from the intuitive level of experience"(Edinger 170)*.* He is against learned styles: poetry must not be a discursive, but a *dramatic* communication of experience.

We may link this insistence on feeling to some ideas of the 17th-century libertines (Bouhours, La Bruyère, St. Evremond, and in England, Sir William Temple) who had opposed learning through rules and favoured instead learning through experience (Rousseau will develop these ideas much further in *Emile)*. They oppose "art," and favour the natural ease of style and energy, and they oppose "false wit" which plays with words having nothing to do with the experience of the object they are dealing with. These ideas will become more and more diffused during the eighteenth century. Sublimity or pathos are often said to proceed from the representation of subjective states of consciousness. The same emphasis is found in France in Arnauld's *Port-Royal Logic* : the orator must offer an image of the things "which not only represents the things barely as they are, but also the Motions and Affections with which they are conceived." The expressive function of language is valued alongside with the referential one.

Connotation and its conceptual opposition to denotation are also emphasized. Rhetorical figures are accepted by Arnauld and Addison as a kind of mark of subjective feeling; they add an element of connotation to the denotative meaning of words. The terms "connotation" and "denotation" themselves are not used as yet, but a distinction similar to this between "principal" and "accessory" meanings of words is also found in Fénelon, Johnson or Wordsworth. Adam Smith inverses the traditional relationship between figures and beauty of expression. Beauty comes from a sentiment of sympathy; figures will follow spontaneously. Reynolds himself distinguishes between a style in which words are used as means and another one in which words are used as ends in themselves: this is understood to be a vicious use.

Genius and originality is valued early enough by British critics such as John Dennis (*The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* , 1701) and Edward Young ("Conjectures on Original Composition," 1759), together with Johnson himself, who points out that nobody was ever great by imitation. Gerard and Dennis advise the poet to feel passion, so that he may have the same associations of ideas as his classical models. There is a renewal of interest in the inspirational theories of *Ion* and in the criticism of Longinus.

The corresponding emotion on the side of the audience is *ecstasis* , a strong emotion of transport. Catharsis is now understood as a purifying and exalting of the emotions, in a rather sentimental way. This conception is linked to the Cartesian idea of the emotions in art, which considered them a useful exercise for the soul, an exercise which is safe because of the imitative nature of the passions awakened by art. But rationalism does not develop an influential aesthetics, and so it is the empiricist theories that flourish. This we may link to Locke's view of language: words do not convey ideas: they *excite* ideas. There is an insistence here on connotation, of that element in meaning which is linked to some particular experience; all this foreshadows romantic ideas. Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (above all, the later editions containing the doctrine of association, ca. 1700) provides the philosophical basis for this perceptual revolution against rhetoric; his distinction between primary and secondary (or subjective) qualities of objects, as well as his conception of the human mind and its associational processes are behind the aesthetic speculations of Addison or Burke. Associationism is also used in textual analysis; it is applied, for instance, to Hamlet's monologue, to the study of synecdoche (Addison) or as a theme and an organizing principle to the novel by Sterne. There is an urge to develop a connection between aesthetics and science: Burke and Hume will try to find a universal standard of taste; the effects on the receiver are sometimes explained in a mechanical way (according to Burke, beauty works by "relaxing the solids of the system"; Kames presents a similar mechanical model in his *Elements of Criticism* [1762]). Alison affirms that poetical descriptions are beautiful in proportion to their power to stimulate associations charged with emotion. The apparent non-analyzability of aesthetic emotions will lead some critics to postulate an internal aesthetic sense, simple, ultimate and infallible, after the model of Shaftesbury's "moral sense" (Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* ,1725).

**4.5.2. Joseph Addison** (1672-1729)

Addison may be considered as the first of the English aestheticians in the sense that he is interested above all on the effect of the work on the reader. He wrote in *The Spectator* (1712) a series of essays "On the Pleasures of the Imagination." We may note that among these aestheticians *imagination* is becoming a more important critical concept, and *wit* is less important ("wit," being linked to words, not to things, is an *extrinsic* way of invention). Imagination, or fancy, is the combination and alteration of memories. If this is done through a work of art, Addison speaks of "secondary imagination," the primary being that effected by the mind alone. "Secondary pleasures" come from a comparison between the ideas awakened by the original and those aroused by the imitation. Artistic imitation is most pleasing when it approaches nature; and nature is most pleasing when it approaches art. The role of the poet is an important one; he heightens and enlivens nature: Addison conceives this as a kind of directing the attention of the reader. But the role of the reader is also important, because his imagination and his judgement are also in question in the perception of the work. Descriptions please in two ways: as imitations, and as the object described. Descriptions of bad or disagreeable things may still please as descriptions; those of good things both as descriptions and as the object described. Actually, there are three kinds of objects proper for imitation: beautiful, great or uncommon objects (cf. the distinction which will become common later in the 18th between the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque). The best objects, Addison says, are those that work on the passions of the reader, exciting them in a way that becomes pleasurable because it is recognized as secondary, not the real thing. The pleasures of imagination are less gross than those of sense and less refined than those of the understanding. Every man should develop the sphere of his innocent pleasures to its widest, Addison believes. But he favours a"light" and "lazy" aesthetics, valuing real resemblances more than metaphorical ones, and rejecting the metaphysical conceit because it represents "*too violent a labour for the brain* ."

Addison's classification of the arts sees sculpture as being the nearest to the object represented, the most concrete; painting follows, and then description. Music is the most abstract. Classifications such as this one will become almost standard during the eighteenth century and the romantic age, and will receive a philosophical backing: romantic thinkers will say that some arts are more objective and others (poetry and music among them) more subjective.

**4.5.3. Edmund Burke** (1729-1797)

Burke was an important writer in the fields of law and political theory. His main work on aesthetics is *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).

**Sublimity**: The concept of the sublime becomes fashionable again in the eighteenth century, with the revival of Longinus. Boileau, in his *Réflexions sur Longin,* concluded that sublimity came only from Longinus' five possible causes of sublimity working together (great ideas, passion, use of figurative language, a careful composition). In English criticism, the concept of the sublime as opposed to beauty had been introduced by Dennis, and many others followed. "Sublime" is applied in two main senses: either to the genius of the poet who goes beyond the rules (cf. fashion of inspirationalism, Dennis' *passion* and Young's defense of original genius in his "Conjectures on Original Composition") or to some object which is big, irregular, frightening and surprising in an agreeable way. The ideas of irregularity and excess are present in both. For Burke, the sublime is linked to an excitement coming from terrible objects which produce strong emotions. In order to enjoy the excitement of sublimity, the observer must preserve some distance from these objects and feel secure from danger. As the Roman poet Lucretius said, it is pleasant to watch the power of a storm in the sea only if we are on firm ground, not from a sinking ship.

**Beauty**: According to Burke, a sense of beauty is proper to man; it is "*a social quality .*" It is linked to feelings of tenderness and affection. Burke feels unable to explain the end of beauty; he believes that it answers to a mysterious divine design.

Comparison :

The sublime Beauty

Individual Social

Vast Comparatively small

Rugged Polished

Right line or Insensible shunning of right strong deviation line

from it

Dark and gloomy Clear

Solid and massive Light and delicate.

They may appear united sometimes, Burke admits, but they are opposed principles.

Burke establishes a similar dichotomy in his discussion of style. Burke defines the opposite concepts of a "clear expression" which transmits things naturally, as they are, and a "strong expression" which transmits rather a thing *as it is felt* , that is, in such a way that it will act on the passions, and not the judgement, of the audience. We see here again the opposition between an objective and a subjectively medieated use of language. To affect the audience, Burke argues, we must transmit not so much the object (affection by imitation) as the way it affects a perceiver (affection by sympathy). He believes that a poetry of the emotions cannot be considered to be an art of imitation: Sir William Jones will soon use the word "expression" in this new sense: "music and poetry are expressive of the passions and operate in our mind by sympathy."

**Taste:** Burke believes that some kind of foundation can be established for a standard of taste. Taste he defines as "those faculties of the mind, which are affected by, or which form a judgement of, the works of imagination and the elegant arts" (303). He opposes the idea of taste as a separate faculty of the mind, different from imagination and judgement. Taste is a compound of the primary pleasures of sense, the secondary pleasures of the imagination and the conclusion coming from reason. Imagination is incapable of producing anything completely new, and things which are pleasurable to sense are more or less the same for all men, apart from the few variations which may be introduced by culture and custom. The same happens with imagination, whose works are a combination of sense data. The *essence* of taste is similar in all men, although they experience it in widely different *degrees* . So, Burke concludes, "The cause of a wrong taste is a defect of judgment."

**4.5.4. David Hume** (1711-1776)

Hume tried, like Burke, to develop a standard of taste ("Of the Standard of Taste," 1757). He saw great difficulties: "Beauty", he says, "is not a quality in things themselves; it exists merely in the mind that contemplates them" (315). But he was unwilling to accept the total subjectivism and relativism of taste. Our common sense tells us that some tastes are absurd, so we are supposing a certain standard, even if it is a vague one. "Hume seems to propose a certain state of mind as the source of the standard of taste " (Adams 313). The standard is at its clearest when a mind free of prejudice and accustomed to judgement considers the aesthetic qualities of an object taking into account nothing but the object itself. Like Pope before him, Hume voices here the ideal neutrality favoured by humanist criticism of the bourgeois era-one which will be questioned by the ideological criticism of our century.

**4.5.5. G. E. Lessing** (1729-1781)

The term "aesthetic" means originally "sensitive", "related to perception." It was first used during the XVIII with reference to the study of the beautiful, of fine arts (in the *Aesthetics* of the German critic Baumgarten, 1750). Two important ideas here: the role of the receiver and his experience, and the search for a common grounds to aesthetic feelings and to the different arts.

There is a growing interest in the eighteenth century in the possibility of tracing the common elements of the different arts. A classical motto of the Greek poet Simonides becomes now popular: he had defined poetry as a speaking picture, and painting as silent poetry. This idea is not isolated: it can be related to the Platonic, Aristotelian and Horatian comparisons between poetry and painting. Horace's *ut pictura poesis* is taken out of its context and magnified: poetry and painting are now dealt with as if their subjects and techniques were the same. Aristotle's analogy between sketching and the designing of plots is put to good use: colour, the specifically pictorial element, is disdained (cf. Locke's "secondary qualities") and the emphasis is on figure and meaning. Now, the theory of painting makes a special emphasis on the use of allegory, which is a common element to both arts. Conversely, there is a fashion of descriptive or pictorial poetry. The common grounds of poetry and painting are pointed out by Du Bos, Du Fresnay's *Arte Graphica* and Dryden's *Parallel between Poetry and Painting,* (1695). This tendency will become in time a general movement which tends to look for analogies between the arts, with the side effect of occasionally blurring the differences between them. Wimsatt and Brooks point out the strange paradox by which painting was turned into the critical standard to measure poetry, while literary standards were applied to painting. The influence of pictorial theory on literature was non-intellectual, sensitive, while that of literary theory on painting was a kind of misapplied intellectualization. But the idea of an analogy between the arts goes beyond its more obvious limitations in eighteenth-century theory. All arts have a common source, genius, and a similar ideal of perfection in form and aesthetic elevation of the audience as their end. It is a typical impressionistic, subjective and Romantic kind of criticism, and it will gain strength during the Romantic period (cf. Wagner's ideal of the total work of art) in spite of some voices which pointed out the essential differences between the arts, rather than their similarities. The tendency to draw analogies between the arts may be represented in the mid-eighteenth century by the antiquarians J. J. Winckelmann (*On the Imitation of Greek Art in Painting and Sculpture,* 1754), Cayllus (*Tableaux tirés de l'Iliade, de l'Odyssée d' Homère et de l'Enéide de Virgile,* 1758) and Joseph Spence (*Polymetis,* 1747).

Lessing reacts against these theorists and against the extravagances of the analogy. He is a classicist and an Aristotelian, but a flexible one, not unlike Dryden in the English tradition: he recognises that the limits of the art are wider now than in classical Greece (for instance, in his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* he will react against the prevailing French brand of classicism, asking for a national German drama after the model of Shakespeare and the English theatre).

Lessing affirms that the classics knew that the arts have to be differenciated by their objects of imitation, as well as by their media, and complains that his contemporaries want to imprison poetry withing the narrow limits of painting. By "poetry" he means literature in general, and by "painting" all the plastic arts. His emphasis is on the essential differences between literature and the plastic arts, not on the analogies. This is the subject of his main work, *Laocoon: or, on the limits of poetry and painting*. Painting cannot imitate successive actions: only simultaneous ones. The proper object of painting is forms, physical bodies. On the other hand, poetry is not the best way of depicting forms: rather, it is concerned with actions which unfold in time. Poetry, then, is an art of time, while painting is an art of space. This difference comes from the very signs which are used in poetical or pictorial representation. The signs of poetry unfold in time, those of painting in space. Of course, Lessing says, the limits of poetry and painting are not here: painting can imitate actions through the imitation of bodies, and poetry can imitate forms to a certain extent through action, through a description of the objects as they are used or manufactured-but in a more limited way than painting.

Moreover, the signs used by painting are natural, and those used by poetry (linguistic signs) are conventional (a difference already noted by Du Bos). Lessing foresees one possible objection now. If the signs of poetry are arbitrary, they are not necessarily linked to actions; they could as well represent bodies as they exist in space. But, Lessing answers, this will be less vivid than a representation of actions. Poetry cannot give an overview of the whole of spatial distribution in the way painting can (though it can add other kinds of sensory impressions apart from visual ones). The proper organization for a descriptive poem is a series of feelings to which descriptions are added, not a series of descriptions to which feelings are added. Literature, then, is more subjective than painting. Lessing rejects the extremities of allegory in painting and visual description in poetry. Poetry cannot depict physical beauty in the way painting can. Painting has to offer a definite image; poetry will have to suggest beauty without definite descriptions, and let each reader imagine the object after his own ideals. Painting, for Lessing, cannot use artistically the images of ugly objects. Poetry has wider limits in this sense: it has the privilege of representing anger, sadness and ugliness; it can deal with a wider range of subjects, of human actions and feelings; its limits are at the same time *different* from those of painting and *wider* than them.

**4.5.6. Immanuel Kant** (1724-1804)

4.5.6.1. Kant's Philosophical Aesthetics

4.5.6.2. Transcendental Analysis of the Judgement of Beauty

4.5.6.3. Beauty and Sublimity

4.5.6.4. Art

4.5.6.5. Kant's Influence

**4.5.6.1. Kant's Philosophical Aesthetics**

Kant is not a critic or theorist of literature, but a philosopher who is driven to deal with aesthetics as a necessary component of his philosophy. It is the inner necessity of his system which demands an aesthetic theory. Indeed, he is the first philosopher in whose work aesthetics is a fundamental component (Schopenhauer, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida will follow suit).

Kant had made an early approach to aesthetics in his treatise *Considerations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), but his main work in this area is the late *Critique of Judgement* (1790). In this work, artistic experience is viewed as a kind of conciliation of the worlds of knowledge and morality, or of necessity and freedom, which had been separated by Kant in his two earlier great works, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).

As a philosopher, Kant represents the conciliation of rationalism (Descartes-Spinoza-Leibniz-Wolff) with empiricism (Locke-Berkeley-Hume) in a new kind of philosophy, which he will say is not dogmatic but *transcendental* . We have to differenciate Kant's *transcendental idealism* from later "dogmatic" interpretations. That is, his philosophy is a theory of knowledge, and only in this sense it is also a theory of reality. Transcendental philosophy is an analysis of experience: it starts from the recognition of an act of knowing and goes on to inquire into the conditions which determine its possibility; it will find that moral knowledge is not the same as aesthetic knowledge or scientific knowledge. It is not, however, a psychological theory: Kant always traces a sharp division between the psychological and the transcendental interpretation. The transcendental interpretation deals not with actual knowledge, but with *a priori* principles, with the conditions which determine the very possibility of knowledge. For instance, in the area of perception, it shows how our sensitive experience takes place in the *a priori* molds of space and time; in the area of pure reason, it determines the way in which our understanding unifies the infinite variety of experience under the *categories* or pure ordering concepts by means of a judgement. Just as we cannot experience something without the categories of space and time, so we cannot think without casting our thought into the categories. For instance, "unity," "plurality," "totality," are the categories of *quantity* ; there are also other categories of *quality, relation,* and *modality*. In any synthesis of experiences we necessarily subsume sense impressions under one or more of these concepts.

Kant makes a difference beween the *understanding* or *pure reason* (a logical, discursive faculty which is able to organize impressions into knowledge) and *practical reason* (which does not deal with phenomena, with sensible impressions, but with *noumena* or the postulated, unknowable "things-in-themselves"; it may be usefully related to Shaftesbury's "moral sense"). The world of morality cannot be deduced from the world of phenomena: moral imperatives are not deduced from experience but from a "categorical imperative." The word of nature and the world of moral behaviour are separate.

But Kant saw that the first two critiques did not exhaust the area of transcendental philosophy. He had deduced *a priori* principles for knowledge in the world of phenomena and knowledge in the world of morality (faculty of knowing and faculty of desiring), but there is still one area of knowledge which cannot be reduced to any of them, and whose own *a priori* principles must be deduced separately, in a third *Critique* (the feeling of pleasure or disgust). With these principles of its own, art re-creates both nature and morality, opening a new area for culture. Kant believes that there is a peculiar kind of content to the aesthetic experience (both artistic and natural) which cannot be reduced to the principles of understanding or morality, that is, which has its own *a priori* principles.

We can see here the source of Edgar Allan Poe's three worlds of the human soul: that of knowledge, that of morals and that of art in between (indeed, the essentials of this conception can be found in Mendelssohn before they are developed by Kant). But note that Poe (and many other aesthetes in the 19th century) are calling for the idea of a pure artistic experience, independent from knowledge or morality. This does not make much sense in Kant, who is abstracting art from knowledge and reason only because of his transcendental purpose. Pure beauty, for Kant, is comparatively trivial, even if it does exist. What is important in Kant is precisely that art forms in some way a bridge between the concepts of nature and those of morality. And the subjects proposed by Poe he would not call instances of pure ("free") beauty, from the moment there is a human interest in them ("adherent" beauty, limited by a concept of what the object is supposed to be intended for). It is true that Kant declares in some way the independence of art from morals and knowledge, but it is, if we may say so, an *essential* , not an *existential* independence.

**4.5.6.2. Transcendental analysis of the judgement of beauty**

Kant analyzes the aesthetic judgement of beauty from the point of view of each kind of categories (of quantity, quality, modality and relation).

According to **relation** : This *a priori* basis for the analysis of aesthetic experience Kant looks for in the idea of *finality* . The foundation of aesthetic pleasure is the perception of a finality in things, the feeling that they answer a purpose. But the aesthetic finality is a kind of empty finality, a finality without an object, that is, a *finality without end* , a *purposiveness without a purpose* (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck* ). The finality is not to be found in the object, but in the state of the contemplating mind itself, which enters into a state of free play of the imagination. Aesthetic pleasure, then comes from a kind of pure play of the ability of judging, a delight in its own activity and in the consciousness of a harmony between imagination and judgement. There is also pleasure coming from the sense of freedom form a utilitarian necessity. "Beauty is the form of the *finality* of an object insofar as it is perceived in the object *without the representation of an end."* (I, § 17). Kant concludes from this that "To look for a principle of taste which offers a universal criterion of beauty, by means of certain concepts, is an useless task, because what it is seeking is a thing impossible and contradictory in itself"(I, § 17).

According to **quality**: Aesthetic judgements are not objective: they do not discover any qualities in the object, they do not help us to know its properties better; they refer to the subject and to a feeling which the representation awakens in him. In practical reason, the judgement is based on an imperative. Here no such imperative exists: beauty is perceived in a pure and disinterested contemplation. "TASTE is the faculty of judging an object or a representation with a feeling of satisfaction or disgust, *without any interest whatsoever*. The object of such a satisfaction is called *beautiful*." (I, § 5). Here Kant opposes the disinterestedness of beauty to the interest which is present both in sensitive pleasure (the *agreeable* ) and in morals (*goodness* ). The distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable can be traced back to Plato or St. Thomas, but it comes more directly from Burke, and will be inherited by Coleridge. The beautiful is not (necessarily) *agreeable* nor *good* : it is only beautiful. Rationalism had tended to identify beauty and goodness, while empiricism leanded towards the identification of the beautiful and the agreeable. Idealism, Kant says, keeps the three clearly apart, making beauty independent from morals or sense.

According to **quantity**: The aesthetic judgement of beauty is *universal* . The aesthetic judgement of beauty is also special in that it is not based on concepts, like the judgements of pure reason: in pure reason, judgements link a representation and a concept; the aesthetic judgement of beauty links the representation directly with the feeling of the observer. Here, the aesthetic judgement of beauty agrees with the aesthetic judgement of the agreeable. The aesthetic judgement of the agreeable, however, is not universal: we recognize that different people may have different taste in this respect. But in spite of its subjectivity, the aesthetic judgement of beauty has pretensions of universality: in some way, we objectify our feeling and declare that the beautiful object is a source of necessary pleasure. We feel that everyone should find beautiful objects beautiful. Kant calls this a "pretension to subjective universality " (I, § 6).

According to **modality**: Beautiful things not only must please everybody: they please necessarily. That is because in making these aesthetic judgements, we suppose the existence of a "common sense" as a regulative principle which makes their communicability possible. "Beautiful is that which, without a concept, is known as the object of a *necessary* satisfaction" (I, § 22)

Art has principles of its own, but no contents of its own, says Kant. Rather, it uses the contents proper to pure reason (nature) and practical reason (morality) and relates them to one another, presenting nature as if it were subjected to morality and morality as if it were nature. In this way art effects a kind of imaginary conciliation of the two spheres of human activity. There is no necessary connection between art and morality, but as both follow *a priori* principles in much the same way, beauty is a proper *symbol* of morality. Science works with sense experience (*intuition* ) and phenomena; morality uses noumena but apart from intuition. "None of them can produce a theoretical knowledge of their object as a thing in itself"(I, § 2). But the world of liberty, of moral choice, must act in some way upon the world of phenomena, of nature:

The concept of freedom must accomplish in the world of sense the purpose dictated by its laws, and so there must exist the possibility for nature to be conceived in such a way that at least the conformity to law which has form agrees with the possibility of purposiveness (according to the laws of freedom) which must be realized in it. So, there must be a foundation for the *unity* of the suprasensible, which lies at the basis of nature, with the practical demands of the concept of freedom; the concept of that foundation, even if neither a practical nor a theoretical knowledge of it can be attained, and, consequently, it does not have a sphere of its own, makes possible nevertheless the circulation of the mode of thinking according to the principles of the former to the mode of thinking according to the principles of the latter. (I, § 2).

This circulation is very important, for judgements are the way in which we interpret the world and discover its laws, starting from a unification of experience which is thought of *as if* it answered to a purposiveness. Then, aesthetic pleasure is a kind of side effect of the general workings of knowledge, when there is no concept given for the object and no purpose give for the purposiveness. In aesthetic perception, the faculties of representation enter into "free play" with one another. "[Beauty provides] neither physical nor moral freedom. But it is allied to the supersensible conditions of freedom. In this supersensuous reality, the theoretical faculty and the practical faculty are mutually and mysteriously interwoven."

**4.5.6.3. Beauty and Sublimity**

The ability of aesthetic experience to use the contents of both nature and morality is related by Kant to a favourite eighteenth-century distinction: the one between beauty and sublimity. The contents of beauty are mainly natural, those of sublimity mainly moral, although both nature and morality are at play in both. Kant devotes a detailed transcendental analysis to the concept of sublimity. We will just repeat some of his conclusions. Beauty is that which seems to have a purpose. Sublime is that which seems to go beyond our judgement. "Sublime is that which, from the very fact that it can be thought, proves a faculty of the spirit which surpasses all limits of the senses"(I, § 25). The feeling of sublimity proves that there is a capability of man which goes beyond his physical limitations (mathematical sublime: the proof that our faculty of knowledge goes beyond our senses and intuition; natural or dynamic sublime, powerful and terrible objects make us see by contrast in our insignificance an spiritual superiority: we are small, but we can apprehend the immense in one single concept: we feel our existence as noumena; we are conscious of our dignity as moral beings. In the sense of sublimity, nature is used as a pattern for our ideas: it is a more intellectual perception (not related to *taste* , but to *feeling* ). "Sublime is that which pleases immediately because of its very resistance against the interest of our senses"(I, § 29).

**4.5.6.4. Art**

"Beautiful art . . . is a model of representation that, in itself, bears a conformity to an end, and , even though it has no finality, fosters the cultivation of the faculties of the spirit for social communication"(I, § 44)

We find again in Kant the idea that art must seem natural, even if we are not tricked into believing that it actually is nature: *"*"In a work of art we must realize that it is art and not nature; nevertheless, the finality in its form must seem as free from all violence of rule as if it were a product of mere nature" (I, § 45). Artistic beauty is set by Kant at a lower level than natural beauty. He says that a love for nature is a sure sign of a good soul, but that love for the arts is not. Kant sees the arts as the product of *genius* , the natural disposition of the spirit by which nature gives rules to art. Technique and imitation of models are necessary but it is not all: there is always a need of what can't be learnt, the spirit of the work, the undefinable. That is because the genius is not content with imitating other works and following the rules: he establishes new rules which cannot be deduced from previously existing ones. Genius cannot be imitated: only emulated. The imagination of the genius creates a second nature, with a mixture of laws analogic to those of nature and also moral principles coming from reason. The arts, and especially poetry, use nature as a symbol of morality or theology.

Kant classifies the arts into: arts of word, of figure and of play of forms:

· Arts of the word:

- *Rhetoric* is not highly valued by Kant. He defines it as the art which deals with a question of reason as if it were a mere play of the imagination (cf. the late 17th and 18th-century reaction against rhetoric)

- *Poetry* , on the other hand, presents itself from the very beginning as a play of the imagination, which nevertheless affords matter for reason.

· Arts of figure:

Sculpture, painting, landscape gardening, etc.

· Arts of play of forms:

In space: wallpaper

In time : music. Beauty is at its purest in these abstract arts, which are freest from concepts (free beauty). "It is worth noting that here was a system which conceived Homer and Shakespeare as less aesthetically pure than wallpaper"(Wimsatt and Brooks 372).

Kant also deals in his Critique with the lesser aesthetic emotions: among them, games and laughter, which is for him the result of an absurdity: "laughter is an emotion which is born from the sudden change of an anxious expectation into nothing"(I, § 54)

**4.5.6.5. Kant's Influence**

Kant's influence was enormous in the literary theory of the late eighteenth and of the nineteenthe century, for instance in later aesthetic approaches to "art for art's sake." It can also be traced out in modern critical schools, like the New Criticism, Structuralism and Deconstruction.

Kant's philosophy states forcefully the essential alienation of man as a thinking being from nature, and the need for a reconciliation which is somehow fulfilled by the aesthetic experience. This alienation will be a constant theme in romantic thought. Indeed,

it would not be a great exaggeration to say that all German romantic criticism is devoted to the problem of how literature reconciles sensory experience and ideas," "the worldly and the transcendental," "object and subject," "nature and will, morals," "history and contingence with system and necessity."(Wimsatt and Brooks 370)

In this sense, Kant's work is a powerful systematization of eighteenth-century aesthetics, a foreshadowing of Romanticism and an important influence on later critics.

5.4.1. Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866)

Peacock and Shelley are the spokesmen for two opposed attitudes towards poetry; they were friends to each other, but their views on literature were radically opposed. Peacock spoke against poetry and Shelley defended poetry. Arguments of this kind appear again and again during the 19th century.

Peacock's arguments derive from those used since the late 17th by such people as Sprat, Fontenelle, Diderot; he is a sympathizer of Neoclassicism, and an upholder of the ideals of the 18th-century Illustration, which in the 19th century derives towards a reverence for science and an optimistic confidence in the power of mankind to get rid of superstition.

In England, these views are upheld most explicitly by Utilitarian thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham or James Mill. Bentham declared that art was completely useless and superfluous, and had no place in a well organized society, where all effort should be directed to the happiness of the greatest number of people. He puts forward the Platonic argument that art is pernicious to society because it feeds the passions and prejudices. His insensitivity towards literature was absoluteæhe defined poetry as that kind of writing where the lines do not run till the end of the page. But these attitudes are not restricted to Utilitarians. Lord Macaulay, an important essayist and historian, declared that a certain "unsoundess of mind" was necessary for the cultivation of poetry, and Hazlitt observed that art regresses as civilization advances.

This idea is the starting point for Peacock's main critical work, a short essay entitled "The Four Ages of Poetry" (1820),

" the most sustained account of the conflict beween poetry and science as it stood in the age of the Romantic poets" (Wimsatt and Brooks 416). Peacock opposed romantic poetry. The decline of poetry is inevitably linked to the progress of mankind: poetry has now become obsolete. It belongs to a past age, it is not of the present. Peacock presents us with "a superficially cyclic account ofthe history of culture and poetry, and springing out of that a triumphantly unfair assault on contemporary English poetry" (Wimsatt and Brooks 416).

Peacock's theory of the four ages of poetry is modelled as a variation of the classical topos of the ages of the world: "Poetry, like the world, may be said to have four ages, but in a different order; the first age of poetry being the age of iron; the second, of gold; the third, of silver, and the fourth, of brass" (491). Along these four ages, we can witness the gradual withdrawal of poetry from the realm of fact first, and then of thought.

· The age of iron is a savage age of warriors and superstition, a savage age where poetry is the only kind of intellectual activity. Not that it is eminently refined: it is merely propaganda for the deeds of the savage chieftains.

· The golden age sees the rise of kingdoms, social institutions; it is more settled, and tends to reminisce the deeds of the iron age. It is an age which glories in its ancestors. The truly great poets, like Homer or Aeschylus, belong to this age; their poetry is rough, energetic and inclusive. Poetry is still the greatest intellectual achievement: science and philosophy have not been developed yet. But, Peacock observes, "with the progress of reason and civilization, facts become more interesting than fiction: indeed this maturity of poetry may be considered the infancy of history" (492). Moral and cognitive aims begin to prevail over mythology, and soon the sciences are born: it is the end of the golden age.

· The silver age is the age of civilized life. The Romans, the neoclassicals, are the perfect examples of a silver age. Poetry is less original than that of the golden age: it tends to take that poetry as its model, at least as far as serious genres are concerned. Virgil imitates Homer, and the originality of the silver age is restricted to the minor or comical genres. It is an age of refinement and selection; perfection is more appreciated than variety, and this often results in monotony. Poetry has limited its range, and tends towards the commonplace. History, morals, philosophy, all sciences attain a high development; their findings are too specialised to afford a subject for poetry; poetry ceases to be an instrument of knowledge, it cannot follow the development of these sciences. "Good sense and elegant learning, conveyed in polished and somewhat monotonous verse, are the perfection of the original and imitative poetry of civilized life . . . . It is now evident that poetry must either cease to be cultivated, or strike into a new path" (493).

· The age of brass wants to restore the original strength of purity by a deliberate return to primitivism. It wants to become the second childhood of poetry: it tries to revive the golden age and the intimacy with nature, but to no avail. It lacks energy, and instead of the great epics of the golden age, we have

a verbose and minutely detailed description of thoughts, passions, actions, persons and things, in that loose rambling style of verse, which anyone may write, stans pede in uno, at the rate of two hundred lines in an hour. (495).

Peacock's primary aim in writing his essay is a satirical one, and "the clichés of Romanticism do not escape him unscathed" (Adams 490). Peacock parodies the poetry of Wordsworth: he believes that Wordsworth's primitivistic ideals are a hoax and a perversion of the intellect; it is a false return to nature that Wordsworth effects. In fact, all modern poets are the same:

While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age . . . . A poet in our times is a semibarbarian in a civilized community. (496).

Vico and the German romantics had already established the relationship between the poet, the child and the savage, but in an entirely different spirit: the poet's function is to refreshen, to revitalize by opposing his creative feeling to the reason of the modern world. Not so for Peacock: the poet works through feeling and not reason, all right, but then Peacock does not regard this as a commendation. In his view, "the highest inspirations of poetry are resolvable into three ingredients: the rant of unregulated passion, the whining of exaggerated feeling, and the cant of facticious sentiment" (496). Peacock does not seem to fear the dehumanization of the modern world through reason. Poetry may be ornamental and even pleasurable, but it is in no way useful or beneficial. It only survives thanks to the favour of the mass of uneducated people, who yield to every easy sentiment. The really learned men do no longer care about poetry:

intellectual power and intellectual acquisition have turned themselves on other and better channels, and have abandoned the cultivation and fate of poetry to the degenerate fry of modern rhymesters, and their Olympic judges, the magazine critics (497).

Peacock's faith in the benefits of progress and the new scientific spirit is little qualified. "The romantic theorist could, of course, retort that the poet's 'primitivism' provides a necessary opposition to rationalism run rampant" (Adams 490).

There is a certain contradiction in Peacock's idea of the four ages. On the one hand, he is confident that the age of poetry is well past; on the other he acknowledges that there have been two complete cycles, and that he is living (we are living) in the second brass age. There was one complete cycle starting with the Greeks and ending with the late Roman empire, and another one starting with the Middle Ages and ending now. But Peacock does not seem to believe that a new age of iron is imminent. That is, he seems to be supporting both a linear and a cyclical conception of history. This ambigous attitude towards history is also to be found in Dryden and later neoclassicals.

Peacock's essay also represent the immediate link between the Classical doctrine of the four ages of mankind (golden, silver, iron, and bronze), the Viconian ideas about myth and metaphor and the positivist doctrine, soon to be advanced by Comte, of the three ages of mankind (theological, metaphysical, scientific). Like Comte, Peacock rejoices in the disappearance of the mists of the past and the oncoming of a rational future for mankind. The most curious thing about it all is that Peacock was a novelist and poet himself; but then his attitude as a writer is constantly ironic, cynical and contradictory.