



**THE ART OF RHETORIC:  
A STUDY FROM THE PLATONIC TO THE VICTORIAN CRITICS**

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**Abstract**

The paper renders a critical study on the general observations on the art of rhetoric proposed by famous rhetoricians of the world like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Dionysius, Horace, Quintilian, Dante, Ben Jonson, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Dr. Samuel Johnson, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater. It explains where, how and in what form language exists and the processes through which it undergoes before it is communicated and reciprocated. It interprets and explains the language of daily life, the value attached to the artistic order of words, and the recognition of the existence of the ornamental graces of effective communication. It also emphasizes the fact that words should be used discretely and not indiscriminately and concludes by insisting on the need to use the right words skilfully at the right place in order to bestow vigour and clarity to one's communication.

**Key Words :**

*Artistic Structure, Emotional Pleasure, Grand Style, Ornamental Grace, Rhetoric, Rhythmical Ease.*

**Introduction**

Language exists not in the mind of the communicators but in the society because meaning is bestowed on each word of a language based on the agreement that exists among the communicators who live in or outside the society. Human language is the product of a series of interactions between human beings and their environment (Nagarajan et al 66). That





is why, though “Syntax” of a language presents the graphic form of a language, it does not provide any information about the meaning of the language in itself. In any language, each letter of the alphabet represents each different speech sound. So people use their own language to impose labels on all things they see and they are conditioned to see only the objects and concepts that can be expressed in their own language. Thus, it is the society, which assigns meaning to these graphic forms of language according to the context in which these graphic symbols are used (Yule 100-101). In order to express the thought which exists in his mind in the form of emotions and feelings, man selects a specific subject matter (what one wants to convey), word (vocabulary), sound (phonology), and arranges them in a particular sentence structure (syntax) of a particular language. The selected and organized matter of thought is sent to the different organs of speech through the nerve system and the organs of speech are activated and the matter is conveyed to a person who hears it. On hearing the matter conveyed, the hearer reciprocates to the speaker. This mutual response results in communication. The unique quality of language is that it enables one to hide as well as reveal an idea through one’s communication.

## **The Concept of the Art of Rhetoric down the Timeline**

### **Plato (427-347 BC)**

- a. One must be sure of what he has to say because it is essential for a good speech.
- b. The speaker should also impress the hearer and the listener.
- c. He should know the art of speaking and needs a natural gift of the gap, knowledge of its rules, and constant practice.
- d. The subject must be presented in a natural sequence.
- e. The hearer has to be kept in mind and the speaker must try to get into the hearer’s heart and soul (Prasad 7-8).

### **Aristotle (384-322 BC)**

Aristotle’s comments on the language of poetry in *Poetics* anticipate his comments on style in *Rhetoric*. In these two books, he lays down the essentials of good writing. They are: (i)





clearness, and (ii) propriety or suitability. 'Clearness' means the language should be clear and intelligible. But the same mode may not be proper all the time. 'Propriety' means the suitability of each mode of writing. To promote intelligibility, words that are in use are suitable. But writing should also aim at dignity and charm. Dignity and charm can be attained by the use of unfamiliar words that are archaic, foreign, dialect, newly-coined words because these words will have the elements of surprise and novelty in them. Metaphorical words are preferable to the plain ones. A perfect style must contain words of all kinds in a judicious combination. Compound words are much suitable to the lyric because they demand the use of ornament, rare or unfamiliar words to the epic. For the drama, the metaphorical language is suitable because it is closure to the everyday speech.

*Rhetoric* is remarkable for its focus on composition in prose and style in general. The style of prose is different from that of poetry because poets use unfamiliar words to attain dignity and charm; whereas, prose deals with everyday subject. So, it can make use of only familiar and current words. But to bring about charm, metaphorical language is suitable for both. By clever use of language prose can also bring about novelty and surprise. Multiplicity of clauses, parenthesis, and ambiguous punctuations should be avoided in the construction of sentences. Words can be arranged into two kinds of style. They are: loose and periodic. The loose style can be brought out by constructing series of sentences by connecting them with conjunctions. It is formless. So, it is less intelligible and also less graceful. To set it right, it can either be elaborated or reduced. In the periodic style, each sentence should have a complete whole such as beginning, middle, and end. It can be easily identified at a glance. Since it has a form, it should not be tampered with (Prasad 25-26).

What to include and what to omit in a discussion of rhetoric is difficult to determine because what one wants to include under style is that the other wants to omit. In the opinion of Aristotle, 'the rhetorician is someone who is always able to see what is persuasive' (*Topics* VI.12, 149b25). Accordingly, rhetoric is 'the ability to see what is possibly persuasive in every given case' (*Rhet.* I.2, 1355b26f.).





In Book III, Aristotle discusses the subject of rhetoric into three parts: proof, style, and delivery. Aristotle includes examples and maxims under proof, whereas Cicero, in *de Oratore* gives illustrations as a means of amplifying and vivifying the subject matter. But he does not discuss the matter of delivery, gesture, and voice. On the other hand, Cicero omits from Book III, the matter of delivery, gesture, and voice. In Book III, Aristotle recommends the communicators to use clever and popular saying in their communication, whereas Cicero recommends wit and humour, in Book II. The requirements of the best manner of elocution, according to Cicero, are: the arrangement of subject matter, delivery, wit, and humour.

*Rhetoric*- III.1–12 introduces the topic of *lexis*, usually translated as ‘style’. *Rhetoric* I & II deal with thought (‘*dianoia*’), i.e., about *what* the orator should say and the various ways of saying or formulating the same thing. Aristotle opines that good prose style consists of metaphor (III.2) the simile, which turns out to be connected with the metaphor (III.4), the issue of correct Greek (III.5), the appropriateness (III.7) and the means by which one’s style becomes long-winded and dignified (III.6). Chapters III.10–11 are dedicated to how the orator can ‘bring things before one’s eyes’, which amounts to something like making the style more vivid. Again metaphors are shown to play a crucial role for that purpose, so that the topic of metaphor is taken up again and deepened by extended lists of examples. Chapter III.12 seems to make a new start by distinguishing between oral and written style. The philosophical core of Aristotle’s treatise on style in *Rhet. III.1–12* seems to be included in the discussion of the good prose style however it is the topic of metaphor that has attracted the attention all in the later reception up to the present day (Chapter-8: “Style: How to Say Things with Words”).

Aristotle speaks of only one virtue of prose style, and not of clarity, ornament (by dignified expressions) and appropriateness as three distinct virtues of style. However, from the times of Cicero and Quintilian on, these three, along with the correctness of Greek or Latin, became the canonical four virtues of speech (‘*virtutes dicendi*’). Finally, if the virtue of style is about finding a balance between banal clarity, which is dull, and attractive dignity, which is inappropriate in public speeches, how can the orator manage to control the different degrees





of clarity and dignity? For this purpose Aristotle equips the orator with a classification of words (more or less the same classification can also be found in *Poetics* chapter 21): First of all, Aristotle distinguishes between the '*kuria onamata*', the standard expressions, and the '*glôtta*', the borrowed words, idioms or vernacular expressions. Furthermore, several expressions that are altered or modified, e.g., newly coined expressions ('*pepoiêmena*'), composite expressions (especially new or unusual compositions ('*ta dipla*'), and lengthened, shortened or otherwise altered expressions. Aristotle uses the term '*kosmos*' under which he collects all epithets and otherwise ornamental expressions.

These different types of words differ in accordance with their familiarity. Most familiar are the usual or current words, the least familiar words are the '*glôtta*' or words that are newly coined. The metaphors are also unknown and unusual, because a usual, well-known word is used to designate something other than its usual designation. The best established words, the '*kuria*', make their subject clear, but do not excite the audience's curiosity. Aristotle says that the orator should make the speech admirable and pleasant by the use of unfamiliar words. He also admonishes the orator not to use inappropriately dignified or poetic words in prose speech. Thus the virtue of style is accomplished by the selection and balanced use of usual and therefore clear words. In order to make the speech pleasant and dignified and in order to avoid banality the orator must make moderate use of non-familiar words. Since metaphors contribute, as Aristotle says, to clarity as well as the unfamiliar and surprising effect, they avoid banality and tediousness of speech (<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>).

#### **Cicero (106-43 BC)**

- a. According to Cicero, a rhetorician knows language and an orator knows the truth. What the speaker speaks will be worthless, lest he/she is truly sure of what he/she is talking about.
- b. The success of an orator or writer depends on knowing what listeners/readers want to hear/read about. Unless the writer/speaker understands the nature, the interest and the





mindset of the readers/listeners, he/she will be unable to choose and use the apt diction to convey his ideas clearly and agreeably.

c. Without concreteness, language becomes a medium of masturbation–‘onanism’. The writer/speaker must be able to combine the theory with practical examples in his/her writing/speaking by **focusing on what matters**.

d. **The speaker should sincerely** try to connect himself/herself with the audience instead of feeling a stranger to them or feeling superior to them. If the speaker is unsure of something, he/she should admit it and should make it an asset instead of a weak spot in his/her message. This is the psychological stance that Cicero wants the speaker to take.

e. The writer/speaker should love what he/she does. In order to achieve this he/she must work hard like Demosthenes who used to fill his mouth with pebbles and recite verses to twist his tongue, in such a way to break him of a stutter.

f. When the writer/speaker wants to know anything on the art of writing and speaking, he/she should consult the person who knows about it. Cicero also advises one who aspires to be an eloquent speaker needs to practice writing meticulously and extensively (<http://ryanholiday.net/6-things-cicero-can-teach-you-about-writing/>).

#### **Division of Oratory Style and its Application to Poetry**

The Roman orator Cicero divided the oratory style into three types: (i) the low, used to prove, (ii) the middle, used to please and (iii) the high or lofty, used to move. This division was later used to distinguish the kinds of poetry by their style. The elegiac used the low style, the pastoral the middle, and the epic the lofty. In the eighteenth century, these three categories were reduced into two: the low and lofty. The low words and phrases, since too familiar and unable to impress, were considered unfit for poetic use. Another variety of words which Dr. Johnson found unfit for poetic use and which does not fall into these categories was the technical terms, because they were unintelligible to the readers (Prasad 168).

**Dionysius (60 -7 BC)**





Dionysian ‘imitatio’ is the [literary method](#) of imitation as formulated by Dionysius, who conceived it as the [rhetorical](#) practice of emulating, adapting, reworking, and enriching a source text by an earlier author. Dionysius’ concept marked a significant departure from the concept of ‘[mimesis](#)’ formulated by [Aristotle](#) in the 4th century BC, which was only concerned with “imitation of nature” and not “imitation of other authors”. Latin orators and rhetoricians adopted Dionysius’ method of ‘imitatio’ and discarded Aristotle’s ‘mimesis’.

Dionysius was also the author of several rhetorical treatises such as

- a. *The Art of Rhetoric*, which is rather a collection of essays on the theory of rhetoric, incomplete, and certainly not all his work;
- b. *The Arrangement of Words*, treating of the combination of words according to the different styles of oratory;
- c. *On Imitation*, on the best models in the different kinds of literature and the way in which they are to be imitated—a fragmentary work;
- d. *Commentaries on the Attic Orators*, which, however, only deal with Lysias, Isaeus, Isocrates and (by way of supplement) Dinarchus;
- e. *On the Admirable Style of Demosthenes*; and
- f. *On the Character of Thucydides*.

Three centuries after Aristotle’s *Poetics*, from the 4th century BC to the 1st century BC, the meaning of *mimesis* as a [literary method](#) had shifted from “imitation of nature” to “imitation of other authors”. No historical record is left to explain the reason of this change. [Dionysius](#)’ three volume work *On mimesis (On imitation)*, which was the most influential for Latin authors, is lost. Most of it contained advice on how to identify the most suitable writers to imitate and the best way to imitate them. For Dionysian ‘imitatio’, the object of imitation was not a single author but the qualities of many.

Latin orators and rhetoricians adopted the literary method of Dionysius’ ‘imitatio’ and discarded Aristotle’s ‘mimesis’; the imitation literary approach is closely linked with the widespread observation that “everything has been said already”, which was also stated by





Egyptian scribes around 2000 BC. The ideal aim of this approach to literature was not [originality](#), but to surpass the predecessor by improving their writings and set the bar to a higher level. A prominent Latin follower of Dionysius was [Quintilian](#), who shared with him the view of 'imitatio' as the practice that leads to an historical progress of literature over time. Both Dionysius and Quintilian discuss 'imitation' exclusively from the point of view of rhetoric. In Quintilian, and in [classical rhetoric](#) in general, rhetoric drew much attention to the process of 'imitatio'; the four operations that organize all the figures of speech, defined as a "ready-made framework" of "relatively mechanical procedures" for the emulation, adaptation, reworking and enrichment of a source text by an earlier author. This view of rhetoric was taken by [Erasmus](#) in [De Copia Rerum](#).

In [Aristotle's Poetics](#), [lyric poetry](#), [epic poetry](#), drama, dancing, and painting are all described as forms of [mimesis](#). Dionysius' concept marked a significant depart from the concept of 'mimesis' formulated by [Aristotle](#) in the 4th century BC, which was only concerned with "imitation of nature" instead of the "imitation of other authors." Latin orators and rhetoricians adopted the literary method of Dionysius' 'imitatio' and discarded Aristotle's 'mimesis' (<http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/11645351>).

### **Horace (65-8 BC)**

Horace recommends the iambic metre as the most suitable for drama because it lends itself easily to dialogue and the second syllable is louder than the first. It increases the voice of the actors and the audibility of the audience. He states that the language of tragedy is exalted because the subject of tragedy is also exalted. On the contrary, the language of comedy is humble because the subject of comedy is also humble. He also states that the speech should suit the character, its age, its status of life, its situation and its mood (Prasad 40-41).

### **Quintilian (35-95AD)**

Quintilian, a Spaniard, had his education in Rome and worked as a Professor of rhetoric in Spain. He wrote a book known as *Institutio Oratoria*, 95 CE which is generally referred to in English as *The Institutes of Oratory* (Saintsbury 290), a treatise in twelve books which deals with







the art of communication (Saintsbury 289). Quintilian's theory of style is applicable to the art of speaking and writing. Quintilian considers it illogical to say that speech should have more vigour and writing should be more polished. He sees no difference between the art of speaking and writing because they aim at the same (Saintsbury 63, 72). The art of speaking and writing is a gift of nature. It can be brought to perfection by constant practice. After careful and proper consideration, the ill-formed or half-developed speech or writing can be raised to its full stature by much drill. As a river flows with its full force, it clears all the impediments in its course. Similarly, the flaws that lurk in speech and writing can be removed and made perfect by constant training (Saintsbury 64). Quintilian's theory of style was applicable to the art of speaking and writing. Quintilian considered it illogical to say that speech should have more vigour and writing should be more polished. He saw no difference between the art of speaking and writing because they aim at the same (Prasad 45).

#### **Nature and Art**

The art of speaking and writing was a gift of nature. It can be brought to perfection by art. According to him, style is the product of both nature and art. After careful and proper consideration, the ill-formed or half-developed speech or writing can be raised to its full stature by art. As a river flows with its full force, it clears all the impediments on its course. Similarly, the flaws that lurk in speech and writing can be removed and made perfect by art (Prasad 45-46).

#### **Language of day-to-day Life**

Quintilian preferred the language of daily use to the use of out-of-the-way words and phrases. For oratory, he considered the use of unfamiliar expressions as unsuited. He agrees with Aristotle and Horace on the use of familiar words for their convincing expressions. In connection with familiar subject-matter, unfamiliar words are unintelligible, obscure, smack of insincerity or artificiality. According to him, the language of prose is the language of daily life. But, it is not the language of the masses because in the language of the masses one can find irregularities, unfamiliar style, uncommon words, quaint turns of phrases, and lapses from





grammar and good taste. It should be purified of its eccentricities. Such purified language alone can be accepted as the standard language of daily life. Language of daily life should be an approximation of the normal language of both the learned and the unlettered apart from its defects (Prasad 46-47).

### **Choice of Right Words**

Style consists of words and their arrangement. The writer should choose the right words. He has to pick and choose the words, instead of using the words that strike his mind. The apt use of words lends grace to style. When the current words fail to express one's emotions and thoughts, newly-coined words can be used sparingly. If the archaic words are used discretely, their novelty will help to impart dignity to style. If such words are used indiscriminately, the reader and the listener will need and the interpreter to explain their meaning. So, a good speaker and a writer should guard himself against it. Current words, if they are used skillfully, give vigour and clarity to one's speech and writing (Prasad 47-48).

### **Arrangement of words**

#### **Clarity**

Arrangement of words is as important as the choice of words. They should be perfectly combined to form phrases, clauses and sentences. It should convey its meaning to the best advantage. To do so, it should have clarity, ornamental grace, artistic structure and rhythmical ease. Clarity is the first condition of an effective style. It should be free from superfluity, ambiguity, inordinate length, and ill-coordinated punctuations. It should say neither too much nor too little. It should say it in a manner which makes it possible for the hearer to understand it. The sentences should be of just the length necessary to understand the meaning. No part should be grammatically loose (Prasad 48).

#### **Ornamental Grace**

It means embellishment of the language with artistic ornament. This consists of the avoidance of all ugly expressions. For example, (1) the use of undignified words in a dignified context, (2) big words for simple words, (3) wrong combination (incongruous) of words—





mixture of grand words with commonplace, poetic with prosaic, old with new; and of fine-sounding or over-rich words or phrases. It is an art by itself, most effective, when most concealed. It carries an element of surprise through which familiar things appear in the new perspective. It makes an immediate appeal to emotions. It results from various devices such as similes, emphasis, innuendo (an expression which says little and suggests much), sententiae (it says a great deal in the briefest and most pointed manner), metaphor, and other figures of speech. Metaphor, to both Aristotle and Quintilian, is 'the supreme ornament of style' and for its element of surprise. The total effect of these devices is: novelty, variety, elegance, and emotional pleasure; and they make artistic structure (Prasad 48-49).

### **Artistic Structure**

It is essential to achieve clarity and beauty. To achieve this, words are to be placed in the best order possible. One should know where to place the nouns, verbs, and where the rest. This normal order (i. e. nouns first, verbs next, adverbs after verbs, etc), is alright for a normal speech. For a speech of special kind, the speaker must consider how most forceful and how most beautiful his words should be, and how to use words in the most appealing manner. Words are best used, when they are best placed. The slightest alteration in their placing alters their meaning or their effect (Prasad 49-50).

### **Rhythmical Ease**

Verse steals its way into our hearts by this device. A good prose also has the rhythmical character. In prose, it is subtler and freer; it is more felt by a sensitive ear than seen on the surface. In poetry, each line is measured and follows a uniform movement. No clear rules are set down by Quintilian. He leaves it to the ear of the speaker. But there are graces in style that cannot be put down to the observance of any rules of the art (Prasad 50-51).

### **Dante (1265-1321AD)**

Dante classifies the choice of words into 'rustic' and 'urban'. The 'rustic' words are ignoble. So, they are unfit to be used. The urban words are of three kinds: the 'childish', the 'feminine', and the 'masculine'. The first two being again ignoble, the 'masculine' ones are left





for consideration. They also consist of two sets of words: the 'shaggy' and the 'rumpled' are ignoble, and the 'combed' and the 'glossy' are the finest of all and fit to be used in poetry. The 'combed' are words which leave the speaker's lips with a certain sweetness. The 'glossy' are ornamental, which 'when mixed with the 'combed' words, make a beautifully harmonious conjunction' (68). But, as poet cannot always be cloyingly sweet or pompously ornamental, Dante admits the necessary use of 'shaggy' words, mostly monosyllables. In his carefully sifted vocabulary, Dante avoids the 'rustic' altogether. He admits only two of the many varieties of the 'urban'—the 'combed' and the 'glossy'—with a third—the 'shaggy'—as a necessary evil (Prasad 68).

## **Ben Jonson (1572-1637)**

Style refers to "any specific way of using language, which is characteristic of an author, school, period, or genre" (Baldick 214). Ben Jonson comments on style too. He claims that the words have no use for their own sake. It is meaning (thought) which gives life to language (words). The language is like body and the meaning is like soul. Language is an index of character. It reveals what a person is (Prasad 92).

## **The Requirement for Clarity of Thought**

In order to have clarity of thought, Ben Jonson recommends revision of words and their arrangement. Jonson believes that a writer, who wants to attain excellence, should not be satisfied with the first word or the first arrangement in a composition. On the contrary, he should repeatedly revise his words and their arrangement in the composition (Prasad 93). He observes that "ready writing makes not good writing: but good writing brings on ready writing" (as quoted in Prasad 93).

## **Choice of Words and the Importance of Custom**

In his remarks on choice of words, Jonson follows Aristotle, Horace and Quintilian. According to him, custom is the most certain mistress of language. By custom, he means 'the consent of the learned'. It is custom that decides which words should be chosen in a particular context. Jonson feels that the words used by the poets should be intelligible to the readers.





Therefore, he advises them to use the oldest words of the present language and the newest words of the past language (Prasad 93-94).

### **Perfection in Style**

In Jonson's conception, perfection in style refers to "choiceness of phrase, round and clean composition of sentence, sweet falling of the clause, varying an illustration by tropes and figures, weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention, and depth of judgment" (as quoted in Prasad 94). A good writer should develop a taste for perfection in style.

### **Language and Similes**

As to language, according to Joseph Addison, it is perspicuous and sublime. He has imitated Homer rather than Virgil, in the copiousness of his phrases and the running of his verses into one another (Bond 80). Moreover, the similes used by Milton add beauty to the narrative.

### **John Dryden (1631-1700)**

In *The Apology for Heroic Poetry*, he points out that the style of the epic is heightened from that of natural speech, just as its action and characters are above those of common life. In order to do this, the poet should make use of the various rhetorical devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, disordered narrative and the like (Prasad 118-119).

### **Alexander Pope (1688-1744)**

Influenced by Horace and Quintilian, Pope wants the writer not to be the first person by whom the new words are tried nor be the last person to lay the old words aside (Enright and Chickera 119). In other words, the words chosen should be neither too old nor too new. This idea of Pope is similar to Quintilian's advice to choose the oldest of the new words and the newest of the old words. Expression, according to Pope, is the dress of thought. Like the sun which illumines the objects, true expression makes the idea very clear. The words are like leaves and when they abound, the fruit of sense will be hidden. Hence, verbiage (superfluous expressions) and pompous words should be avoided (Enright and Chickera 119).





## Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Dr. Johnson advises to exclude too familiar and too remote words from the language of poetry, because the words that are heard daily do not impress us. The remote or strange words are either not understood or understood with difficulty. Poetry, according to him, has to speak a universal language. He advises to use elegant words in the place of familiar words (Prasad 152).

### The Use of Similes

Dr. Johnson advocates the use of apt similes, which illustrates the meaning clearly. In his *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope compares a student's progress in the sciences with the journey of a traveler in the Alps (Enright and Chickera 116-117). Praising this comparison, Johnson says that a simile, to be perfect, must illustrate and ennoble the subject. It must show the subject to the understanding clearly and display it to the fancy. At least, one of these qualities is essential for a simile. In didactic poetry, a simile has to illustrate even if it does not ennoble. Likewise, in heroics, it has to ennoble even if it does not illustrate. To be complete, a simile has to be understood independently of its context, because it is said to be a short episode. (Prasad 152-153)

### The Drawbacks of Similes

Johnson is aware of the drawbacks of similes. He points out that even the greatest writers have sometimes failed in their similes. For instance, the ship-race compared with the chariot-race is neither illustrated nor ennobled (Prasad 153). Thus, Johnson speaks for and against similes.

## The Poetic Diction of Neoclassical Writers

### Before Neoclassical Critics

Before neoclassical critics, the writers had their own choice of poetic language. For instance, Spenser preferred the archaic language to the language of his day, while Milton had preference for uncommon words and phrases. It was the neoclassical critics, who established a system for poetic language (Prasad 167).





## True Poetic Diction

According to neoclassical critics in general, and to Johnson in particular, true poetic diction refers to a system of words which is free from the grossness of domestic use and the harshness of the technical terms. In other words, true poetic diction is choice of any language except the too familiar (low) and technical terms. It also differed from the language of prose. The neoclassical poetry, by employing the devices like personification, periphrasis, antithesis and Latinisms, gradually drifted away from natural expression.

**William Wordsworth (1770-1850)**

## The Subject and Aim of his Poems

The first part of the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* deals with the subject and aim of Wordsworth's poems. Rustic life is the main subject of his poems published in the *Lyrical Ballads*. In the preface to the second of edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth states that his principal object, in these poems, "was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate them or describe them... in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect" (Ramaswami and Sethuraman 291).

## The Reason for the Choice of the Language of Rural People

The reason why Wordsworth chose humble and rustic life and the language of rural people was that it is in such condition of life, the passions of men attain their maturity and are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature; and our elementary feelings can be contemplated and communicated in a better way; and the manners of rural life are more easily comprehended and more durable. Another reason why Wordsworth chose the language of rural people was that these people, free from outside influence, speak a language which conveys their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Such a language is more permanent and more philosophical than that which is opted by poets because it comes from the repeated experience and regular feelings of those people (Ramaswami and Sethuraman 291).





### **An Attack on the Diction of his Day**

This is the second part of the *Preface*. The purpose of Wordsworth is to imitate and adopt the language of men. Since personifications do not form a part of that language, he avoids them in his works. In his poems, he takes pain to avoid poetic diction, which in his understanding, refers to the use of the devices like personifications, phrases and figures of speech which are the common inheritance of poets. He affirms that such devices arouse disgust rather than pleasure (Ramaswami and Sethuraman 294-295).

### **No Essential Difference between the Language of Poetry and Prose**

Wordsworth is of the opinion that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of poetry (Ramaswami and Sethuraman 296). He contends that except with reference to metre, the language of a large portion of every good poem and even of the most elevated character, in no respect, differs from the language of prose. Likewise, some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be in the language of prose, when prose is well written (Ramaswami and Sethuraman 295). He substantiates his claim by citing Gray's sonnet "On the Death of Richard West" as an example. He observes that the best part of this sonnet that has any value is in prose. For example, the concluding lines:

"I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear

And weep the more because I weep in vain" (Ramaswami and Sethuraman 296).

### **Acceptance of Some Difference**

Despite the aforesaid argument above, Wordsworth admits some difference between the language of poetry and that of prose. To an objection that rhyme and metre constitute the distinction, he says that he recommends for such poetry a selection of language spoken by men, and this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will form a distinction and will separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life. If metre is added to such language, the distinction will be sufficiently produced. Here, it is crystal clear that Wordsworth accepts the distinction between the language of poetry and that of prose. But the distinction is not just in metre but in choice of language, which in poetry, should be made with







true taste and feeling. Moreover, Wordsworth accepts the use of metaphors and figures. This is evident when he says that if the poet's subject is judiciously chosen, it will naturally fit upon occasion, and will lead him to passions, the language of which must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures (Ramaswami and Sethuraman 297).

It has to be noted that many of Wordsworth's notable poems like "Tintern Abbey", "The Solitary Reaper" and the like are not in the language really used by men. At the same time, his poetry which contains rustic life as the subject presented in the language of men has tremendously succeeded. Therefore, it can be concluded that the language really spoken by men undoubtedly suits a particular class of poetry and has its own merit. The neoclassical critics have been too narrow in their judgment.

### **Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)**

As for poetic diction, Coleridge rejects the Wordsworth's opinion that *real* language of men (i.e. men in low and rustic life) should be the language of poetry. He says that "every man's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties and the depth or quickness of feelings" (*Biographia Literaria*, 198). For Coleridge, every man's language has three important factors: (i) its individualities, (ii) the common qualities, and (iii) words and phrases of universal use (*Biographia Literaria*, 198). It implies that the language differs from person to person, class to class, and place to place, whether it is spoken in a village or a town. Therefore, if the language has to become common to all, then all its uncommon features and peculiarities have to be omitted from it, whether it is that of a rustic or of a townsman. Only such a language will have a universal appeal, and can become the language of poetry. Hence, the omissions and changes that are to be made in the language of rustics will be as numerous as in the language of townsmen to use it in poetry (Prasad 188).

### **There is Essential Difference between the Language of Prose and Poetry**

According to Wordsworth, there is no essential difference between the language of prose and of poetry. Coleridge negates this idea, saying that there may be, there is, and there should be an essential difference between the language of prose and of poetry (*Biographia*





*Literaria*, 212). The use of metre in poetry plays a vital role in bringing out this difference. That is why, he says, “I write in metre, because I am about to use a language different from that of prose” (*Biographia Literaria*, 209).

**Matthew Arnold** (1822-1888)

a) In the lectures *On Translating Homer* Arnold offers grand style as a grand cure for an evil creeping into English life and poetry—Americanism signifying meanness of spirit. It was the outcome of the new-fangled craze for democracy with which life was deprived of nobility, and literature alone could hold its banner up. Homer’s writings which did this were just the need of the day. He was the grand master of the grand style (Prasad 206).

#### **b) Defining Grand Style**

The effect of the grand style is that it ennobles poetry and life itself. Arnold feels that Homer could achieve it by his ‘rapidity’ of movement, ‘plainness’ and ‘directness’ of language, ‘nobility’ of nature and simple ‘lucidity’ of mind. The grand style, therefore, arises in poetry, when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats a serious subject with simplicity. The language should be simple as that of Homer or gorgeous as that of Milton. Arnold finds only three masters of grand style. They are Homer, Milton and Dante (Prasad 207-208).

**Walter Pater** (1839-1894)

Pater’s definition of style is similar to that of Longinus. The sense of fact, the subject matter of fine art, can be presented well through **three forms**: diction, design and personality.

#### **Diction**

The writer chooses a vocabulary that would equip him well to colour his own spirit in words. He must use current words, avoiding the obsolete, the uncommon and the ornamental, with a skilful economy to express the precise meaning. Paying such close attention to diction, the writer provides a pleasurable stimulus to the reader. The literary artist is of necessity a scholar writing for the scholarly (Prasad 221-222).

#### **Design**





It is the combination of words into a unified whole. It is not just a series of sentences held together by their common purpose but an architectural design which foresees the end in the beginning and never loses sight of it. The mind should combine word with word, phrase with phrase, sentence with sentence, part with part till they become one whole and one with the subject. Pater calls this 'necessity of mind in style' (Prasad 222).

### Personality

It is the writer's 'soul in style'. It is the very breath of the writer in his work, and is his very self in his work i.e. the man in style. By the fact that it appeals to every man, it has something universal or 'the soul of humanity' in it. It effects unity of tone or atmosphere, as mind effects unity of design (Prasad 223).

### Conclusion

The theory of style not only remains the central part of any work of art but also plays a pivotal role in the art of communication. The concepts like the language of daily life, the value attached to the artistic order of words, and the recognition of the existence of the ornamental graces as essentials for effective communication. If the right words are used skilfully at the right place, they give vigour and clarity to one's speech and writing. It is true that the use of apt words in one's communication is an art by itself, most effective, when it is used not deliberately, but felicitously. It imparts an element of surprise to both the listener and the reader. Through the use of right words in the right contexts, not only familiar but also unfamiliar concepts are understood in the right perspective and this enables meaning to be multifarious. It makes an immediate appeal to the intellect as well as the emotions of the hearer and the reader at the same time.

If words are used discretely, their novelty will impart dignity to one's style of communication. If words are used indiscriminately, the reader and the listener will need an interpreter/lexicon to explain their meaning. All communication should be purified of all sorts of fallacies in order to make it effective. According to the master minds of rhetoric, such purified language alone can be accepted as the standard language of daily life. They also state





that language of daily life should be an approximation of the normal language of both the lettered and the unlettered apart from its defects. So, a good communicator should guard himself/herself against such lapses of communication. The total effect of the use of the devices suggested by these rhetoricians will certainly impart novelty, variety, elegance, emotional pleasure and artistic structure to one's spoken as well as written communication and makes one's communication effective.

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