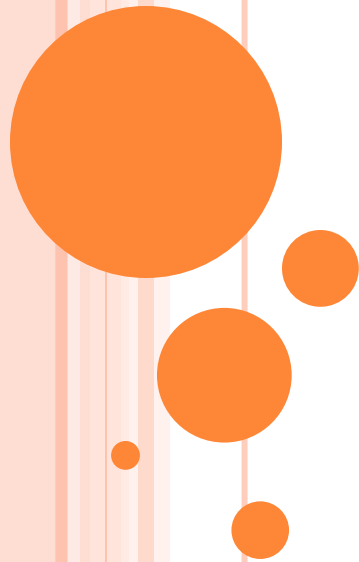


RIZVI COLLEGE OF ARTS, SCIENCE AND COMMERCE

**PRAGMATIC FUNCTION OF LITERATURE-
LITERATURE AND MORALITY**

CLASS: TYBA

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INTRODUCTION

- Plato criticized that literature is 'careless of justice and virtue'.
- The authors and lovers of literature tried to save literature from this criticism.
- They argued that literature works as a vehicle to express the morality that society approves of or should approve of according to the author



DEFENDING LITERATURE: ARGUMENTS

- Lot of theoretical defenses came out including Aristotle, Philip Sidney and Shelley.
- For Sidney, with his Renaissance Humanism, poetry is the ultimate instrument of moral instruction because it “be so good as to teach goodness and to delight the learners” (Adams and Searle 2005:197).
- Shelley, in a typically Romantic privileging of the imagination over reason, believes that poetry is invaluable to society. Because it enlarges the imagination, stimulates empathy and produces “the moral improvement of man” (542).



CONT....

- They offer the contention that poetry is uniquely positioned to effect the moral improvement of man, both in terms of its impeccable moral pedigree and ability to transmit virtue.
- Such a comparison also demonstrates how their definitions of poetry lead, most logically, to the identification of moral functions which other disciplines cannot perform.



CONTINUED...

- While other disciplines are constrained by rules, the poet is liberated by an imagination which perceives man's potential for moral perfection so that he is "lifted up with the vigor of his own invention...making things better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite a new, forms as never were in nature" (188).
- Sidney, insists that it is man's proximity to "the Heavenly maker" who "made man in his own likeness" which ensures that "our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is" (188)



ARGUMENTS

- It is, of course, our flawed “infected will” (a function of original sin) which prevents us from recognizing this (188).
- Such divinely inspired imagination, which can “feign” such images of virtue, has resonances with Shelley’s perception of the symbiotic relationship between poetic imagination and moral sensibility



SYDNEY'S ARGUMENTS

- Sidney suggests, the poet's ability to craft such wondrous images of perfection which renders his creations superior to those of nature, whose "world is brazen [brass]" whereas "the poets only deliver a golden" (188).
- Poetry, therefore, can "make better" an historical character such as King Cyrus, or "make a new" one "so excellent a man in every way as Virgil's Aeneas" (188).



SHELLEY'S ARGUMENTS...

- Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" emulates Sidney's strategy in Apology.
- Shelley begins by considering two types of mental action- reason and imagination: reason is the "enumeration of quantities already known" while imagination is the "perception of the value of those quantities" (538).
- Shelley's definition of poetry is, quite simply "the expression of the imagination"(538)



IMAGINATION AS VEHICLE TO EXPRESS MORALE

- It becomes clear very soon that imagination plays a pivotal role in the moral function performed by poetry.
- Shelley sees man as “an instrument” who responds to a series of internal and external impressions and who possesses a unique faculty for harmony and melody.
- This gives man an exquisite responsiveness to the stimuli of beautiful sound, reflected in his ability to produce “internal adjustments of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them” (538).



IMAGINATION AS VEHICLE TO EXPRESS MORALITY

- This is a crucial point because it explains the imagination's susceptibility to beautiful poetry and why it can perform the powerful role, shortly outlined by Shelley, as man's moral organ.
- Shelley suggests the "faculty of approximation to the beautiful" is most highly evolved in poets
- He claims, rather majestically, that "to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful", to perceive the very essence of goodness inherent to existence and experience.



IMAGINATION AS VEHICLE TO EXPRESS MORALE

- Man's capacity for empathy nudges Shelley towards that all important moral function for literature. Enhanced empathy is an outcome of man's experience of poetry.
- Like Sidney, who perceived a certain divinity in poetic imagination, Shelley considers that poetry functions "in a divine manner" and "awakens and enlarges the mind by making it receptive to a multitude of exquisite thoughts" (542).



IMAGINATION AS VEHICLE TO EXPRESS MORALE

- “the great instrument of moral good is the imagination” which poetry nurtures by perpetually stimulating with new images of beauty, delight and joy (542).
- For Shelley, therefore, “poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man” in the same manner as “exercise strengthens a limb” (542).



CONCLUSIONS

- In fact, more successful was the critical interpretations of literary works where they emphasized the moral values and ethics advocated by the very literary work.
- But, they were many others who questioned the very basis of Plato's argument saying that literature has a very different purpose and thus hold a very peripheral connection with ethics.



THANK YOU

