**Classical theory: Horace-Ars Poetica or The Art of Poetry**

Important points in Ars Poetica:

The subject matter of poetry: A poem must have organic unity, all the parts must be vitally connected with one another. The poet is free to indulge his fancy, but he must not lapse into absurdity and create monsters or impossible figures. The poet must choose only those subjects which he is able to deal with. The subject must suit both the power and style of the poet.

Discretion must be exercised in the use and choice of words. A poet is at liberty to coin new words and revive old ones, but this should be done with much discretion and only when absolutely necessary.

Each particular genre should stick to the meter allotted to it by the ancient Greeks. For epic: iambic hexameter; elegiac verse, poems of complaint, tragedy and comedy: iambic verse; and for hymns to the gods, odes to victory, love poems: lyrical meter.

Form of poetry: The plot should be based on familiar old stories, and novelty may be imparted through skilful treatment. Entirely new themes may also be invented, but these would require great skill and art on the part of the poet. If an old story is chosen, a slavish imitation of the details is not necessary, but the poet should stay away from inconsistencies and absurdities. Comic themes should not be treated in a lofty vein of tragedy and tragic themes in the low vein of comedy.

Medias res: As regards the plot construction, it is good to follow the example of Homer and plunge straight into the middle. The beginning should be simple and all the unnecessary details should be avoided. Moreover, the incidents should have a logical connection.

Characterisation: Characters must be consistent and true to type. Characters drawn from traditional legends must preserve their traditional traits. A different treatment of such characters will make them unreal and unconvincing. Similarly, characters must fit their ages.

The dramatic style must also vary in accordance with character, mood and circumstance. Different tones must be used for different moods and personalities for verisimilitude.

Further, the dramatist should know what to represent on stage and what to report to the audience. Ugly and horrible incidents should not be shown on stage.

Next, a play should not have more than five acts, and there must not be more than 3 characters in any one scene. The gods should not intervene unless absolutely essential. The denouement should logically follow from the preceding incidents. The Chorus should form an integral part of the play.

Iambic metre should be used. The Greek models should be followed. To achieve excellence, the poet must read the Greek masters by day and think of them by night.

Qualities of a poet:

1) The art of poetry requires labour and persistence, and so a poet should revise his work many times to attain excellence. He should also show it to some wiser and more skilful person to get guidance from him. In fact, Horace suggests that before publishing his work, a poet must let it stand for about a decade.

2) A poet must be a keen observer of men and manners, and he must try to replicate characters true to life.

3) A poet must instruct or please, or combine both functions. He should not however indulge in romantic extravagances just for the sake of pleasure. He should aim to mix pleasure with profit. He should be brief and avoid superfluity, for only then will the people pay attention to his instruction.

4) Minor faults should be forgiven, however, poets should avoid faults as much as possible.

5) Great poets have been great prophets, so poets should not be ashamed of their office.

6) For great poetry, both nature and art are essential. Abundant wit and natural ability without a sound workmanship, or vice versa is of no avail. Both wit and training are necessary.

7) The idea of poetic madness or inspiration is absurd. Excess must be kept under restraint. A poet who relies on mere inspiration is generally laughed at.