

Essays - 3.

Patterns of Creativity

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Q. 1 How does Shelley's attitude to science differ from that of Wordsworth and Keats?

Answer:

Wordsworth and Keats have contrasting views on science as compared to Shelly. This can be observed from their numerous works.

Wordsworth, in one of his poems, praises the beauty of nature and how science and intellect misshapes it. Keats goes on to say that philosophy is destructive. Shelly, on the other hand, has an appreciative tone towards science and this is portrayed in his works. A.N. Whitehead's testimony of Shelly's attitude towards Science says that he was never tired of expressing in poetry the thoughts which it suggests.

Q. 2 'It is not an accident that the most discriminating literary criticism of Shelley's thought and work is by a distinguished scientist, Desmond King-Hele.' How does this statement bring out the meeting point of poetry and science?

Answer:

Desmond King-Hele's criticism shows that Shelly is a scientist's poet. He, in his literary criticism of Shelly's thought and work, points out that Shelly's attitude to Science emphasizes the surprising modern climate of thoughts in which he chose to live. Shelly's work is the perfect mix of both poetry and science and therefore his work is unparalleled.

Q. 3 What do you infer from Darwin's comment on his indifference to literature as he advanced in years?

Answer:

Darwin confessed that he only gained pleasure from poetry up to the age of thirty. He thoroughly enjoyed the works of many great poets like Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Milton, etc. Pictures and music also gave him great delight. But over the years, his mind became a machine for grinding laws out of facts and therefore couldn't find the taste for poetry, pictures of music. In fact, he found the works of Shakespeare intolerably dull and reading it nauseated him.

Q. 4 How do the patterns of creativity displayed by scientists differ from those displayed by poets?

Answer:

Poetry makes immortal the beauty of nature and this world. Scientists, on the other hand, make use of the resources given to them by nature. They invent to make our lives simpler. Although some poets like Wordsworth and Keats believe that Science destroys the nature, there are others like Shelly who have a different opinion. Shelly believes that the Scientists follow the footsteps of poets to make space and give time. He also believes that the scientists have their appointed office in the society. However, it can be concluded that poets and scientists are not necessarily working against each other. While poets celebrate the beauty of nature, scientists work towards creating utility.

Q. 5 What is the central argument of the speaker?

Answer:

S. Chandrasekhar, through the essay "Patterns of Creativity", attempts to find an answer to the question 'Why is there a difference in the patterns of creativity among the practitioners in the arts and the practitioners in the sciences?'. Instead of providing the answer directly, he made an assortment of remarks and extracts which contained it. On one hand, there are poets like Keats and Wordsworth who felt that intervention of science destroys nature while there are poets like Shelly who included science in his poetry. Towards the end, the speaker included an extract

from Shelly's A Defense of Poetry, and further goes on to question why no such defense of science has been written by a scientist.

TALKING ABOUT THE TEXT

Q. 1 Discuss in small groups 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'.

Answer:

Shelly, in his essay 'A Defense of Poetry', says that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. He believes that poetry makes immortal the beauty in the world and records the happiest moments. It is the center and circumference of knowledge and it is what comprehends all science. According to him, poets are mirrors or the shadows which futurity casts upon the present. Poets not only work towards appreciating the beauty in this world but also participate as critics who strive to make the world better with their words.

Q. 2 Discuss in small groups Poetry and science are incompatible.

Answer:

Poetry and science are not necessarily incompatible. Some poets like Keats and Wordsworth are of the view that science and technology, exploits and destroys the nature. Others like Shelly are appreciative of science and even write about it in their works. Charles Darwin, a great scientist, was himself fond of literature during his young years. On the other hand, scientists like Faraday are purely devoted to science and invention. Thus, it's a matter of opinion and perspective that answers this question. While there are some who are appreciative of both poetry and science, there are also others who believe that poetry and science are incompatible.

Q. 3 Discuss in small groups 'On reading Shelley's, A Defense of Poetry, the question insistently occurs why there is no similar A Defense of Science written by a scientist of the equal endowment.'

Answer:

Shelley chose to write an essay to praise his subject/profession. Similarly, the absence of an equal endowment from the scientists can be understood as a matter of expression. Faraday, for instance, chose to show his praise through his remarkable inventions. The form of expression differs but it can be observed that both poets and scientists are highly appreciative of their subjects.

APPRECIATION

Q. 1 How does the ‘assortment of remarks’ compiled by the author give us an understanding of the ways of science and poetry?

Answer:

The assortment of remarks compiled by the author helps in providing an answer to the question ‘Why is there a difference in the patterns of creativity among the practitioners in the arts and the practitioners in the sciences?’ It shows how different poets view science and how they use their work to condemn or appreciate the work of the scientists. It even provides a glimpse of how scientists appreciate those poets who acknowledge the importance of science. The remarks also include a narrative of Charles Darwin, a scientist, who was also highly interested in literature during his young years, and of Faraday who introduced some remarkable inventions. An extract from Shelly’s A Defense of Poetry, talks highly about the work of the poets and the importance that poetry holds.

Q. 2 Considering that this is an excerpt from a lecture, how does the commentary provided by the speaker string the arguments together?

Answer:

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Q. 3 The Cloud ‘fuses together a creative myth, a scientific monograph, and a gay picaresque tale of cloud adventure’— explain.

Answer:

The Cloud, authored by Shelly fuses together a creative myth ‘I am the daughter of Earth and Water’, a scientific monograph ‘And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams’, and a gay picaresque tale of cloud adventure ‘And out of the caverns of rain’.

LANGUAGE WORK

Q. 1 How do the words in bold, in the lines below, illustrate the poet’s ability to convey criticism cryptically? Our meddling intellect

Misshapes the beauteous forms of things:

We murder to dissect.

Answer:

The poet wished to convey the exploitative nature of science and invention. He, therefore, used the above-mentioned words to indicate the same.

Q. 2 Explain the contradiction in the similes, ‘Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb’.

Answer:

A child from the womb signifies the birth, a new beginning whereas the ghost from the tomb is in contrast, implying death or the end.

Q. 3 Explain the metaphor in the line: ‘Poets are ... the mirrors of gigantic shadows that futurity casts on the present’.

Answer:

Shelly in his ‘A Defense of Poetry’ praises the art of poetry. He says that poets are the hierophants of

an apprehended inspiration, the mirrors of gigantic shadows which futurity casts

upon the present and the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

→Read and enjoy the excerpts from an interview given by S. Chandrasekhar to Deccan Herald (23 January 1994 issue).

QUESTION: You came to America in 1936. Do you think you would have achieved what you did had you stayed back in India?

CHANDRASEKHAR: In a narrow sense, the answer is NO. There were better facilities for work here. I was also disconcerted with science politics in India. I was very sensitive and I desired the mental peace to do science the way I wanted.

Secondly, how can one evaluate scientific achievement? It is not a personal accomplishment. I had many students and collaborators. Science has to be an integrated effort. Otherwise, it would be too narrow.

Q: Who was your earliest mentor? And who influenced you most in your career?

A: I had no mentor. And nobody influenced me. I wrote my thesis on my own. I have always been alone. This is not criticism. It is the character of my work.

Q: Do you recall your mother and her attitudes which may have shaped yours?

A: Yes, I recall a particular incident which revealed my mother's extraordinary awareness. I was hardly ten years old, when she woke me up one morning and said, "Do you know Ramanujam is dead? It has come in the newspaper."

The very fact that she realized that Ramanujam's death was an important event showed her enlightenment in these matters. Her attitudes did influence me a great deal.

Q: Has your wife been a great support to you in your scientific career?

A: I have mentioned Lalita in my book, *Truth, and Beauty*. My biographer, Kameswar Wali, has also written a whole chapter on my wife. [Suddenly, with a smile] Do you know the American press called that the best chapter?

Q: Have you, at any point in time, regretted your decision to leave the country of your birth?

A: There is no point in regretting or being happy over decisions you have made. I think it's irrational to regret the past anyway. You must reconcile yourself to the life you have chosen and lived.

Q: Do you enjoy teaching?

A: I always integrated teaching with research. They support each other.

Q: What is it that makes Indians achieve more in this country (America) than in India? Do you think it could be the academic climate?

A: I wouldn't judge achievement by awards. The quality of science in India is good too. But I remember in the 1930s the great scientists of that country were in the universities. But today it is not so. And, that is a loss. Q: Has your personal life been complete and happy?

A: That you should ask Lalita—maybe I could have given more. [Pause] I don't believe that a scientist—a true scientist—can ever have a complete personal life. [Pause again] I sometimes wonder whether all that I did and accomplished in my lifetime—was it really worth it?

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Kameswar Wali later interpreted this comment as: "When Chandra asks—Was it worth it? — he is not being negative. It is just an

awareness, another dimension of realization which dawns as one gets older.