

**Institute of Distance and Open Learning
Gauhati University**

**MA in English
Semester 3**

**Paper XIII
Theory III – Twentieth Century Criticism**

**Block 1
Trends in Formalism**



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Block Introduction:

Adequately named as ‘Trends in Formalism’, this is the third block of this course. Critical movements like New Criticism, and Formalism, of the early twentieth century were moving in a certain direction. The isolation of the ‘aesthetic’ from the moral, religious concerns and the exaltation of the ‘aesthetic’ as a defense against a commercialized and dehumanized world finally established the notion of criticism as a serious and scientific activity. Thus, most of the critical movements associated with literary theory—ranging from Formalism and New Criticism to Post-structuralism—arise out of certain specific socio-political and historical events of the twentieth century. However, it should be remembered that such historical developments bear a complex and often contradictory relation to literary practice and theory. For example, the 1917 Russian Revolution which propounded ‘Social Realism’, finally established literature as politically interventionist and as expressing class-struggle also spawned other aesthetic such as symbolism and formalism, the latter exerting a considerable influence on the development of structuralism in subsequent periods.

This block is designed in such a way that you gain direct access to ideas of New Criticism and Russian Formalism. New Criticism, as you will gradually come to know, starts from an attempt to professionalize American literary studies during 1930s. What the American critics like John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks were trying to do, questioned the so-called triumph of modern science and capitalist culture which posited a threat to tradition and ‘everything that was not immediately useful—like poetry’. Like their English counterparts, these poet-critics turned towards their past culture which remained untouched by industrialization and commercialism. They saw poetry as a means of resisting commodification and superficiality. Because they believed that the internal organization—its formal structure—creates harmony out of opposites and tensions. Thus, poetry became their main object of study, because in creating coherent wholes out of variety and contradiction, poetry could transcend the chaos of actual experience.

The genealogy of Formalism is perhaps even more interesting. Although Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in their book *Theory of Literature* gave serious attention to Slavic Formalist Literary Criticism, readers could have

little chance to examine the works themselves. History would tell us that during 1920s, a group of Russian Formalist critics urged the separation of literature from politics. But this is just a long and complex story of orthodox views in the Soviet Union. Since our purpose is to know the internal history of the movement called Russian Formalism and the theory it developed, we can easily find certain resemblances between New Criticism and Russian Formalism. The Formalists involved themselves with three of the New Critical activities—1. an assault on traditional academic scholarship; 2. the development of a critical theory which would separate literature from history, sociology, and philosophy, and 3. finding out a way to talk about literary works that would replace discussions of background, social usefulness or intellectual content with analysis of structure.

Once you look at the units of this block, you will gain more insights into these two theoretical trends. In order to help your study, we have divided this block into six units in the following way.

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Unit 1 : New Criticism

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Unit 1

New Criticism

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1.1 OBJECTIVES

New criticism was an influential critical movement in the course of modern literary criticism. If it is in some ways aligned with Structuralism and Russian Formalism, more recent trends such as Marxism, Post-structuralism, Feminist or New-historicism developed as reaction against the New-critical ethos. By the end of this unit you will be able to

- *familiarise* yourself with the historical background and philosophical heritage of New Criticism
- *discuss* how the movement is continuous with or departs from critical tendencies and theorization prevalent in earlier times

- *find* out important critics and literary scholars associated with New Criticism
- *explore* ideas and concepts central to this particular school of criticism.

1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The term ‘New Criticism’ was coined by John Crowe Ransom in his book entitled *The New Criticism* published in 1941. It implies a theory and a form of practice prevalent in Anglo-American literary criticism between 1940s and 1960s. Three important books that served as the foundational text of this critical movement are *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), *Practical Criticism* (1929), and *Understanding Poetry* (1938). Various critical essays of T.S. Eliot also paved the way for the development of New Criticism.

During the course of your studying New Criticism, you might ask yourself—where does New Criticism stand in the tradition of English literary criticism? Firstly, it can be argued that it is a reaction against some of the important critical insights and tendencies of the Romantics whose dominant tendency was to see the value and significance of literary work as the result of authorial intention or the ‘expression’ of the intention of the authors. The root of literary truth thus lies in the sincerity of emotions and feelings experienced by the author. New Criticism dispensed with the question of author while assessing a work of art. Secondly, it is a reaction against the historical and philological approaches to literature—a thrust then prevalent in the arena of literary study. John Crowe Ransom, for instance, when he was Carnegie Professor of Poetry at Kenyon College, organized academic discussions regularly pleading for a pure criticism that could overthrow historical and philological scholarship then in vogue in the universities. He argued for exclusive focus on the literary techniques rather than on biography, morality, psychology and sought to replace extrinsic with ‘intrinsic’ criticism. Thirdly, during the heyday of New Criticism, criticism became a self-contained academic discipline. It is not that literary works were not part of the curriculum in schools and universities in the English-speaking world, but study of literature was included in various disciplines—rhetoric, philology, history. But criticism did not play any significant part. However, from the 1920s, there started a sudden vogue in academic institutions of critical interpretation which included analysis and introduction of evaluative judgment of literary works.

Is there any common agenda of this New Critical school? Key theorists and thinkers associated with this school have their own agenda and propositions. In fact, there are differences and disagreements amongst the New Critics themselves. Yet they all agree upon the question of the object of literary criticism. The basic assumption was that reading a text in terms of authorial intention, effect on the reader or its historical context cannot do justice to the text which is a texture of variously patterned linguistic elements. The text is an autonomous, self-contained entity and is itself the proper object of criticism. A text must be studied in its own terms and extra-textual yardsticks should not be brought to bear upon it.

Stop to Consider:

New Criticism and Empiricism

New Criticism not merely talks about literary text as the object of literary study, it also dwells extensively on the 'nature' of 'textual experience'. 'Experience' here is a key word because critics see literature, and more specifically, poetry as embodied experience, which cannot be reduced to a set of principles or propositional truth. Philosophically the term 'experience' refers to empiricism, and let us note that the philosophical origin of New Criticism is empiricism.

How do we derive knowledge of a literary text? According to the New Critics, any reference to context, either historical or biographical, or understanding of how a text affects a reader does not help us in this regard. The only way to acquire the experience of the text itself is through 'close-reading' of the text. Reading is itself an experience which is the authentic source of truth and knowledge. Empiricism is based on the assumption that all knowledge is derived from experience. (The first empiricists were physicians who derived their rules of medical practice from their experience alone.)

The mind, according to the Empiricists, is capable of organizing experience and that there is no 'innate' idea as ideas are impressed upon the human mind by experience itself. There are two ways in which knowledge-formation is possible- (i) perception and (ii) reflection of the mind. John Zock Dennis refers to the existence of 'innate' ideas but asserts that mind has an innate power of reflection.

We should not, however, confuse poetic experience with scientific and practical knowledge. New Critics are assertive of the distinctive character of literary knowledge which greatly differs from scientific knowledge. Whereas literary knowledge is derived through perception, non-literary knowledge is based on reflection of the mind.

Despite insistence on ‘authorial intention’ or ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’, there are also continuities between Romantic criticism and New Criticism. Let us take the example of Coleridge. In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge offers a theorization of poetry and its relation to the poet. Poetry, to Coleridge, is not just an outward expression of a poet’s inner feelings because imagination plays a creative and transformative role. Imagination, Coleridge says, “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate”. Besides, imagination fuses the opposites; it denotes a balance or reconciliation of “opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual, with the representative. . . .” This accounts for the organic unity of poetry, the interrelationships of poetic elements and their inseparability from the whole—facilitated by imagination. Such a doctrine is an important antecedent to the New Critical concept of literary work as a self-contained whole. Of course, pervasive insistence of the Romantics on the link between the poet and the poem, the cause and the effect, the literary phenomenon and its subjective origin did not find any importance in the New Critics. New Critical ethos goes against the dominant Romantic concept of the origin of any literary phenomenon.

John Keats’ idea of the relation between a poet and his/her poem greatly departs from the expresser’s notion of art, and is more attuned towards new critical ethos. As I shall elaborate later, the biographical account of the poet is irrelevant to the reading of the poem, declare Wimsatt and Beardsley in *The Intentional Fallacy*. Keats is dismissive of Romantic subjectivism. In a letter to Sir Richard Woodhouse, he says: “The poetical character. . . is not itself, it has no self, it is everything and nothing, it has no character. . . a poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity- he is continually in for and filling some other body”. The implication is important as knowledge about the poet does not help in the reading of the poem.

SAQ:

Can you name a text or any category of texts where the ‘author’ or the source can be overlooked? Would you include a newspaper report in this category? (20 + 20 Words)

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If you ask yourself a question—Is New Criticism just a method of reading or does it also embody a distinctive ideology? In subsequent critical trends, with the advent of a variety of ‘political reading’ of literary works, the New Critics are accused of a certain snobbery because of their exclusive focus on a clearly demarcated text, alienated from its various contexts. You should however understand that such a separation of the text from history as well as the circumstances of its production could also imply a ‘closure’ of reading rather than opening up of the text to diverse possibilities of meaning. Critics like Terry Eagleton, Frank Lentriccia critiqued New Criticism for this kind of conservatism. Such conservatism has also its political origin. In America, the ‘little magazine’ *The Fugitive* formed a group of critics that included Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom and Austin Warren. By 1931, *The Fugitive* evolved as ‘The Agrarians’. (Read more about them in section 2.1 of unit 2 of this block). The Agrarians were conservative and defended the south because the north was seen as materialistic, industrial and socially progressive. They upheld, in numerous essays and letters, the organic unity of the south. Although the group disappeared by 1937, Ransom, Tate, Warren and Brooks turned to literary criticism and the conservative political background inspired them to uphold a formalist poetic.

An affinity between the Formalists and the New Critics can be perceived. Both unanimously fixed the object of investigation. Both employ a mode of ‘intrinsic’ criticism, brushing aside the ‘extrinsic’ elements from the scene. Both share a pervasive concern for ‘form’, unlike the formalists, the New Critics insisted on the irreducibility of literary experience that cannot be paraphrased by any degree of scientific precision.

Stop to Consider:

New Criticism versus Russian Formalism:

An important point of convergence between New Criticism and Russian Formalism is that both regard literature as self-contained verbal entity. They insist on the autonomy of the literary text. One important offshoot of such an assumption is that they promote a mode of intrinsic criticism and reject extra-literary criteria to judge literary texts. Let us, in this context, quote from Hans Bertens: “Although Eliot is obviously very much interested in poetic technique and in the form of specific poems, an interest that would be worked out by a group of American poets and critics, the so-called New Critics – he is ultimately more interested in a poem’s meaning. Poetry should convey complex meanings in which attitudes that might easily be seen as contradictory are fused and which allow us to see things that we otherwise would not see. Our job, then, is to interpret poems after which we can pass judgment on them; that is, establish how well they succeed in creating and conveying the complexity of meaning that we expect from them...the idea that we read poems, and literature in general, because they contain meaning, is obvious. This search for the meaning of poems, novels, plays and other works of literature has from the 1920s well into the 1970s absolutely dominated English and American literary studies and still constituted one of their important activities.” To the Formalists, however, literary investigation should not be directed to the meaning *per se* but to the discovery of form that makes meaning possible.

Both schools dwell on the specific nature of literary language. Whereas New Critics hold literary language in opposition to the language of science and of practical discourse, Formalists like Roman Jakobson define ‘literariness’ by insisting on the poetic function of language. However, Formalists rely more on overarching organizational principles such as fabula, syuzhet, metaphor, metonymy or on specific mode of literary representation—defamiliarisation. On the other hand, “the principles of the New Criticism are basically verbal. That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language...and the explicative procedure is to analyse the meanings and interactions of words, figures of speech, and symbols”. (*A Glossary of literary Terms*)

However, whether or not one dwells on the ‘origin’ of meaning or exploration of meaning through interrelationship of verbal entities that constitute the text, one must invariably seal off experiences of the external world, and read the text itself carefully. Hence, both groups adopt a habit of ‘close reading’.

We must also note that the Formalists, unlike the New Critics, confer a greater amount of scientificity to the study of literature. This can be better understood when we read M. H. Abrams. He says: “Unlike the European Formalists...the

New Critics did not apply the science of linguistics to poetry’ and their emphasis was not on a work as constituted by linguistic devices for achieving specifically literary effects, but on the complex interplay within a work of ironic, paradoxical, and metaphoric meanings around a humanly important theme.”

SAQ:

Can we now say that the following topics are the points of debate in both New Criticism and Russian Formalism? (80 words)

- i. Author
- ii. Meaning
- iii. Text
- iv. Poetic Language
- v. Literary Text/Non-literary Text
- vi. Metaphor
- vii. Paradox

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1.3 IMPORTANT FIGURES

Discussion of New Criticism is never complete without any reference to its major exponents whose contributions not only enriched the contemporary critical scenario but also formed the grounds of later developments in literary and critical theory. New Criticism reacts against some earlier critical habits such as historicist reading and expressionist notion of art that characterizes Romantic criticism. Key figures of this critical movement were John Crowe Ransom, I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, Kenneth Burke, R.P. Blackmur, William Empson, Yvor Winters, W.K. Wimsatt, among others. To be more precise, New Criticism denotes a practice of reading evolved by I.A. Richards. In fact it was ‘practical criticism’ initiated by Richards that was carried forward by the New Critics and its impact can be seen in

their exclusive textual orientation. Following is a list of the significant names and their contributions.

1.3.1 I. A. RICHARDS: (1893-1979)

I.A. Richards was an important figure in the 20th century critical scenario. Once, he distributed in the classroom some papers containing poems (where name of the poets were withheld) and asked students to critically evaluate them. Such an undertaking might seem commonplace to you, but it was indeed a formidable task then because it inspired a direct, ‘unmediated’ encounter between the literary text and the critical reader. It was principally because of I.A. Richards that scientific objectivity became the hallmark of New Criticism.

Born in Sandbach, Cheshire, in 1893, I.A. Richards was educated at Clifton College. It was Cabby Spence who inspired in him an interest for literature. Richards did not have any formal training when he began his career. We must mention C. K. Ogden who was Richard’s collaborator throughout his intellectual pursuits. Richard, Ogden and James Wood co-authored *Foundations of Aesthetics*, where they mapped the principles of aesthetic reception. Another outstanding work by Richards and Ogden was *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language and of the Science of Symbolism*. The earlier phase of his critical works focused on meaning, comprehension and communication. *Principles of Literary Criticism* by Richards is a reaction against a time when there was nothing but “an echo of critical theories”. The book is an expression of the enthusiasm he felt for science and the scientific mode of enquiry. *Practical Criticism*, another work by Richards, had a pedagogic necessity as it promoted a particular method of teaching literature in many Anglo-American universities, and inspired the practice of ‘close-reading’ in subsequent critical developments. Richards, as Basil Willy states, founded the modern schools of New Criticism.

Richards contributed a good number of terms to literary criticism. He set in currency such terms as ‘stock responses’, ‘pseudo-statements’, ‘bogus entities’, distinction between ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’, terms like ‘referential’, ‘referent’, ‘ambiguity’, etc. The term ‘ambiguity’ was a negative marker, and was used in a pejorative sense in earlier criticism. It was Richards who

put it to use in a non-pejorative way, asserting that ambiguity is a basic trait of language itself. William Empson, who was a student of Richards, expounded the term in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

1.3.2 WILLIAM EMPSON: (1906-1984)

Empson, as S. Ramaswami and V. S. Sethuraman have said, is “perhaps the first analytical critic to apply the principles of I.A. Richards on the nature and function of language consistently and with gusto to particular passages of poetry.”

Empson emphasized a linguistic analysis of literary texts. He maintains that a particular word does not have a single meaning but a cluster of meanings. His “seven types of ambiguity” shows careful analysis of small units of a text (word, line, sentence, etc.) Empson insists on alternative readings and states that ambiguity is characteristic of poetic and literary language. He meticulously probes into texts like *Othello*, and *Paradise Lost* and explores multiple meanings of certain key words found in the text, making use of the dictionary and knowledge of historical semantics.

I.A. Richards’ principles regarding the nature and function of criticism, was first applied to poetry by Empson. In the *English Critical Tradition*, he is regarded as one of the sharpest and the most sensitive of modern critics. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is the name of the critical treaty which makes Empson one of the leading New Critics.

1.3.3 ALLEN TATE: (1899-1979)

Allen Tate belongs to the Southern group of American critics. Whereas I.A. Richards separates referential and emotive function of language, Tate distinguishes between scientific and literary discourses. This distinction can also explain the distinction between New Criticism and Russian Formalism. If both schools share the view that a literary work is the proper object of study, the Russian Formalists’ scientific study of literature goes against the New Critics’ insistence on the irreducible and ontologically different experience of literature.

In a way, Tate’s criticism is eclectic; he reconciles Richards, Cleanth Brooks and R.P. Warren. He draws on Richards’ idea of reconciliation of opposed

and harmonious elements, Brooks' concept of irony, and Warren's view that a poetic proposition has nothing to do with intellectual and rational scrutiny.

1.3.4 JOHN CROWE RANSOM: (1888-1974)

Ransom was a pioneering figure of New Criticism in America. He had a remarkable influence on contemporary American critics through the literary journal *Kenyon Review* (Ransom edited *Kenyon Review* for 20 years.) He repudiated various forms of literary criticism including impressionism in favour of an ontological approach to critical issues. To Ransom, the function of criticism is the elucidation of literary works. Most notable among the critical works by Ransom are *The New Criticism* and *The World as Body*. Both works contain important manifestoes of New Criticism. In an essay titled "Criticism, Inc.", for instance, he states certain basic principle of this school; he expresses his aim to make literary criticism "more scientific or precise and systematic". He underlines the importance of a critical shift from historicism to aesthetic appreciation. His critique of left-wing criticism and humanism is caused by their adherence to moral criticism. Historical and biographical information are not irrelevant either, but they must help to define the 'aesthetic' of literature. *The History of Literary Criticism* mentions some normative principles characteristic of New Criticism, as set by Ransom. For him, criticism should exclude

- (a) Personal impressions.
- (b) Synopsis and paraphrase
- (c) Historical studies.
- (d) Linguistic studies (involving allusion word-meaning etc.)
- (e) Moral content.

Ransom further asserts that poetry is ontologically different and hence irreducible to prose-meaning.

Stop to Consider:

Ransom's view of the distinctive nature of poetic experience can also be understood through the distinction he makes between 'texture' and 'structure' of a poem. The structure is the argument of the poem seen as a whole. 'Texture' is constituted by elements that have local value and affect the overall shape of the poem. The 'texture' does not easily give rise to the 'structure' but rather impedes it. It complicates whatever argument the poet is going to establish. As a result "in the end we have our logic but only after a lively reminder of the aspects of reality with which logic cannot cope."

The term 'Texture' is actually derived from the plastic arts which denotes the surface quality of a work, as opposed to its shape and structure. As applied in modern literary criticism, it thus designates the concrete qualities of a poem as opposed to its idea: thus the verbal surface of a work, its sensuous qualities and the density of its imagery.

1.3.5 William Wimsatt, Jr. (1907-1975) and Monroe C. Beardsley (1915-1985)

Wimsatt, a professor of English at Yale University, contributed to New Criticism with such works as *The Prose Style of Dr. Johnson*, *Philosophic Words*, *The Verbal Icon* and *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (with Cleanth Brooks). Beardsley was a professor of philosophy and his works included *Practical Logic*, *Aesthetics*, *An Introduction to Philosophic Thinking*.

The most notable contributions of both critics are found in essays titled *The Intentional Fallacy* and *The Affective Fallacy*. These were controversial papers which elaborated a basic tenet of New Criticism: the issue of authorial intention and affect on the reader. 'Intention' and 'Affect' must be avoided in criticism because they are not implicated in the text itself. If a poem expresses certain thoughts and attitudes, they can be ascribed to the 'dramatic speaker' or 'persona' of the poem and not to the biographical author. Therefore, in critical discourse, terms such as sincerity, authenticity, originality need to be replaced by terms like integrity, relevance, unity, function because it is the literary work which is the sole object of critical scrutiny.

However, they reject Richards' attempt to distinguish 'emotive' from 'referential' meaning, because describing emotive meaning would result in

affective relativism, which would give a license to disregard the cognitive meaning of a poem.

Check Your Progress:

1. Outline the main concerns of the New Critical advocacy of textual “close reading”.
2. Highlight the extent of the similarities between New Criticism and the Formalists. In what sense are both schools proponents of the ‘poem’? In what way do they differ?

1.4 KEY CONCEPTS

1.4.1 AUTONOMY OF THE TEXT

The New Critics were oriented towards “close-reading” or ‘practical reading’ in the line laid down by I.A. Richards. A text, because it is constituted by a unique language, is itself a source of its meaning and value, and is thus distinguished from other texts or other uses of language. A poem is an embodied experience inextricably bound up with language, and hence its meaning cannot be conveyed by prose paraphrase.

Scientific and poetic truths are different in nature. Scientific truth is propositional and can be shown to be true or false. Literary/poetic truth is not ‘scientific’ in the sense that it is not susceptible to the norms of truth and falsehood. Still, critical endeavour is scientific. In the Romantic period, it is the poet who is the locus of meaning and significance. (Remember Wordsworth’s oft quoted definition of poetry as ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’) But now poetry is said to have its own territory, its own unique mode of existence. The poem is seen by New Critics as a self-contained, self-sustaining entity. The poem, and not its relation to the external world, is the focus and object of criticism.

The New Critics’ consensus on the object of critical analysis leads to the divorce between a literary work and its diverse contexts provided by history, biography, sociology and other disciplines.

New Critical method relies on a basic empirical principle that man is the observer of external objects, and, therefore, can publicly formulate

abstractions on the ‘perceived’ event/object. To isolate a work from its wider socio-historical context is to assume that the work is subjected to ‘scientific’ analysis. (In a sense this recalls ‘scientific’ practice that isolates an object written in a controlled environment, in order to observe.)

Stop to Consider:

According to John Locke, knowledge comes from two sources (i) ideas coming from experience and (ii) reflection, or the ability to look at one’s own mind. Now, a poem as an external object can be analyzed objectively, while its content concerns what is going on in the mind of the poet/reader. Hence, poetry performs a mimetic function that embodies the result of reflection on the mind. These questions cannot be described scientifically, but through a poetic structure.

The above discussion shows that although New Criticism is based on empirical philosophy, in a way it also dismisses rigorous scientific methodology in grasping poetic/textual truth.

1.4.2 INTENTIONAL FALLACY

“The Intentional Fallacy” by W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley is a foundational text of New Criticism which states that ‘intention’ should not be brought to bear upon the analysis of the literary text. What do we understand by the term ‘Intention’? The authors state, “intention, as we shall use the term, corresponds to what he intended in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance... In order to judge the poem’s performance, we must know what he intended. Intention is designed or planned in the author’s mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author’s attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write.”

Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that knowledge of an author’s original intention is neither integral to, nor essential in the critical analysis of a work. One can interpret a text without any reference to ‘authorial intention’. Their claim here is two-fold:

- (i) Authorial intentions are not available in the text.
- (ii) Notion of authorial intention dismantles the integrity of a literary work.

However, ‘intention’ cannot be so easily dispensed with. Have the authors completely denied the very notion of “Authorial intension”? We must know that they distinguished between the intention realized in the text and that which is supposed to exist prior to the existence of the text. When intention is realized, it is useless to consult the author because “critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle”.

Again, ‘intention’ cannot be the standard for critical evaluation of a text. Meaning can be deciphered only through a ‘close’ analysis of the text, attending to its linguistic as well as rhetorical components. Of course, all meanings cannot be said to be free from authorial intention. In conversation, for instance, what the speaker intends prior to his utterance is crucial to meaning of the utterance. Literary meaning resists such dependence on the psychology of the author. “The Intentional Fallacy” also contends that a text can have meanings unacknowledged by the author. Hence, author cannot be a guide to interpretation of a text because interpretation must be justified textually.

There is both external and internal evidence for a work’s meaning. Internal evidence can be found in “the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, diction, arise and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture” (*Literary Theory and Criticism*, 181).

External evidence is private, and not part of the work, and it comes from journals, letters, conversation etc. However, Wimsatt and Beardsley could not sharply demarcate these two kinds of evidence, because the author’s expressed meaning and intention can get incorporated into the text through its linguistic texture.

SAQ:

How would you name the ‘authorial intention’ behind the ‘Sunne Rising’ by Donne? Would this ‘intention’ help us to understand the poem better? (70+70 words)

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1.4.3 AFFECTIVE FALLACY

As used by Wimsatt and Beardsley (*The Verbal Icon*, 1954), this term connotes ‘a confusion between the poem and its result (what it is and what it does)’. Judgment of a literary text should not rest upon the effect it has on the readers. ‘Affective fallacy’ is thus a confusion between a poem and its “affect” on readers. A text, however emotive its context might be, must nevertheless be judged as a text, or a self-sufficient entity. It must be seen as a system of language. So, evaluating a work of art in terms of its results in the mind of the readers is supposed to be a critical error.

Eliot’s “objective correlative” predates this principle. As explained by Eliot, emotions are externalized into a poem not as emotions but in the form of some events and situation, specific to the emotion as judging a poem from emotion results in impressionism.

1.4.4 IRONY AND PARADOX

Irony indicates a ‘verbal situation’ where the expressed meaning differs from its implied meaning. A number of New Critics used this term and it was seen as a general criterion of affixing literary value to a work of art. We can in this context, point to T. S. Eliot who endorsed metaphysical poetry for its use of wit. To Eliot, wit is ‘internal equilibrium’ and ‘involves’ a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience...” (*The English Critical Tradition*, 197-198). In the same vein, I.A. Richards contends that in any aesthetic experience, the rivalry of conflicting impulses is avoided as they are given autonomy. He also distinguishes between ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’ in poetry, defining irony as a touchstone for the poetry of exclusion: “Irony consists in bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses; that is why poetry which is exposed to it is not of the highest order, and why irony itself is so constantly a characteristic of poetry”. (*Literary Criticism: A Short History*).

Cleanth Brooks elaborates Richards’ idea in his essay “Irony as a Principle of Structure”. Poetic statements, Brooks states, can aspire for musicality only through particular, concrete details. In poetry, general meaning is qualified by the particular “the concrete particulars with which the poet loads himself seems to deny the universal to which he aspires”, (*The English*

Critical Tradition, 472). Brooks further states that “the obvious warping of a statement by the context” we characterize as ‘ironical’”. Critics like Brooks would even like to suggest that the ‘language of poetry is the language of paradox’. This idea has been persuasively elaborated by Brooks in his book *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947).

SAQ:

How is the difference between form and content apparent in a poem like Blake’s “The Tyger”? To what extent does the content forge structure of the poem? (60 + 60 words)

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1.4.5 AMBIGUITY

William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is a fundamental text of New Criticism. The title is misleading, because it seeks to ‘categorize’ different types of ambiguity. But what it purports to say is clear: words have multiple meanings. Besides, English syntax is flexible to adjustments of the written and colloquial word order.

Because of its unique organization of language, poetry can cover an indecision which finds an echo in the mind of the reader. Such indecision stems from the reconciliation of contradictory impulses.

Although Empson offers a classification of ambiguity, his contribution to the study of poetry is not in classification, but in the way he offers a close and acute analysis of the linguistic elements with an eye on the many-sidedness of language. Of course, ambiguity can be a nuisance if “it is due to weakness or thinness of thought”, “impression of incoherence”. Real ambiguity adds complexity and richness to poetry.

In relation to the question of multiple meanings, Empson states that a reader must know the forces that work in the mind of the author, or how it appeared to its first readers. So, knowledge of the history of language, the author’s conscious or unconscious intention as well as the reaction of the first readers— are all keys to an understanding of ambiguity.

SAQ:

“She is all states, and all princes, I” How would you categorize the figurative language here—metaphor, ambiguity, or irony? Give reasons for your answer. (100 words)

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1.4.6 METAPHOR

Metaphor implies a comparison between two dissimilar things, where comparison is not anticipated. In fact, terms like metaphor, irony, and tension are widely used in New Criticism because they are all about the intrinsic properties of a literary text.

I.A. Richards has it that meaning originates from a specific context within a text. But contrary to this, metaphor exemplifies how the contexts merge. Metaphorical meaning is therefore not a version of literal meaning or “simply a prettified version of an already stated meaning” (*Literary Criticism: A Short History*, 644), but that which occupies a new, distinctive ground, adding to the richness of poetry. Richards contends that it is the link with a second context that determines that a given usage is metaphorical. Richards introduces the term ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’, ‘tenor’ indicating the subject and ‘vehicle’, the metaphorical term linked to the ‘tenor’. However, metaphor does not mean either ‘tenor’ or ‘vehicle’, but a third entity that stems from their link. Resisting traditional notions of ‘displacement of words’, Richards sees metaphor as a transaction of two contexts, and its value is thus, never ornamental.

Stop to Consider:

Equally important are Ezra Pound’s and Eliot’s ideas of metaphor which, they think, are the essence of poetry. To Pound, metaphor, which is synonymous with idiographic method, is juxtaposition of picturable elements. Eliot’s view of metaphor is influenced by the metaphysical poets as well as the 19th century French symbolist poets. He writes of the metaphysical poets that they forcibly unify heterogeneous ideas in their minds. These poets, he writes, put together incongruous elements and unify what normally resists unification. The

amalgamation of disparate is crucial, as it leads to the unification of thought and feeling. When thought and feeling remain separate, metaphor becomes non-structural, a mere ornament or an illustration of something. Thus New Critics see metaphor as a constitutive principle of poetry.

1.4.7 TENSION

You have now seen that to the New Critics, poetry does not yield unambiguous, objective truth. This, according to them, is the inevitable result of the way in which materials and images are organized in the poetic text. Seen in this way, tension is a general characteristic of poetry. I. A. Richards holds that any experience includes various impulses, but in poetic experience “the rivalry of conflicting impulses is avoided not by our suppressing the impulses, but, paradoxically by our giving them free reign.” What is the consequence of such a free reign of opposing impulses? “Such a conception, presenting its difficulties for an equilibrium of conflicting impulses is easily confused with the state of balance that one finds in irresolution—that is, an oscillation between two sets of opposed impulses in which the mind, like the fabled donkey poised between the equally attractive bales of hay, can only remain suspended in inaction.

In an essay, “Tension in Poetry” Allen Tate uses the term in a special sense. A poem has both denotative and connotative meaning. “In poetry, words have not only their denotative meanings but also their connotative significance. To indicate the logical meaning and the denotative aspects of language Tate used the word ‘extension’. To refer to the suggestive and the connotative aspect of language, he uses the word ‘Intension’. “A successful poem is one in which these two sets of meaning are in a state of ‘Tension’”.

Stop to Consider:

Denotation and Connotation

Denotation is the most literal meaning of a word, regardless of what one feels about it or the various ideas and suggestions it connotes. For example, the word apartheid denotes a certain form of political, social, and racial regime. But it *connotes* much more than that because connotation refers to the suggestions and implications evoked by a word or a phrase. Connotation may be personal or individual, general or universal. Probably all existing words with lexical meaning can have various connotations.

1.4.8 ORGANIC FORM/UNITY

The idea of organic unity finds echo in Romantic critical thought. According to Coleridge, a literary work must have an organic form which develops from inside the work itself. A poem is like a growing plant that achieves the organic unity of its different parts with the whole. The New Critics carry forward this argument and shows how the totality of meanings of a work is constituted by the interrelations of various elements within it. Consequently, the significance of other New Critical terms finds a vent in the idea of organic unity to produce totality in effect.

1.5 SUMMING UP

What makes New Criticism significant can be summarized as follows:

1. It institutionalizes the study of literature and establishes it as a self-sufficient academic discipline.
2. It also promotes a particular reading practice: the habit of “close reading.”

Of course, the basic theoretical premises of this school have been variously contested in subsequent periods. New Criticism’s implicit assumption about the high cultural values embedded in English literary culture was debunked with ‘Culture studies’ emerging as a new discipline along with the advent of post-modernism, where moral and ethical barriers are sought to be resolved, hierarchies of aesthetic works are destabilized, in order to pave the way for an open study of multifarious cultural phenomenon. For example, New Historicism, which opts for the historical and social elements as important source of literary speculation, is in sharp reaction to the insular and textual reading upheld by New Criticism. New Historicism insists on a dynamic text, context and dialogue in the production of meaning and value of literature. In fact, the theoretical movements such as Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Deconstruction. Post colonialism, Feminism, Cultural Studies and New Historicism that started from the 1960s onwards began as a reaction against the basic principles and ideas of New Criticism.

1.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 2

Cleanth Brooks: “The Heresy of Paraphrase”

Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introducing the Critic
- 2.3 Reading the Text “The Heresy of Paraphrase”
- 2.4 Key Concepts
 - 2.4.1 Irony and Paradox
 - 2.4.2 Close Reading
- 2.5 Critical Reception
- 2.6 Summing up
- 2.7 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit is designed with a view to make you aware of American New Criticism. However, more emphasis will be put on the work of Cleanth Brooks, whose essay “The Heresy of Paraphrase” is often regarded as a representative text of New Criticism. By the end of this unit you should be able to

- *locate* Cleanth Brooks in the context of American New Criticism
- *justify* his preoccupations as a New Critic
- *grasp* the significance of the essay

2.2 INTRODUCING THE CRITIC

Cleanth Brooks was one of the central figures of New Criticism, a movement that emphasized structural and textual analysis, ‘close reading’ so to say, over historical or biographical analysis. Brooks advocated that “by making the closest examination of what the poem says as a poem”, a critic can effectively interpret and explicate the text. For him, the crux of New Criticism is that literary study be “concerned primarily with the work itself”.

Cleanth Brooks was born on October 16, 1906 in Murray, Kentucky. Mostly known for his contributions to American New Criticism in the mid-twentieth century and for various innovations in the teaching of poetry in American higher education, his best-known works include, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939). His main argument in such works relates to the importance of ambiguity and paradox as means to understand poetry. His other formulations include an emphasis on “the interior life of a poem” and on the codification of the principles of ‘close reading.’

After educating from McTyeire School, a private academy, Brooks went on to study at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. He received his Master of Arts from Tulane University and then studied in Exeter College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar. Brooks then returned to the United States and from 1932 to 1947 worked as a professor of English at Louisiana State University. In 1934, he married Edith Amy Blanchard.

It was during his studies at Vanderbilt that he came in touch with literary critics and future collaborators like Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, Andrew Lytle, and Donald Davidson. In 1935, Brooks and Warren founded the journal *The Southern Review* and until 1942 co-edited and published works of many influential authors, including Eudora Welty, Kenneth Burke, and Ford Madox Ford. The journal was known for its criticism and creative writing, making it one of the leading journals of the time. In addition, Brooks’ and Warren’s collaboration led to innovations in the teaching of poetry and literature. At Louisiana State, prompted by their students’ inability to interpret poetry, they formed a booklet to exemplify ‘close reading’ through examples. This booklet finally led to the publication of seminal texts like—*An Approach to Literature* (1936), *Understanding Poetry* (1938), *Understanding Fiction* (1943), *Modern Rhetoric* (1949), and, in collaboration with Robert Heilman, *Understanding Drama* (1945). Brooks’ two most influential works, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) and *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) were also influenced by the success of that booklet.

Stop to Consider:

While reading Cleanth Brooks you must be aware of his indebtedness to the Southern Agrarians and *The Fugitive*.

The Agrarians were a group of social critics centered around Vanderbilt University during 1930s. Their main intention was to despise industrial capitalism and to insist on the presence of the southern rural and small-town culture. In their anthology of essays, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), their argument was that “the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations, and that therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers.” However, the interests of the group and their collective shift toward poetry resulted in the publication of *The Fugitive*, a literary magazine. The Agrarian efforts, organized mainly by Vanderbilt professors and poets- John Crowe Ransom and Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, represented a distinctive intellectual offshoot of the old circle. Of the twelve contributors to *I'll Take My Stand*, six were current or former members of the Vanderbilt faculty (Ransom, Davidson, psychologist Lyle Lanier, economist Herman C. Nixon, historian Frank L. Owsley, and English professor John Donald Wade) and four were former students (Tate, Henry B. Kline, Andrew Nelson Lytle, and Robert Penn Warren). The final two contributors—critic Stark Young and poet John Gould Fletcher—were literary acquaintances of Tate.

From 1941 to 1975, Brooks held many academic positions and received a number of distinguished fellowships and honorary doctorates. In 1941, he worked as a visiting professor at the University of Texas, Austin. From 1947 to 1975, he became an English professor at Yale University, where he held the position of Gray Professor of Rhetoric and Gray Professor of Rhetoric Emeritus from 1960 until his retirement. His tenure at Yale was marked by ongoing research into Southern literature, which resulted in the publication of Brooks' studies of William Faulkner's *Yoknapatawpha County* (1963, 1978). In 1948, he was a fellow of the Kenyon School of English. From 1951 to 1953, he became a fellow of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. and a visiting professor at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

Cleanth Brooks died on May 10, 1994.

Stop to Consider:

In his essay “The Formalist Critics,” (1951) Cleanth Brooks offers certain basic tenets of New Criticism:

1. That the primary concern of criticism is with the problem of unity—the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of the various parts to each other in building up this whole.
2. That the formal relations in a work, form and content cannot be separated.
2. That in a successful work, format and content cannot be separated.
3. That form is meaning.
4. That literature is ultimately metaphorical and symbolic.
5. That the general and the universal are not seized upon by abstraction, but got at through the concrete and the particular.
6. That literature is not a surrogate for religion.
7. That, as Allen Tate says, “specific moral problems” are the subject matter of literature, but that the purpose of literature is not to point a moral.
8. That the principles of criticism define the area relevant to literary criticism; they do not constitute a method for carrying out the criticism.

Thus, from the above we can see that New Criticism involves an investigation of a poem’s “technical elements, textual patterns, and incongruities” with a kind of scientific rigor and precision. From I. A. Richards’ *The Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism*, Brooks formulated guidelines for interpreting poetry. Brooks formulated these guidelines in reaction to ornamentalist theories of poetry, to the common practice of critics going outside the poem (mostly to historical or biographical contexts), and his and Warren’s frustration with trying to teach college students to analyze poetry and literature.

For Brooks, criticism is directed towards scrutinizing technical elements, textual patterns, and incongruities in texts; as it is found in the beginning of *The Well-Wrought Urn* that the critic should always begin “by making the closest examination of what the poem says as a poem”. Real criticism is neither biographical nor historical, nor it is subjective, the record of the readers’ impressions as he or she reacts to a literary work. Brooks, in a way, tries to make literary criticism look more like a science—rigorous, precise, intensive, and analytical. Like the formalists, he too argues that literature and science use language in very different ways. While science is

referential, abstract, and denotative, literature is non-referential, concrete and connotative. In his *The Well-Wrought Urn*, he states “the tendency of science is necessarily to stabilize terms to freeze them into strict denotations: the poet’s tendency is by contrast disruptive. The terms are continually modifying each other and thus violating their dictionary meanings.”

2.3 READING THE TEXT “THE HERESY OF PARAPHRASE”

Brooks and Robert Penn Warren found that the text-books they were teaching were “full of biographical facts and impressionistic criticism” and so they failed to show how poetic language differed from the language of an editorial or a work of non-fiction. This anxiety subsequently led to their publication of *Understanding Poetry* which strongly argued that poetry should be taught as poetry, and the critic should resist reducing a poem to a simple paraphrase, explicating it through biographical or historical contexts, and interpreting it didactically. Brooks and Warren opined that paraphrasing and inserting biographical and historical information was useful only as a means of clarifying interpretation. Brooks, however, took this notion of paraphrase to a further extent and wrote *The Well-Wrought Urn*. The book, as you will see, is a polemic against the tendency of critics to reduce a poem to a single narrative or didactic message. He describes summative, reductionist readings of poetry with a very popular phrase “The Heresy of Paraphrase”. In fact, Brooks argued that poetry serves no didactic purpose simply because producing some kind of ‘statement’ would be counter to a poem’s purpose. Brooks argues “through irony, paradox, ambiguity and other rhetorical and poetic devices of his or her art, the poet works constantly to resist any reduction of the poem to a paraphrasable core, favoring the presentation of conflicting facets of theme and patterns of resolved stresses.”

The essay “The Heresy of Paraphrase” is the 11th chapter of *The Well-Wrought Urn*. In this chapter he tries to explain why he has chosen the ten poems of ten representative poets of English literature. Making an attempt to find the commonalities in these poems, he feels that they are “close to the central stream of the tradition and were held in favour in their own day and are still admired now.” As he wrote, his attempt was to see “what the masterpieces had in common rather than to see how the poems of different historical period differed and in particular to see whether they had anything

in common with the ‘metaphysicals’ and with the ‘moderns’. Brooks further states that “the common goodness which the poems share will have to be stated not in terms of ‘content’ or ‘subject matter’ in the usual sense in which we use these terms, but rather in terms of ‘structure’. The ‘content’ of the poems is various, and if we attempt to find one *quality* of content which is shared by all the poems—a ‘poetic’ subject matter or diction or imagery—we shall find that we have merely confused the issues. For what is it to be poetic?” Similarly, the term ‘structure’ too is not satisfactory as a term because “One means by it something far more internal than the metrical pattern, say, or then the consequence of images. The ‘structure’ meant is certainly not ‘form’ as a kind of envelope which ‘contains’ the ‘content’. The structure obviously is everywhere conditioned by the nature of the material which goes into the poem. The nature of the material, sets the problem to be solved, and the solution is the ordering of the material”.

SAQ:

Would you paraphrase a poem by stating its content (theme) or by outlining how the subject matter or content is separated from its structure/from? Apply this question to Book 1 of *Paradise Lost* to explain your stand. (80 words)

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Citing the example of Pope’s ‘Rape of the Lock’, Brooks says that the ‘structure’ of the poem is neither the ‘heroic couplet’ nor the ‘mock-epic’ convention; the structure meant here is the structure of meaning, evaluations, and interpretations and the principle of unity which helps in balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes, and meanings. It is thus misleading to state that the poem constitutes a ‘statement’ of some sort, for it is from this formula that most of the common heresies about poetry occur. Moreover, the critic is forced to judge the poem by its political or scientific, philosophical truth. The point however is that we cannot describe what the poem in general is ‘about’ and what the general effect of the poem is. As Cleanth Brooks writes: “The Rape of the Lock is about the foibles of an 18th-century belle.

The effect of (Robert Herrick's) 'Corinna's Going A Maying' is one of gaiety tempered by the poignance of the fleetingness of youth. We can very properly use paraphrase as pointers and as shorthand references provided that we know what we are doing. But...the paraphrase is not the real core of meaning which constitutes the essence of the poem." So, if we are to formulate a 'statement' of such poems, which is of course not free from difficulty, the truth is that such formulations lead away from the center of the poem as it does not represent the 'inner' structure or the 'essential' structure or the 'real' structure of the poem. Such formulations can be used as more or less convenient ways of referring to parts of the poem, but are not to be mistaken for the internal and essential structure of the poem. In this essay, Brooks comes to a conclusion that "most of the distempers of criticism come about from yielding to the temptation to the remark which we make about the poem—statements about what it says or about what truth it gives or about what formulations it illustrates—for the essential core of the poem itself."

Brooks refers to W.M. Urban's book *Language and Reality* to explain these points. According to Urban the inseparability of intuition and expression relates to the inseparability of form and content, or content and medium: "the artist does not first intuit his object and then find the appropriate medium, it is rather in and through his medium that he intuits the object...to pass from the intuitible to the non-intuitable is to negate the function of the symbol." Brooks opines that the obvious example of such error are those theories which treat the poem as 'propaganda', and the most subtle are those, which beginning with 'paraphrasable' elements of the poem, refer to other elements subordinate to the paraphrasable elements. At this moment, Brooks also makes a contextual reference to the American poet-critic Yvor Winters who perhaps furnishes the most respectable example of the paraphrastic heresy. By citing few lines from Robert Browning's "A Serenade at the Villa" Winters proves that to refer to the structure of the poem to what is finally a paraphrase of the poem is to refer to something outside the poem.

So, most of our difficulties in criticism are rooted in the heresy of paraphrase. And if we have to paraphrase, we distort the relation of the poem to its 'truth' and we split the poem into 'form' and 'content'. What Brooks says, further clarifies his intentions in the following way:

“If we allow ourselves to be misled by the heresy of paraphrase, we run the risk of doing even more violence to the internal order of the poem itself. By taking the paraphrase as our point of stance, we misconceive the function of metaphor and meter. We demand logical coherences where they are sometimes irrelevant, and we fail frequently to see imaginative coherence on levels where they are highly relevant.”

SAQ:

Make an attempt to distinguish between ‘form’ and ‘content’ in Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’. Does the ‘form’ contemplate the ‘content’ or is the ‘content’ meaningless without the ‘form’? (60 words)

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In order to make his point more clear, Brooks states that the essential structure of a poem resembles that of architecture or painting or that of a ballet or musical composition. To move still closer to poetry, the structure of a poem resembles that of a play. What Brooks means by saying this is that the dynamic nature of drama allows us to regard it as *an action* rather than as a formula for action or as a statement. This analogy will help the readers in understanding the point that they will do well by approaching a poem thinking it to be drama. It is on the same lines that the proposition that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” is best understood when it is seen in relation to the total context of the poem. But a reader might also ask if it is possible to frame a proposition which will *say* what the poem *says* as a poem or could the poet also not have framed such a proposition. The obvious answer is that the poet had not thought about the proposition otherwise he would not have written the poem. We, as readers, may find our own proposition for an ease in understanding and such an effort will cause no harm to the ‘inner core of the poem’—if we do not mistake it for ‘what the poem really says’. Brooks says:

“The characteristic unity of a poem lies in the unification of attitudes into hierarchy subordinated to a total and governing attitude. In the unified poem, the poet has ‘come to terms’ with his experience. The poem does not merely

eventuate in a logical conclusion. The conclusion of the poem is the working out of the various tensions—set up by whatever means—by propositions, metaphors, symbols. This unity is achieved by a dramatic process, not a logical, it represents an equilibrium of forces, not a formula.”

This helps in understanding the point that the relation of each item to the whole context is crucial and the structure of the poem has to do with the complex of attitudes achieved.

From the ongoing discussion, you must have had some ideas of what Brooks is actually trying to say. Brooks emphasizes that a poem is never meant to produce a statement, a proposition, a didactic lesson or a message. According to Brooks, all poetry exhibits ‘irony’ which we can read as the pervasive incongruity usually involved in poetry. This means that through irony, paradox, ambiguity, and other rhetorical and poetic devices, the poet works constantly to resist any reduction of the poem to a paraphrasable entity favouring the presentation of various conflicting elements.

Thus, you have seen that in this summary chapter of *The Well-Wrought Urn*, Brooks articulates his position that it is “heresy” to paraphrase a poem when trying to get at its meaning. Poems are not simply “messages” expressed in flowery language. The language is crucial in determining the message; form is content. Thus, to try to abstract the meaning of a poem from the language in which that meaning is rooted, the paradoxical language of metaphor, is to disregard the internal structure of the poem that gives it its meaning. The temptation to think of poetry as prose draped in poetic language is strong simply because both are composed with words and differ only in that poetry has meter and rhyme. But, Brooks instead wants us to see poetry as music, a ballet, or a play: “the structure of a poem resembles that of a ballet or musical composition. It is a pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonizations, developed through a temporal scheme...most of us are less inclined to force the concept of ‘statement’ on drama than on a lyric poem; for the very nature of drama is that of something ‘acted out’—something which arrives at its conclusion through conflict—something which builds conflict into its very being.” The poem is thus a “working out of the various tensions—set up by whatever means—by propositions, metaphors, symbols.” It achieves a resolution through this working out of tensions, not necessarily a logical resolution but a satisfactory unification of different

“attitudes,” or dispositions towards experience. Therefore, any intellectual proposition within the poem must be viewed in the context of all the other propositions expressed in the highly **changeable** language of metaphor.

2.4 KEY CONCEPTS

2.4.1 Irony and Paradox

It is in the context of the ongoing discussion that Brooks refers to his ideas of ‘irony’ and ‘paradox’. According to Brooks by using the term irony one risks, of course, making the poem seem arch and self-conscious, since irony for most readers of poetry, is associated with satire. Moreover, irony is our most general term for indicating that recognition of incongruities-which, again, pervades all poetry to a degree far beyond what our conventional criticism has been heretofore willing to allow.

Irony in this general sense, is available in Tennyson’s “Tears, Idle Tears” in Donne’s “Canonization” in Pope’s “Rape of the Lock”, in Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and even in Wordsworth’s “Intimations” ode; because the poets are never seen to have avoided the pressures exerted by the symbols. But as Eliot has said the task of the poet is to “dislocate language into meaning.” So, “the word, as the poet uses it, has to be conceived of, not as a discrete particle of meaning, but as a potential of meaning, a nexus or cluster of meanings.

Brooks says that the essential structure of Donne’s poetry is not logical. It is because Donne exemplified a great mastery of using metaphor imposing a clean logic on his images. Besides this, where Donne uses logic, he uses it to justify illogical positions. His common criterion is to overthrow a conventional position or to prove an essentially illogical one.

“The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry”

Published in 1947, this book is often considered as a seminal text of the New Critical school of literary criticism. *The Well-Wrought Urn* is divided into eleven chapters, ten of which attempt ‘close reading’ of celebrated English poems from verses in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* to Yeats’s “Among School Children”. The eleventh, chapter entitled “The Heresy of Paraphrase,” is a polemic against the use of paraphrase in describing and criticizing a poem. This chapter is

followed by two appendices: “Criticism, History, and Critical Relativism” and “The Problem of Belief.” However, most of the book’s contents had already been published before 1947. The book was conceived as a reaction to the historicist/biographical trends in literary criticism which sought to interpret each poetic work within the context of the historical period from which it emerged. Brooks vehemently rejected this kind of historical relativism, as he believed that it repudiates “our concept of poetry itself.” Brooks instead opted for a “universal judgments” to treat poems as ‘self-contained’ entities which can be interpreted even without a reference to historical or biographical information.

The Ten Poems of the Book

John Donne, ‘The Cannonization’ (1633), William Shakespeare, ‘Macbeth’ (Ca. 1606); John Milton, ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ (1632); Robert Herrick, ‘Corinna’s Going A Maying’ (1648); Alexander Pope, ‘The Rape of the Lock’ (1714); Thomas Gray ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ (1751); William Wordsworth, ‘Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ (1807); Alfred Lord Tennyson, ‘Tears Idle Tears’ (1847); and William Butler Yeats, ‘Among School Children’ (1927).

2.4.2 Close Reading

Brooks was an out-and-out a literary critic and theorist. According to him, his interest in ‘close reading’ began in his school days when he had studied the classical languages. He notes that he was heavily influenced and affected by the approach to literature and criticism adopted by his teachers and poets—‘who were talking about the making of poems’. Like his contemporary critics in the 1930s, Brooks too came down heavily on the emphasis of graduate studies on ‘historical and biographical’ information and protested the absence of any attention to ‘the interior life of the poem’. While at Oxford, he read Richards’ books—*The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929). At first, he did not accept what Richards had to offer but gradually he developed Richards’ guidelines for examination of the poem itself into his own intrinsic (or formalist) criticism. Brooks’ ‘close reading’ often runs the risk of coming more or less to the same conclusion, which means, each poem that he examines, from whatever sources and periods he inspects its images, metaphors, tones of voice, is valued or reproved for its handling of irony and paradox. R. S. Crane,

another scholar–theorist accused Brooks of ‘Critical Monism’ as, all of the texts from Renaissance through the modern period treated in *The Well-Wrought Urn* end up seeming like 17th century lyric. But Brooks did concede to this point, as he notes in the “Heresy of Paraphrase”, he is only undertaking an analytical experiment by reading 18th and 19th century poems “as one has learnt to read Donne and the moderns.” While acknowledging the historical differences among these poems, Brooks never forgets to show that there are common elements in their use and organization of language.

2.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

During 1940s and 50s, critics often argued that Brooks’ approach to criticism was flawed for being overtly narrow and for refuting all attempts to relate literary study to political, social, and cultural issues and debates. Brooks, however, rebuffed such accusations and insisted that he was not excluding the ‘context’ because a poem possesses organic unity, and it is always possible to derive a historical and biographical context from the language the poet uses. He even argued that a poem by Donne or Marvell may not depend, for its success, on outside knowledge that we bring to it. It is richly ambiguous yet harmoniously orchestrated, coherent in its own special aesthetic terms. Another flaw in New Criticism was its contradictory nature. Brooks wrote, on the one hand, “the resistance which any good poem sets up against all attempts to paraphrase it” is the result of the poet manipulating and warping language to create new meaning. On the other hand, he admonished the unity and harmony in a poem’s aesthetics. These seemingly contradictory forces in a poem create tension and paradoxical irony according to Brooks, but critics questioned whether irony leads to a poem’s unity or undermines it. During the ’70s and ’80s, Brooks’ reputation suffered when his books and essays were often cited to illustrate the flaws of the American New Criticism. It was argued that Brooks isolated literary criticism by limiting it to intensive textual analysis, ignored history, discounted readers, failed to consider writings by women and minorities and refuted all attempts to relate literary study to political, social and cultural issues and debates. Yet his reputation lies in his being an incisive interpreter of literary texts and adept theorists whose literary and critical discussions anticipated the theories deployed against him.

The common charge against Brooks is that his focus on the 'text' narrowed the field of literary criticism and pedagogy by laying biographical and historical contexts aside. Edward Said and Stephen Greenblatt have especially called attention to the 'anti-historical' thrust of the New Criticism and sought to connect literary criticism with new forms of ideological critique and historical enquiry. But Brooks did more than any one else to articulate and codify the principles of Anglo-American New Criticism and demonstrate how they applied to a wide range of texts. But he became a prime target for opponents of the approach. Moreover, Brooks' criticism gained another significant momentum when post-structuralists such as Paul de Man and Barbara Johnson implicitly reminded readers of Cleanth Brooks by urging that it is precisely the competing, conflicting, indeed warring relationship among the words in the text that keeps it from self-contained equilibrium. Whereas Brooks sees the 'essential structure' and a 'pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonizations' in a poem, a deconstructionist like J Hillis Miller, "seeks the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all."

In his later years, Brooks criticized the poststructuralists for inviting subjectivity and relativism into their analysis, asserting that "each critic played with the text's language unmindful of aesthetic relevance and formal design". This approach to criticism, Brooks argued, "denied the authority of the work".

2.6 SUMMING UP

By this time, you have gained enough ideas about Brooks as a critic. In addition to arguing against historical, biographical, and didactic readings of a poem, Brooks believed that a poem should not be criticized on the basis of its effect on the reader. In his "The Formalist Critics" he says that: "the formalist critic assumes an ideal reader: that is, instead of focusing on the varying spectrum of possible readings, he attempts to find a central point of reference from which he can focus upon the structure of the poem or novel".

Brooks does not accept the idea of considering critics' emotional responses to works of literature as a legitimate approach to criticism. He says that "a detailed description of my emotional state on reading certain works has little to do with indicating to an interested reader what the work is and how the parts of it are related". For Brooks, nearly everything a critic evaluates

must come from within the text itself. This opinion is similar to that expressed by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in their famous essay “The Affective Fallacy,” in which they argue that a critic is “a teacher or explicator of meanings,” not a reporter of “physiological experience” in the reader.

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Unit 3

F. R. Leavis: “The Line of Wit”

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introducing the Critic
- 3.3 Reading the Text: “The Line of Wit”
- 3.4 Key Concepts
 - 3.4.1 Moral Seriousness
 - 3.4.2 English Culture
 - 3.4.3 Tradition
- 3.5 Critical Reception
- 3.6 Summing up
- 3.7 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This is the third unit of this block. You have seen that this block discusses twentieth century criticism and its components as well as its exponents. In this unit, you will get an opportunity to discuss F.R. Leavis and judge for yourself his relative significance in the English critical scenario of the twentieth century. However, we also hope that by the end of this unit, you will be able to

- *read* Leavis as one of the leading English literary critics of the twentieth century
- *gain* a clear idea of his views on literature especially poetry and fiction
- *locate* significant issues in Leavisite criticism
- *grasp* the significance of the essay “The Line of Wit” as a seminal text of English criticism

3.2 INTRODUCING THE CRITIC

Frank Raymond Leavis was born in Cambridge, England, on July 14th, 1895. His father Harry Leavis was a cultured man who owned a small shop

in Cambridge which sold pianos and other musical instruments. Leavis was to retain a respect for him throughout his life. Leavis was educated at a local private school whose headmaster Dr. W. H. D. Rouse was a classicist and was also praised for his 'direct method', a practice done by teachers to carry on classroom conversations with their pupils in Latin and classical Greek.

Leavis was nineteen when Britain declared war against Germany during World War I, in 1914. He took part in the war as a stretcher-bearer, working with the Friends' Ambulance unit. But the experience of the war had a lasting effect on Leavis as he later suffered from insomnia and intermittent nightmares. Leavis was slow to recover from the war. He had then won a scholarship from the Perse School and in 1919 he began to study history. In his second year, he changed to English and became a pupil at the newly-founded English School at Cambridge. But despite a first-class Honours in History, Leavis was never considered a strong candidate for a research fellowship. In 1924, however, Leavis presented a thesis on 'The Relationship of Journalism to Literature on the Rise and Development of the Press in England'. This work was to contribute a lot to his future development as a thinker as well as a critic. In 1927, Leavis was appointed a probationary lecturer for the university, and his substantial publications left clear marks of influence from the demands of teaching.

In 1929, Leavis married one of his students, Queenie Roth, a union resulting in a productive collaboration. When Leavis published *New Bearings in English Poetry*, his wife published *Fiction and the Reading Public*, and both became instrumental in publication of the quarterly periodical *Scrutiny*. In 1930, Leavis was appointed director of studies in English at Downing College where he taught for the next thirty years.

Stop to Consider:

The Genesis of Scrutiny:

Scrutiny, the Quarterly Review and a literature journal, was founded by F. R. Leavis in 1932. The first issue of May 1932 was limited to only 100 copies. Gradually the circulation grew leading to 750 copies in the later part of 1930s and 1000 copies in the later part of 1940s. During 1950s only 1500 copies were made but most of them were held by colleges and academic libraries for circulation.

Leavis remained its principal editor until the final issue in 1953. During that time, he used it as a vehicle for the new Cambridge criticism, upholding rigorous intellectual standards and attacking the dilettante elitism which he believed, characterized the Bloomsbury Group. *Scrutiny* provided a forum for identifying important contemporary works and for reviewing the traditional canon by comparably serious criteria. This criticism was informed by a teacher's concern to present the essential to students, taking into consideration time constraints and a limited range of experience. So, *Scrutiny* established itself as an organ of entirely non-traditional and even radically deprecatory assessments of established classics which resulted in the replacement of Milton by John Donne.

New Bearings in English Poetry was the first major volume of criticism that Leavis had produced. Leavis had also been associated with the American New Critics, who emphasised 'close reading' and detailed textual analysis of poetry over an interest in the mind and personality of the poet, sources, the history of ideas and political and social implications. Although there are similarities between Leavis's approach to criticism and that of the New Critics, Leavis differs from them in not considering the theory of the work of art as a self-contained and self-sufficient aesthetic and formal artifact isolated from the society, culture and tradition from which it emerged. *New Bearings*, devoted principally to Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot and Pound, was an attempt to identify certain new achievements in modern poetry.

In 1933, Leavis published *For Continuity*, a selection of *Scrutiny* essays. His other book *Culture and the Environment* stressed the importance of the presence of informed and highly-trained intellectual elite whose existence within university English departments could preserve the cultural continuity of English life and literature. In *Education and the University* (1943), Leavis argued that "there is a prior cultural achievement of language; language is not a detachable instrument of thought and communication. It is the historical embodiment of its community's assumptions and aspirations at levels which are so subliminal much of the time that language is their only index".

In 1948, Leavis focused his attention on fiction and made his general statement about the English novel in *The Great Tradition* by stressing an English tradition through Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. Leavis purposely excluded major authors such as Sterne and Hardy, but eventually changed his position on Dickens, and later

published *Dickens the Novelist* in 1970. In 1950, in the introduction to *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, Leavis set out the historical importance of utilitarian thought. 1952 saw the publication of another collection of essays from *Scrutiny* in the form of *The Common Pursuit*. This is one of Leavis's best-known and most influential works. A decade later, Leavis became controversial when he delivered his Richmond lecture, "Two cultures? The significance of C. P. Snow" at Downing College, vigorously attacking Snow's suggestion that practitioners of the scientific and humanistic disciplines should have some significant understanding of each other, and that a lack of knowledge of twentieth-century physics was comparable to an ignorance of Shakespeare. Leavis's attacks on Snow were widely decried in the British press by public figures such as Lord Boothby and Lionel Trilling. Leavis introduced the idea of the 'third realm' as a name for the method of existence of literature.

In 1962, his readership and fellowship at Downing were terminated; however, he took up Visiting Professorships at the University of Bristol, the University of Wales and the University of York. His final volumes of criticism include *Nor Shall My Sword* (1972), *The Living Principle* (1975) and *Thought, Words and Creativity* (1976).

Stop to Consider:

The influence of F.R. Leavis and his wife Q.D. Leavis on the development of English as an academic discipline has been so strong that anyone studying English literature in Britain can be called an unwitting Leavisite. David Macey writes "Together with the 'Practical Criticism' of I A Richards and William Empson's practice of 'Close Reading', the Leavises' recommendation of attention to the text played an immensely important role in turning English into a serious and disciplined mode of study rather than a 'gentlemanly' conversation about books. The network of connections centered on the journal *Scrutiny* extended their influence through schools and colleges and shaped the literary education of more than one generation of students, whilst the insistence from the 1930s to the 1970s on the distinctive discipline of university English is the major single factor that has made English literature the hegemonic discipline within the English education system. In major studies like *Of both Poetry* (1936) and *General Studies of Prose* (1948, 1952), as well as of individual novelists such as *Lawrence* (1955) and *Dickens* (1970), the Leavises helped to shape the modern canon of English Literature. (Macey, p. 225).

In his *Living Principle*, F. R. Leavis said that collaboration is essential as any work of art can exist only in what he calls the “third realm”—the realm of that which is neither public in the ordinary sense or merely private. This collaborative nature of criticism is continually underlined in Leavis’s own practice. Examples can be cited of his collaboration with his wife, Queenie Dorothy Leavis, in *Lectures in America* and *Dickens the Novelist*. Another example of collaboration was with his students at Downing who introduced his methods and principles in schools and universities where they subsequently taught. Moreover, the subsequent emergence of the journal “Scrutiny” provided as well as accommodated wide range of critical comments on diverse topics. (Irena R. Makaryk, p. 401).

Leavis’s preferred method of analysis—displayed to best advantage in his studies of poetry—is a ‘close reading’ of short passages and he was happiest when working in a classroom with an open text before him. Like the theorists of practical criticism, he held that literary analysis should contain nothing that cannot be produced from, or related back to, the text itself. In a discussion of philosophy and criticism he argued that the critic must guard against extrapolating from the text under analysis, and refrain from all premature or irrelevant generalizations. His refusal to theorise or philosophise about what he is doing is based on the conviction that the authority of the mature and experienced critic or reader is based on an immediate sense of values instilled by training in the labour of reading.

Leavis’ importance in the development of literary criticism in England in the mid 20th century can be seen in his unceasing insistence on the priority of practice over theory and the centrality of evaluation within the critical process. In *Revaluation* he argued that the critic should ‘say nothing that cannot be related immediately to judgments about producible texts.’ On the other hand, Leavis also argued that mature literary discussion can manifest itself only within an informed human community.

Although it is difficult to classify Leavis’s criticism, an attempt can be made to group it into four chronological stages. The first is that of his early publications and essays which include *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) and *Revaluation* (1936). Here he was concerned primarily with reexamining poetry from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, and this was accomplished under the strong influence of T.S. Eliot. Also, during this

early period Leavis sketched out his views about university education. Then he turned to fiction and the novel, producing *The Great Tradition* (1948) and *D.H. Lawrence, Novelist* (1955). Following this period Leavis pursued an increasingly complex treatment of myriad literary, educational and social issues.

In two of his last publications were embodied the critical sentiments of his final years including *The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought* (1975), and *Thought, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in Lawrence* (1976). One noticeable point in him is that despite a natural aversion to it in the early part of his career, his criticism became progressively philosophical in nature during the last years of his life.

F.R. Leavis died at the age of eighty-two on the 14th of April 1978 having been made a Companion of Honour in the New Year. His wife Q.D. Leavis died in 1981.

SAQ:

How will you understand Leavis' 'third realm'? Does it qualify to be a legitimate critical concept? Give your reasons. (80 words)

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3.3 READING THE TEXT: "THE LINE OF WIT"

In the preface to his seminal book on English Poetry, *Revaluations* (1936) F.R. Leavis defines the task and duty of the critic to be the perceiver of himself so that he/she can make the finest and sharpest discriminations possible and state his/her findings as responsibly, clearly and forcibly as he/she can. In 1932, Q.D. Leavis criticizes Charlotte Brontë for her indulgence in undisciplined emotion that makes her a 'schoolgirl of genius' and very unfavourably compares her genius with the 'well-regulated minds' of Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, while F. R. Leavis (1936) complains that Milton's habit of writing Latin verse forces him to exhibit in *Samson Agonistes* a loss of 'all feelings for his native English'. Seen in the context of such discussions, we can comprehend the significance of this essay.

“The Line of Wit” from *Revaluations* (1936) is an attempt to define the main line of the English poetic tradition. This essay is also a celebration of T. S. Eliot’s work on the Metaphysical poets, as Leavis says: “Mr. Eliot’s achievement is a matter for academic evaluation, his poetry is accepted, and his early observations on the Metaphysicals and on Marvell provide currency for university lectures and undergraduate exercise.” Moreover, the appearance of the *Oxford Book of Seventeenth-Century Verse* also offered scope for surveying and reconsidering the poetry of the great Metaphysicals like Donne whose ‘extraordinary force of originality’ made him ‘so potent an influence in the seventeenth century’. Leavis then states that poems like “The Good Morrow” with its most appealing beginning: “I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I/Did, till we lov’d?” enable Donne to show his originality by deviating from the old ‘musical’ tradition of poetry and by using “in complete dissociation from music a stanza-form that proclaims the union of poetry and music”. This dissociation is positive; and the utterance, movement and intonation are those of the controlling and ‘talking’ voice. Moreover, Donne’s verse which had turned acutely dramatic presents a technique, a spirit in which the sinew and living nerve of English are used—“suggests an appropriate development of impressions that his ear might have recorded in the theatre”. This also refers to Donne’s characteristics like presentation of situations, the liveliness of enactments which are aptly justified by the inclusion of his poem “Satyre (iii)” in the *Oxford Book*.

Stop to Consider:

“Leavis’ *Revaluations* is an attempt at rewriting the history of English poetry in the light of Eliot’s observation that ‘Donne, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert and Lord Herbert, Marvell, King, and Cowley at best are in the direct current of English poetry, and that their faults should be reprimanded by this standard rather than coddled by antiquarian affection’ (‘The Metaphysical Poets’). Like its counterpart, Leavis’ *The Great Tradition*, which attempts to rewrite the history of fiction, *Revaluation* reflects, as much in its inclusions as in its omissions, the critical preferences and prejudices of F.R. Leavis. Leavis is nothing if not normative in his approach and he is not ashamed of his literary judgments which are always based on a deep commitment to life.” (Ramaswami S. & V.S. Sethuraman, p. 693)

Such a perception throws light on the contemporary critical preoccupations which had the potentiality to influence the type of critical discourse that was to follow. We have to understand from these preoccupations that Leavis was also defining the English poetic tradition from his point of view. Again as we realize such a 'tradition' can be traced through adherence to certain critical principles.

Leavis discusses how the characteristics of Donne's poetry—presentations of situations, liveliness of enactment can be called dramatic. For example, one of Donne's poems in the *Oxford Book* namely "Satyre (iii)" reminds the readers of dramatic blank verses. The elements of play with sense movements across rhymes, the control in tone and stresses found in this poem, provide affinities with Shakespeare. Yet Donne was writing something very original and quite different from blank verse. According to Leavis, "Enough illustration (out of an embarrassment of choice) has been given to bring home how dramatic Donne's use of his medium can be, how subtly, in a consummately managed verse he can exploit the strength of spoken English." Leavis was perhaps trying to hint at the 'colloquial' elements in Donne's verse which made his poetry so memorable.

Referring to the influence of Donne on the Cavalier poets like Thomas Carew, Leavis says that Carew "exemplifies Donne's part in a mode or tradition (or whatever other term may fitly describe that which makes the Court poets a community)... To say this is not to stress any remarkable originality in his talent; his strength is representative, and he has individual force enough to be representative with unusual vitality." This can be best seen in his poem "Know, Celia" where he represents a court culture—an element of the tradition of chivalry which meaningfully showed the contemporary life and manners. Leavis then acclaims Prof. Grierson's *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* where he is seen to have shown Carew's indebtedness to Donne. But Carew's achievements also lead us back to influences other than that of Donne's. For example, Ben Jonson, whose 'classical' endeavours remind us that there are 'ways of being classical'. But the idiomatic quality of the Caroline poetry, its relation to the spoken language makes another significant point about Jonson's influence on his successors. Jonson's effort was to cultivate an English mode that could express a sense of contemporaneity with the

classical masters like Horace and Juvenal. This mode, as seen through a large number of his poems, can be described as ‘consciously urbane, mature and civilized.’ The assertive force of Jonson’s genius, his native robustness, his interest in man and manners and his views on literature and poetic art, could clearly be seen in his poems included in the *Oxford Book*. Leavis argues: “Ben Jonson’s powerful genius to initiate the tradition, the common heritage, into which a line of later poets could enter and by which a very great Augustan poet was to profit long after civilization and literary fashions had been transformed.” One may use the term ‘wit’ to emphasise the remoteness of Johnson’s art from the nineteenth century notion of the ‘lyrical’.

Stop to Consider:

Wit

This term has acquired a number of connotations since the Middle Ages. Formerly, wit used to mean ‘sense’ or ‘the five senses’: thus ‘common sense’. During the Renaissance, however, it came to mean ‘intelligence’ or ‘wisdom’; thus intellectual capacity. During the neo-classical age, wit Dryden, Cowley and Pope held wit as primarily a matter of propriety. As Pope in his famous *Essay on Criticism*: “True wit is Nature to advantage dressed.” William Hazlitt later distinguished between wit and imagination: wit being artificial and imagination being valid for him. During the 19th century when the term imagination was used to designate the ability to invent, wit was associated with levity. Matthew Arnold dismissed Chaucer and Pope from his list of great poets because of their wittiness, and ‘lack of high seriousness’. Eliot, however hailed metaphysical poets like Donne and Marvell for their peculiar ability to combine wit with seriousness.

Cavalier Poets

It refers to the group of English lyric poets during the reign of Charles I (1625-49). This group includes Lovelace, Sir John Suckling, Herrick, Carew and Waller. These poets virtually abandoned the sonnet form which had been the most chosen and favoured contemporary medium for love poems. Their lyrical poems are usually light, witty, elegant, and for most part, concerned with love.

The ‘line of wit’ then runs with Ben Jonson and Donne, through Carew and Marvell to Pope. Leavis argues that Pope has certain qualities that relate him to Marvell: “The affinity with the mode of Marvell’s *Dialogue* should be fairly obvious. The weight behind that concluding passage of the *Dunciad*

is greater than Marvell could supply and the urbanity has a different inflection, but the relation between wit and solemnity is essentially that of the *Dialogue*.” But Leavis points out that such a line should also include Cowley who seems to be another significant figure and more representative than Marvell. Because, in a poem like “Of Wit”, one of his ‘Metaphysical’ extravagances, Cowley “discusses and expounds wit in a manner and spirit quite out of resonance with the Metaphysical mode—quite alien and uncongenial to it; with a reasonableness that has little to do with the ‘tough reasonableness’ underlying Marvell’s lyric grace... It is a spirit of good sense, of common sense; appealing to criteria that the coming age will refine into ‘Reason, Truth and Nature’.”

Then he goes on to analyze the relative significance of the neo-classical poets like Dryden and Pope. Leavis states that Dryden’s genius and his strength of native English led Hopkins to praise him as ‘the most masculine of our poets, in his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of our own literature...’ But when compared to Pope, Dryden proves to be inferior. Pope’s greater strictness of versification means greater autonomy manifesting greater fineness and profundity of organization suggesting a much greater intensity of art. But such a comparison is erroneous. Because Dryden’s effects are all for the public ear and his pamphleteering verse as well as the blank verse in a poem like “All for Love” could be appreciated on a first hearing. So, Dryden’s verses were effective for satiric purposes and could be read in the appropriate spirit. This is what is perhaps missing in Pope. So, the greatness of Dryden can be compared to that of Ben Jonson. The community to which Jonson belonged as a poet was predominantly ideal but the community to which Dryden belonged was that in which he actually lived and moved. His complete involvement with the Augustan life could make one call him a great representative poet rather than a great poet. But Leavis says that he may be a greater poet than Marvell, but he did not write any poetry as indubitably great as Marvell’s best. Instead, Pope was a complete Augustan and explored through his poetry the strength of his own civilization and achieved a kind of strength so closely related to Marvell’s. In this context, Leavis’ reference to Eliot’s idea of ‘dissociation of sensibility’ bears tremendous significance as he puts the phrase into currency and ascribes the kind of dissociation largely to the influence of Dryden and Pope. This directly brings us back to the discussion of the changes that

took place over English civilisation in the seventeenth century leading to the appearance of modern English prose during the early part of the Restoration. Other influential factors leading to the ‘changes’ included—economic and socio-political history, the emergence of the Royal Society and various intellectual and cultural developments. But, the decay of the Courtly culture due to ‘disruptions’, ‘exile’ and ‘travels’ can be best identified in the lyrical tradition of the Restoration. As for the tradition of wit and grace in lyric is concerned, it died into modes, into conventions of sentiments and expressions of a new age. But the impression of the period was incomparably rich with the contributions of Donne, Ben Jonson, Herbert, Milton, Marvell and Dryden. Each poet was practicing an art having important social functions. The essay finally comes to an end with references to Carew, Cowley and Herrick. Leavis once again says that ‘the line of wit’, then, runs from Ben Jonson (and Donne) through Carew and Marvell to Pope’. Carew’s “The Inscription on the Tombe of the Lady Mary Wentworth” neatly justifies this line. His wit is in the pure Augustan mode. On the other hand, the wit in Cowley’s “Of Wit” exhibits a curious instability. While Herrick’s poem “The Funeral Rites of the Rose” when compared to Marvell’s “And Sleeps so too” can be discussed by the underlying urbane wit.

SAQ:

‘Line’ refers to a convention of practice, and ‘wit’ to a skilled use of the English language—would you agree with these explanations of Leavis’ conception? Would you agree with the idea that ‘line of wit’ is here a reference to a nationalistic construction? (10+90 words)

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3.4 KEY CONCEPTS

3.4.1 Moral Seriousness:

‘Seriousness’ or ‘Moral Seriousness’ is the hallmark of Leavisite criticism, and an apprenticeship in the ‘labour of reading’ is viewed as a defense against the mass culture born out of heavy industrialization (here we can

remember Arnold). As David Macey observes—although such criticism is quite open about its attachment to a high culture, it also made the study of popular culture an institutionalized practice which had a direct impact on the early developments in cultural studies. Leavis, in his writing, was one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century English literary criticism. He introduced a ‘seriousness’ into English studies and the modern university subject has been shaped very much by Leavis’s example. Leavis possessed a very clear idea of literary criticism and he was well-known for his decisive and often provocative judgements. Leavis insisted that evaluation was the principal concern of criticism, and that it must ensure that English literature should be a living reality operating as an informing spirit in society, and that criticism should involve the shaping of contemporary sensibility.

3.4.2 *English Culture:*

Nostalgia for an ‘organic’ or ‘common culture’ that has been lost because of industrialization is an important strand in the works of the Leavis’s and all those they have influenced later. The preservation of tradition goes hand in hand with the celebration of the life-force that once sustained the sturdy communities of sixteenth century, and which survives in the capacity of experience, the reverent openness towards life and the moral seriousness that typify the great novelists.

3.4.3 *Tradition:*

Leavis’s idea of tradition depends on his views of literature. He further opined that the educated public must maintain a kind of cultural continuity. Because a living culture draws upon the best from the past, adapting it to new situations and needs and the educated public can uphold standards that have been established in the past. According to Leavis, in his own time English culture had entered a period of crisis, as exemplified by the titles of certain books like *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930s) Traditional standards and their continuity were threatened and ‘new bearings’ were desperately needed.

3.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The attention paid by other critics to Leavis was never free from controversies. Although his ideas superficially resembled those of the New Critics of the United States, he was never an anti-historicist. Because Leavis firmly believed that literature and life are closely connected and that a work of art cannot be separated from the culture that produced it.

It can be argued that Leavis's achievements as a critic of poetry have always been so impressive. But Leavis is widely accepted to have been a better critic of fiction and the novel than of poetry. Much of this is due to the fact that a large portion of what he had to say about poetry had already been said by his contemporaries. For example, in *New Bearings in English Poetry* Leavis attacked the Victorian poetical ideal, suggesting that nineteenth-century poetry rejected the 'poetical' and instead showed a separation of thought and feeling and a divorce from the real world. The influence of T.S. Eliot is easily identifiable in his criticism of Victorian poetry. Moreover, Leavis acknowledged in *The Common Pursuit* that, 'It was Mr. Eliot who made us fully conscious of the weakness of that tradition'. In his later publication *Revaluation*, the dependence on Eliot was still very much present, but Leavis demonstrated an individual critical sense operating in such a way as to place him among the distinguished modern critics.

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss Leavis' concern with English poetic traditions as part of his concerns with the state of English culture.
2. Elaborate how Leavis accords Donne a special poetic significance in terms of how the poet helped to re-define a poetic tradition.
3. Explain how or why Leavis sees the 'line of wit' running through specific poets whom he names

3.6 SUMMING UP

So we can see from the above discussion that Leavis' criticism falls into two phases. In the first place, influenced by T.S. Eliot, he devoted his attention to English verse. In *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), he attacked Victorian poetry and proclaimed the importance of the work of T.S. Eliot,

Ezra Pound, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, emphasizing wit and the play of intellect rather than late-Romantic sensuousness. In *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936), on the other hand, he extended his survey of English poetry back to the 17th century. In the 1940s, his interest moved toward the novel. In *The Great Tradition* (1948) he reassessed English fiction, proclaiming Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad as the great novelists of the past and D.H. Lawrence as their only successor. He stressed the importance these novelists placed on “a reverent openness before life.” After 1955, other novelists, notably Dickens and Tolstoy, engaged his attention in *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (1967) and *Dickens the Novelist* (1970), written with his wife. His range is perhaps best shown in the collection *The Common Pursuit* (1952).

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Unit 4

T S Eliot: “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

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- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introducing the Critic
- 4.3 Reading the Text: “Tradition and the Individual Talent”
- 4.4 Key Concepts
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- 4.6 Summing up
- 4.7 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will find a discussion on T. S. Eliot and his seminal essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” At the end of this unit you will be able to

- *grasp* the main ideas behind the essay
- *make* a clear perception of the concepts Eliot has brought forth
- *understand* for yourself the strength of Eliot as a critic

4.2 INTRODUCING THE CRITIC

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, USA in 1888. From 1898 to 1905, he attended Smith Academy which was a preparatory school. In 1906, he entered Harvard University and subsequently received his Masters degree in 1910.

Eliot moved to England and became a British citizen before World War I. The publication of *The Sacred Wood* (1920) and “The Waste Land” (1922) soon earned him recognition and critical acclaim. Whereas “The Waste Land” established him as a poet in the English- speaking world, some of the

essays included in *The Sacred Wood* conveyed a new and distinctive critical attitude whose impact on contemporary as well as subsequent strains of critical thought was unmistakable.

At Harvard, Eliot became keenly interested in philosophy and comparative literature. Important influences on Eliot during this time include the philosopher, poet, humanist George Santayana, from whom Eliot took a course on modern philosophy and Irving Babbitt, a relentless anti-Romantic, with whom Eliot studied 19th century French literary criticism. Another influence on his early works was the theory of the dynamic flux and movement of consciousness propounded by Henri Bergson, the French philosopher. However, the crucial experience of Eliot's Harvard years which to a great extent influenced his poetry and criticism was his reading of Arthur Symonds' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which introduced French symbolist poetry to English and American readers. Between 1909 and 1911, Eliot worked on two of his best poems, "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J Alfred Pruffrock", drawing on the style and irony and symbolism he had encountered in the 19th century French poets specially Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud and Jules Laforgue whom Symonds quoted and discussed.

After studying a year at the Sorbonne in Paris, Eliot returned to Harvard to pursue graduate work and serve as a teaching assistant. For his dissertation topic, he focused on the writings of the British idealist philosopher F. H. Bradley who wrote *Appearance and Reality*. (1893). His research led him to the University of Marburg in Germany in 1914. But as the threat of world war loomed large, he relocated to Merton College, Oxford, and went on to settle in England permanently.

Eliot went through a nervous break down and to recuperate he first went to South East England and then to a sanatorium in Switzerland, where he worked on the draft of a long poem he had started years earlier. In Paris, on his way back to London, he showed the draft to Ezra Pound, who turned it from what Eliot called, "a jumble of good and bad passages" into the poem "The Waste Land" (1922).

Some of Eliot's Critical Writings: A Brief Overview

“The Metaphysical Poets” (1921)

In this essay, Eliot asserts the value and significance of the 17th century metaphysical poets. He notices a striking similarity between the poetic sensibility of the 17th century poets and the modernist ethos, while Tennyson and Browning are relegated to the background. The Victorian poets are said to be lacking in a “unified sensibility.” Such an observation on the relative importance of poets situated at different points along the historical time-line is not to be thought as a separate escalation or a passing thought. The essay can be read as exemplifying Eliot's concept of tradition. It is not an endorsement of the metaphysical poets, because such an endorsement in subsequent times worked in the activation of the canon of English literature.

“Hamlet and His problems” (1919)

This essay declares Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to be an artistic failure. What is important for us, however, is not the statement itself, but the way in which Eliot locates the artistic problems of the play hinting at its lack of ‘objective correlative’ to emotions. This doctrine of ‘objective correlative’ is in line with the concept of poetic impersonality.

In his later criticism there is a shift in his critical position. Whereas in “Hamlet and His Problems” he seeks to state a theory of correspondence between the ‘internal’ emotional states of mind and ‘external’ events and situations, essays like “Rudyard Kipling” (included in *On Poetry and Poets* (1957) explores the problem of such a ‘formula’ of emotions. When a state of mind has its unique verbal representation, identification of that ‘signified’ world causes the effacement of sign. The verbal icon is not important once it points at the signified. Language must strive not to remain as a mere vehicle, but to arrive at finality.

The later critical essays of Eliot express a more personal note in critical assessments. It is evident in essays like “What Dante Means to Me”, “The frontiers of criticism”, “The Three Voices of Poetry”, as well as in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1993). Eliot dwells on the problems of poetic drama in “The Three Voices of Poetry” (1953) and “Poetry and Drama” (1951).

As the editor of the quarterly *The Criterion* till 1939, he published leading English modernists (including Virginia Woolf and James Joyce) and was the first to publish in English significant European writers such as Marcel Proust, and Jean Cocteau. This was also the time when he started to work on his

play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935); later he enjoyed considerable success with his drama of the 1950s. (including *The Cocktail Party*).

4.3 READING THE TEXT: “TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT”

“Tradition and The Individual Talent” (1919) begins: “In English writing we seldom speak of tradition.” The poise and authority of Eliot’s critical voice backed by his masterful performances as a poet soon made “tradition” a key topic for poets, critics, intellectuals, and teachers of literature in the academy. Two of the canonical texts of modern Anglo-American Literary criticism, F. R. Leavis’ *Revaluations: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and Cleanth Brooks’ *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), were expansions of Eliot’s ideas about tradition.

As for the structure of the essay, it is divided into two segments— the first dealing with ‘tradition’, and the second, the impersonal nature of poetry. The title itself indicated this basic thematic division. Both segments are related in that while the first gives us a broad view of how a writer surrenders before an impersonal process which is tradition, the second part gives a close view of how the personality of the poet is negated in the act of poetic creation. Hence it is impersonality that characterizes both poetry and tradition.

SAQ:

How well, do you think, does Eliot contest the Wordsworthian conception of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”? Is there an accompanying shift in the idea of language here? (50 + 50 words)

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Let us now concentrate on the first section, the conventional notion of tradition. ‘Traditional’ has a pejorative sense, often used disapprovingly. Besides, Eliot says, it also evokes a sense of antiquity, the opposite of

contemporaneity. Eliot also hints at the lack of critical awareness in English culture with a mild satire. He asserts the inevitability of critical attitude and knowledge, “criticism is as inevitable as breathing”.

Popular understanding of the merit of a poet is that his value consists in the way he differs from his predecessors, and thus expresses his individual talent, ‘what is praiseworthy is unique to a poet, and what is unique is isolable from tradition. Reacting against such a prejudice Eliot holds that “the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.” (*English Critical Tradition*, 169)

Such a proposition might seem paradoxical—that the uniqueness of an individual poet can be assessed from the extent to which he resembles writers of the past. It implies conscious effort on the part of the poet not to assert his distinctiveness, but to acquire knowledge of tradition. Tradition is not blind adherence to the past nor does it imply unconscious handing down of knowledge across generations. Eliot deems the individual an active agent who does not acquire tradition in a passive way, but acquires it with great labour.

Tradition implies a ‘historical sense’. It not merely includes contemporaneity, but a greater awareness of works written in Europe from Homer onwards, as well as the knowledge of English literature. (Eliot defines tradition in an English and European context). What Eliot repudiates is mere obsession with contemporary times. Knowledge of both past and present is equally important. A poet’s exposure to both realms of literary knowledge would enable him to distinguish the temporal as well as the permanent elements of a historical continuum. He must be able to perceive historically shifting sensibilities, the temporal elements of literary culture which are specific to a particular period, as well as those traits which recur across the historical periods. This is how the individual writer can actively participate in tradition through laborious acquisition of an acute historical sense. However, this is not all about tradition.

How can we, then assess the significance and value of an individual writer’s work? Eliot describes the phenomenon of valuation within a much broader historical framework. A writer’s significance and value cannot be assessed ontologically, but in his relation to the preceding poets and writers. Eliot’s

assertion here goes beyond the insular evaluation characteristic of New Criticism.

Eliot says that prior to the existence of a new work, works that have been written so far form an ideal order. This 'ideal order' is complete at every moment. The advent of a new work affects this order because value attached to the works (by dint of their being part of an order) is slightly re-adjusted. In this way, tradition requires the continuous valuation of works belonging to both past and present.

The implication is that a poet should be judged by the standards of the past. However, Eliot says that such a comparative view does not imply hierarchy or gradation of works. In other words it does not amount to saying that the past is greater than a contemporary work or the vice versa. But Eliot complicates the concept stating that conforming to past criteria and the lack of novelty would disqualify a work as a work of art.

SAQ:

Does Eliot give a clear idea as to how an 'individual talent' or an original writer can be evaluated? Will a comparison with the past or dead poets make our assessment 'unfair'? (60 + 40 words)

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Eliot mentions that a poet must familiarize himself with the main current of the past. But how does the author define 'main current'? Eliot also talks about the 'mind' of Europe; which is more important than the private mind of the poet. This 'mind' can denote a sensibility specific to a particular historical period. This 'mind' is not static but follows a course of complicated development, which is not improvement but 'change'. Hence, the 'conscience present' should not be conscious about 'present' above but show an awareness of the shifting sensibilities throughout the past.

An awareness of the past, thus, ideally necessitates an extraordinary scholarship. Let us not forget that Eliot formulates tradition in relation to not a scholar who could meticulously investigate a literary tradition, but a poet.

Tradition is important for a poet, because a heightened perception of tradition would illuminate his creative enterprise. The knowledge of tradition must be internalized, and is not for any public exhibition. Finally, a sense of the past or tradition does not come invariably to all writers, and is a matter of individual perception. Finally Eliot urges the poet to surrender himself before an impersonal tradition. (*The English Critical Tradition*, Vol. II.)

The second part of the essay dwells on the process of poetic creation. Let us clarify here that Eliot's theory is normative and not descriptive. Central to this theory of poetic creation is the negation of the poet's personality. But this negation of personality is not a basic trait of all poetry; it is, in contrast, a principle that differentiates mature poetry from immature ones.

Eliot suggests an analogy of chemical reaction to refer to his idea of impersonality. Eliot says the analogy is that of a catalyst. When two gases are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulfuric acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present. But the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected: remains inert, neutral and unchanged. The mind of the poet is like the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates." It suggests a split in the poetic self: "the man who suffers" and "the mind which creates". The creative process is not about how one experiences feelings and emotions, but how the feelings and emotions form a new whole unaffected by the whims of the mind.

Distinction is made between poetic experience and experience in real life. To the poet, experience serves as a mere material which undergoes a process of transformation in the act of creation. Hence, the experience of reading a poem is different from the other experiences of a reader. The poetic mind is a receptacle of images, feelings and it accommodates new combinations. This accounts for the complexity of poetic images.

Of course, Eliot asserts that poetry does not express new emotions. Ordinary emotions find their way in a poem in new combinations. Emotions cannot exist in a realm separate from the subject. When the poetic process combined them into a new emotional complex, what happened is the effacement of the subject, and hence poetic emotions assume impersonality.

SAQ:

What kind of emotion should we then expect in good poetry: new, familiar or synthetic ones? Is Eliot stating here that poetry is only artifice, and not related to familiar realities? (50 + 60 words)

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Stop to Consider:

“For Eliot, each poem exists within the tradition from which it takes shape and which it, in turn, redefines. Thus tradition is both something to which the poet must be ‘faithful’ and something that he or she actively makes: novelty emerges out of being steeped in tradition. Eliot was later criticized by later critics such as Harold Bloom as a ‘weak’ poet-critic because of the priority that he assigned to tradition. Eliot maintains: ‘What happens when a work of art is created, is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it.’ Eliot has also been criticised for picturing tradition as variously a ‘simultaneous order’, ‘a living whole’, ‘an ideal order’ and the ‘mind of Europe’, thereby idealizing its conflicts, contradictions and commissions.” (*“Norton Anthology”*)

Although “Tradition and the Individual Talent” is a remarkable essay, F.R. Leavis says, “The trenchancy and the vigour are illusory, logical inconsequence, pseudo-precisions, fallaciousness, ...the aplomb of its equivocal actions and specious cogency, the falsity and gratuitousness of its impersonality doctrine ... without the distinguished individual, distinguished by reason of his potency as a conduit of argente life and by the profound and sensitive responsibility he gives proof of towards living experience, there is no art that matters.” Although ideas expressed in the essay are often critiqued in subsequent time, they are by themselves no less complex and obscure. Therefore, while reading the text, I would suggest you all that you should not hastily summarize the concepts but try to come to terms with the complexities involved through an understanding of the concepts.

4.4 KEY CONCEPTS

4.4.1 TRADITION

Literary tradition is not unconscious handing down of literary knowledge. On the contrary, the poet must acquire it through great labour.

Central to Eliot's idea of tradition is the notion of 'historical sense'. A poet leaves behind him a past history of literary culture. Historical sense is not merely knowledge of literary history; it brings in the two contexts- past and present. The past is not a series of works ordered in a fixed chronology to which present works are constantly making attractions because it is seen from perpetually shifting viewpoints of the present. In this way, tradition implies a dynamic process in which a writer of the present is deeply implicated.

The poet must be aware of the fact that many have gone before him, and are therefore dead. In contrast, the poet and the present are two distinct orders and both exist simultaneously. Hence, certain elements of the past enter into the realm of the present, whereas some other elements exist as specificities of a particular historical culture. Therefore, literary tradition suggests continuities and discontinuities, the temporal and the timeless elements of a historical continuum.

Tradition is not mere growing accumulation of knowledge neither does it indicate an assemblage of works written down the ages.

It sets an ideal order where every work of art occupies a distinctive position, with a certain value attached to it. When a new work comes into existence, this ideal order is disturbed and a new order is created. In this way, tradition implies a perpetual re-adjustment of works belonging to past and present.

Stop to Consider:

The philosophical origin of Eliot's concept of tradition can be traced to F.H. Bradley. Eliot wrote his doctoral thesis on the philosophy of Bradley ("Experience and object of knowledge in the philosophy of F.H. Bradley") where it is stated that immediate experience is incomplete and partial so a comprehensive understanding of experience must bring other points of view, an other mind's thought, because of the limitedness of 'lived' truth. It was from Bradley that Eliot derived his knowledge of pattern, unity and order: to get beyond immediate sensory experiences, they must be organized in a coherent whole.

We must also remember that the need for order as manifested in this essay is also of the modernist ethos. The modernists tried to find stability and coherence in a chaotic, disintegrated culture stricken by war.

Eliot's main statements can be understood against the critical heritage that he is actually questioning. For him tradition is an ideal arrangement of literary works which needs readjusting as a new work of art is admitted. We can see that tradition includes some qualities shared over time. That is why it is an 'ideal' order. But when we come to judging a work of art, it is difficult to grasp Eliot's ideas. No work can be judged alone because we also refer to a tradition which plays a role in deciding the work's significance. Eliot is clear that no poet can work without this awareness of past. He clearly asserts that only a historical sense can enrich the value of the individual talent. In other words, when we understand that a literary work of art is not an outpouring of the poet's personality but that poetry is born of an escape from personality, the 'tradition' and originality become the sites of meaning.

It may seem to the passive or complacent reader that Eliot is often unclear or even inconsistent. The inconsistency may relate to not understanding his insistence on 'tradition'. What we should be clear about is the fact that Eliot is not concerned with 'tradition' of the neo-classicists. He is referring to a traceable pattern, traceable through history and milieu.

In this sense, Eliot is being ahistorical because historical context cannot be ignored in literary evaluation. But he does not see a work of art in strict isolation from its artistic-historical context. That is perhaps his seminal insight.

We can go even further to say that by the time of Eliot's essay England and Europe had broken with many traditions in violent ways and that the recovery of such patterns was to be involved in hard labour. Seen as a transcendental order, tradition could be grasped only through detachment from one's history.

4.4.2 IMPERSONALITY OF POETRY

If we look at the Romantic theory of poetry, it did not make a distinction between a poem and the experience that gave rise to it. Poetry is the unmediated expression of private feeling and emotion of the poet. In Romanticism, confession was a dominant model of literary expression, in

which the author reveals the ‘truth’ of his mind. The Romantic concept of poetry is characterized by overwhelming insistence on sincerity of thought and feeling, where language is not a detractor of a poet’s felt truth, but a vehicle of its expression.

Eliot makes a distinction within the poet the man who experiences emotion and feeling, and the creator who works upon the felt experiences: “the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates” (*The English Critical Tradition*, 172). To Eliot, the role of the mind is the role of a catalyst in a chemical reaction. Mind is not more than a space for poetic composition but remains unaffected by the process. You can explore how far Eliot describes the role of the mind in the creative process. Mind facilitates the process but is itself detached from the process where “impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways” (*The English Critical Tradition*, 174). It can lead to the absurd notion that a poem writes itself, and the poetic process is beyond the reach of the poet.

What is however, unambiguously clear is that a poem is not a record to the poet’s private experiences. Whereas the Romantics found in the poetic emotion the presence of an actual ‘feeler’, the poet himself, according to Eliot, assumes a certain impersonality, sharply different from the actual experience of the poet.

Stop to Consider:

a. Mind as Medium:

Eliot values a poet in terms of his ability to efface himself and get transformed into a medium. For a contrast, we can look at Coleridge’s theory of imagination, where mind is much more than just a medium, because it “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate”.

b. Poetic Emotion and Personal Emotion:

Non-involvement of the poetic mind is manifested in the nature of the resultant poetic emotion, which cannot be identified with the actual emotion of the poet. ‘Impersonality of poetry’ describes the nature of poetic emotion, rather than the process. Poetic emotion has an impersonal, objective existence which a reader can feel from his reading of the poem. There is also a process: the creative process itself between poetic emotion and personal emotion.

There is ambiguity in Eliot's statements about emotion. While discussing the issue of emotion after quoting a passage from Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Eliot mentions how the "floating feeling" has combined to give us a new art emotion. In the paragraph that follows it, Eliot contradicts this position "The business of the poet is not to find new emotion" (175).

Of course, the implication may be that poets do not have any new emotion at hand, and that the range of emotions he is exposed to does not radically differ from ordinary human emotion. But this ordinary human emotion does not find itself in poetry in its original form because-

(i) The poetic mind combines impressions and experiences to form a complex whole.

In *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, Wimsatt and Brooks observe that in the metaphysical poets incongruous elements are compelled into unity because "He (Eliot) accepted the incongruity of the elements as inevitable; the perennial problem of the poet was to unite what resists unification; the skilful poet was the poet who could turn to positive account the very resistances set up by his materials."

(ii) In poetic text manifestation of such combinative power of mind is seen in linguistic terms. In his discussion of Tourneur's passage from *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Eliot talks about balance of contrasted emotion, and about "structural emotion". Perhaps, Eliot also suggests the operation of language in the creative process itself.

Although Eliot is self-consciously anti-romantic here, we must also see continuity with the Romantics. At one point in the essay, Eliot says "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality." There is an interesting convergence between the concept of impersonality and Keats' idea of a poet. Keats says "the poetic character ... is not itself— it has no self— it is everything and nothing— it has no character... a poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because it has no identity- he is continually in for ... and filling some other body".

Inn such discussions perhaps we can discern the later critical thinking which would focus more sharply on the creative mind as conscious or less-than-conscious. We would also infer a latent romanticism in Eliot's propositions where he seems to be implying a special kind of mind and personality of the poet.

4.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

In 1928, Eliot stirred up the English intellectual world with strong responses by stating that he was a royalist in politics, Anglo-Catholic in religion and a classicist in literature. Paul De Man mentions in “The Resistance Theory” that Eliot was a perfect embodiment of New Criticism by dint of his “original talent, traditional learning, verbal wit and moral earnestness” (*Modern Literary Theory*, 275). Eliot’s critical thoughts and insights prepared the ground for the flourishing of New Criticism in the 1940s and the 1950s. Besides, it was Eliot who helped to establish English as an academic discipline and remodelled the canon of English literature. If we go back to Matthew Arnold, he sees poetry not merely as a form, but as an expression of culture. In an age of religious doubt and skepticism, when development of science and technology dismantled much of people’s shared beliefs and stable ideas, religion failed to serve as the unifying force that could sustain human civilization. Hence, Arnold pleads for the cause of culture and poetry to take the place of religion. However, Arnold’s insistence on poetic culture could not establish literature as a course in school and universities. Besides, his definition of culture was vague, in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), as he defined culture as ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world’. Eliot strives for a practical resolution of this problem not merely with a definition of tradition but also explaining an English poetic tradition. In the essay *To Criticize the Critic*, Eliot builds up and upholds a distinctive tradition of English poetry that includes the Metaphysical poets. Again, he also demonstrates the ‘best’ by explaining an objective criterion to judge the worth of poetry, in his theory of ‘impersonality’.

Eliot formulated the nature and function of literary criticism; the New Critics (such as John Crowe Ransom and Brooks) invoked his practice as a model. He described criticism as “the disinterested exercise of intelligence...the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste...the common pursuit of true judgment”, and the New Critics followed this injunction to centre arguments in analysis of specific passages and poems. “Comparison and

analysis”, Eliot said, “are the chief tools of the critic”, enabling a precise perception of literary effects, relationships and values.

By the 1950s, Eliot was lamenting the rise of copiously detailed interpretation of texts—which he called “lemon squeezing”—but perhaps more than anyone else he had launched a new movement. In later section of “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, Eliot states “honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry”. In such sentences, we can see the origins of New Criticism with its concern for the words on the page. For many critics in the 1970s and after Eliot—Anglican, conservative, New Critical, formalist—has been the arch enemy. Bloom, for example, derided Eliot’s poetry and criticism and sought to revitalize the Romantic tradition that Eliot had shunned. Many others, arguing for the inclusion of women and minority writers within the literary canon, have attacked his judgments about literary and cultural tradition. Eliot’s and the New Critics’ “tradition”, they maintain, is narrow and elitist, enshrining a limited range of authors and presenting to students a partial, misleading literary history.

4.6 SUMMING UP

The discussion on T. S. Eliot and his seminal essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” in this unit has helped you to grasp the main ideas behind the essay. Explaining an English poetic tradition, Eliot’s essays deals with the unique, harmonious relation between the impersonal process of tradition and individual talent and here you must have gained a clear perception of the concepts Eliot has brought forth. As explored in this unit, the concepts-tradition and impersonality of poetry are central to Eliot’s conceptualization of poetic tradition. Seen in the context of Eliot’s formulation of the nature and function of literary criticism, you must have understood for yourself the strength of Eliot as a critic as well as his influence in modern literary criticism.

4.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._S._Eliot

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Unit 5

Russian Formalism

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5.1 OBJECTIVES

Originating in the work of OPOYAZ and the Moscow Linguistic Circle, Russian Formalism is one of the most influential critical movements of the 20th century. This unit is designed to familiarize you with the major figures as well as the concepts central to Russian Formalism. By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- *understand* Russian Formalism in the context of the changing critical scenario in Russia
- *identify* the major figures of the movement as well as assess their contribution
- *explore* the concepts expounded by the contributors to the movement
- *assess* the contribution of the formalists to subsequent critical/theoretical development

5.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The second decade of the twentieth century saw the emergence of two groups of literary thinkers and linguists: “Moscow Linguistic Circle” and the OPOYAZ often known as the “Society for the Study of Poetic Language”. The former group was formed in the capital city of Russia in 1915. It was founded by the eminent linguist and scholar Roman Jakobson. The other members of the group were Grigory Vinokur, Peter Bogatynev, Osip Brik and Boris Tomashevsky. OPOYAZ was formed in St. Petersburg in 1916. Victor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynjanov, Boris Eikhenbaum and Victor Vinogradov belonged to this group. We must remember that the term ‘formalist’ was initially applied pejoratively to the literary scholars and critics associated with these two literary circles of Russia. These Russian critics, if separated into two different groups, were nevertheless associated in much of their intellectual effort. Their intellectual co-operation gave birth to several volumes of essays, titled “Studies in the Theory of Poetic Language” (1916-23).

Although initially used in a derogatory sense, ‘formalist’ was a neutral designation to a group of thinkers in later times. Leading thinkers of post-revolutionary Russia such as Lunacharsky, Bukharin, and Trotsky repudiated the formalist project for its adherence to the formal aspects at the cost of its wider historical and social dimensions. In fact, the formalists hardly reconciled formalist and stylistic analysis with wider socio-historical issues until Mikhail Bakhtin entered the critical arena.

Stop to Consider:

It is important to note that two major influences in 20th century criticism were Russian Formalism and the findings of Mikhail Bakhtin. Though not a formalist, Bakhtin linked question of literary genres and language to larger issues of ideology, class and subversion. For Bakhtin, like the formalists, language was a key concern, but his concept of language has a much wider sociological dimension. For instance, he sees language as a site for ideological struggle and social intercourse.

Throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th century, sociological considerations were dominant in the critical climate of Russia. Russian critics dwelt extensively on literature’s connections with issues of social well-being.

Perhaps, the most important critic in the 19th century, Vissarion Belinsky (1811-48), maintained that literature should contribute to social betterment while at the same time remaining artistic. Social usefulness of literature was also asserted by Nikolay Chernyshevsky who believed that art could be an instrument for the transformation of social reality. Nikolay Dobrolyubov (1836-1861) even maintained that social and political demands should overshadow the aesthetic in literature. Dmitry Pisarev (1840-68) was an iconoclast and had extreme views on this issue: for instance, he denounced Pushkin because his works, he opined, were useless as they are harmful to social progress.

Pushkin and Gogol were at the centre-stage of critical debate in the mid-19th century. Pavel Anenkov brought out Pushkin's works and tried to defend the autonomy of art and the dualistic ideal of the artistic and the political against the monistic doctrines of the Russian critics. Anenkov's intellectual ally was Alexander Druzhinin (1824-64) who flouted art's social commitment and said that the socially beneficial role of art was only possible when it ceased to be art's principal aim.

Anenkov, Druzhinin and their associates were recognized as 'aesthetic' critics and their 'radical' counterparts were Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, and Pisarev, among others. Tolstoy, in his "What is Art?" took a position akin to the radicals. However, he pleads for a literature that can infuse Christian ideals into the readers and thus unite people. Tolstoy's notion of 'committed art' does not have the sharp political edge of the radical critics like Dobrolyubov, but he shares their basic assumption about art's commitment to social good.

After the controversy between the radical and aesthetic critics subsided, the populists appeared on the critical scene. The populists saw peasantry as the potential force for the revolutionary transformation of society. Hence, they saw literature as part of a wider political programme. The most important critics from this school were Nikolay Konstantinovich Mikhaylovsky (1842-1904). Mikhaylovsky wrote articles on major Russian writers— Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin and Chekhov. He even denounced Dostoevsky for his lack of social ideal.

SAQ:

Would you agree with the view that strong focus on the 'social' aspect of a work of art leads to a loss of aesthetic merit? (80 words)

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Russian Formalism thus can be seen as an effect of this long-standing critical debate. Historical and social dimensions of art are flouted and extra-textual yardsticks are pushed aside. Agreement is reached on the issue of what should be the proper object of literary criticism. Before 'formalism', literary analysis was not a discipline by itself but part of academic research. Besides the conventional scholars like Alexander Veselovsky, there were the symbolists who transposed literary critical discourse from the academy into the journals. The Symbolists offered a highly subjective and impressionistic mode of criticism, drawing largely on the French symbolists. The Formalists entered the scene with a reaction against the subjectivism of the symbolists, pleading for a scientific mode of literary study. They sought to emulate the models and methods of science and resorted to scientific positivism. Boris Eikhenbaum, a leading formalist critic, sees formalists isolating literature from politics and ideology as expressive of a revolutionary attitude.

Initially, the formalists offered a distinctive view of language, and underlined the distinctiveness of literary language in contrast to the language of ordinary discourse. Then we see theorizing about verse and the study of narrative plot. It was during this time that the distinction between plot and story was extensively examined. Russian Formalism was paralleled by Anglo-American New Criticism with their views of literary text as autonomous entity and hence, the proper object of study. Initially the Europeans were unaware of the Formalist school. It was only later that Roman Jakobson went to New York and formalist works began to be translated into English. Thus, 'formalism' began to attract the attention of the English-speaking world. Hence, the 'formalists' affinity with New Criticism was not a matter of influence but that of convergence.

Stop to Consider:

Russian Formalism Versus New Criticism

We have already discussed in Unit 1 of this block the affinities and the differences between Russian Formalism and New Criticism. It is pertinent to note here an important observation from *Modern Literary Theory*: “Although Russian Formalism is often likened to American New Criticism because of their similar emphasis on ‘close reading’, the Russian Formalists regarded themselves as developers of a science of criticism and were more interested in the discovery of a systematic method for the analysis of poetic texts. Russian Formalism emphasized a differential definition of literature as opposed to the New Critical isolation and objectification of the single text; they were also more emphatic in their rejection of the mimetic/expressive account of the text. Indeed, Russian Formalism rejected entirely the idea of the text as reflecting an essential unity which is ultimately one of moral or humanistic significance. The central focus of this analysis was not so much literature per se but literariness, that which makes a given text ‘literary’.”

You can understand from this an important difference between the two movements—the separate assumptions about a literary text. The New Critics were more likely to accept a text as “literary” based on derived notions of genre. The Russian Formalist would however seek to explore the status of the text with regard to prevailing notions of what the text stood for.

5.3 IMPORTANT FIGURES

5.3.1 ROMAN JAKOBSON

Roman Jakobson is a vital link between structuralism and linguistics. His life-long research was mainly directed towards the relation between language and literature. Jakobson held that literary research and the study of linguistics should go hand-in-hand. Let us, in this context, note that one of his most important essays that propounded ‘formalist’ preoccupation with ‘literariness’ is “Linguistics and Poetics.”

He was born in Russia in 1896 and died in the USA in 1982. He entered Moscow University in 1914, completed his study at the University of Prague and taught at Masaryk University from 1935 till the Nazi occupation in 1939. In 1939, he fled to Scandinavia, then immigrated to the USA in 1941 and taught at Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes (1942-46) among many other educational institutes.

Jakobson founded Moscow Linguistic circle in 1915 and was also associated with the OPOYAZ. He founded the 'Prague Linguistic Circle' where he started an engagement with Ferdinand de Saussure's work. He was also associated with the founding of the Linguistic Circle of New York after he moved to America.

Stop to Consider:

Moscow Linguistic Circle & OPOYAZ

The founding of the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1915 provided an unprecedented forum for research into the relations of literature and language, since such research had remained outside the scope of the neo-grammarians then dominating language studies. The work of the circle promoted research into prosody, myth and both traditional and contemporary folklore. Jakobson counted among his collaborators and friends many leading avant-garde poets and painters. The close affiliation of the circle with the Petrograd-based Opoyaz provided a context in which scholarly and historical research proceeded hand-in-hand with contemporary literature.

Jakobson held the view that poetics cannot be separated from linguistics and that poetic elements are object of linguistic scouting. Incorporating the concepts of synchrony and diachrony, he explains that literary study is concerned with elements of the literary text that persist at a given point of time, as well as with changes occurring in a tradition or a system over time. However, Jakobson's contribution to the formalist movement lies in the analysis of 'literariness'. He attempted to define what makes a verbal message a work of art in linguistic terms. 'Literariness' was a major concern for the formalists from the very beginning of the movement. In "Linguistics and Poetics" Jakobson explored this fundamental 'formalist' idea using a wide range of illustration and example. Closely linked to this concept is a theory of poetry. Jakobson identifies metaphor and metonymy as two fundamental ways of organizing discourse.

5.3.2 YURI TYNANOV

Born in Latvia, Tynyanov graduated from Petrograd University in 1918. Besides his identity as a 'formalist' critic, Tynyanov was also regarded as

an authority on Pushkin. The question of what counts as literature and what does not was a constant pre-occupation among the 'formalists'. If Jakobson and Shklovsky expounded 'literariness' and 'defamiliarisation' as an answer to the problem of the division between what is literary and what is ordinary, Tynyanov's argument was that a text being 'literary' depended on its relationship with both literary and extra-literary orders. His concept of a literary system is that a text may be literary and non-literary depending on the nature of the literary systems within which it is set. An important offshoot of such a position is the notion of literature's relative status and the negation of the concept of tradition as an integrated system as found in this statement: "Tradition, the basic concept of an established history of literature, has proved to be an unjustifiable abstraction of one or more of the literary elements of a given system within which they occupy the same plane and play the same role. They are equated with the like elements of another system in which they are on a different plain, thus they are brought into a seemingly unified, fictitiously integrated system." (Tony Bennett)

The initial position of the 'formalists' was aesthetic and historical. They pleaded for the study of devices and techniques which account for the literariness of a given work of art. By 1924, literary study introduced a systematic, functional and dynamic perspective; and it started with Tynyanov. The most distinguished work of Tynyanov was *Theses on Language*- a collaborative work with Jakobson. The points made here are important for the 'formalist' movement.

1. Literary study must be carried on rigorously on a theoretical basis using precise terminology.
2. Within a particular form in literature (such as poetry) structural laws must be established before it is related to other fields.
3. Study of literary history must be systematic and 'evidences' must be analyzed attending on how they work within the system.
4. A system is not assemblage of all contemporary phenomena; it involves a hierarchy of which elements can be situated.

5.3.3 VICTOR SHKLOVSKY

Victor Shklovsky was another major figure closely associated with Russian Formalism. He is known in modern literary criticism for the concept of 'defamiliarization' — a dominant concern of this school.

Born in St. Petersburg in 1893, Shklovsky completed his education at the University of St. Petersburg. In 1923, he moved to Germany to settle there permanently. There he published two novels: *A Sentimental Journey* (1923) and *Zoo* (1923). He came back to Russia and started serious engagement with literary criticism. As a result, his two critical works—*On the Theory of Prose* (1925) and *The Technique of the Writer's Craft* (1928) came out. As it happened to writers of that period in Russia, he was under pressure from Soviet authorities. He attempted to adopt 'socialist realism'—the official doctrine in literary culture in post-revolutionary Russia. Echoes of such an undertaking can be heard in essays such as "Movements to a Scholarly Error" (1930). Shklovsky was appointed as a commissar in the Russian army during the war. Literary criticism and biographies written by Shklovsky centred on such writers as Lawrence Sterne, Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Shklovsky is perhaps best known for his work *On the Theory of Prose*, where he offers a poetics of prose fiction. His earlier writings show a close link between Russian Formalism and futurism. In essays like "Resurrection of the Word" (1914) he upholds the idea of things in their sensuousness against the mystificatory poetics of symbolism. It was a radical attitude that invited a certain kind of poetry and marked a conspicuous break with conventional poetry. Whereas the futurist rejects bourgeois good taste and common sense, characteristic of traditional poetry, Shklovsky pleads for innovation and experimentation in art—the ways in which true perception can be achieved as against the automatized perception of everyday life. Shklovsky's works include *Mayakovsky and his Circle* (1941), *Third Factory* (1926), *Leo Tolstoy* (1963), *Knight's Move* (1923) and *Energy of Delusion: A Book on Plot*.

SAQ:

Would you agree with the appellation of "journalist" ascribed to this group of thinker? Do their concerns focus on form (or structure and genre) or on language, or a combination of both? (30+60 words)

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5.3.4 BORIS TOMASHEVSKY

Tomashevsky graduated from the University of Liege and took a degree in electrical engineering. He studied 17th and 18th century French poetry at Sorbonne. He also studied Russian philology at St. Petersburg University and joined 'OPOYAZ' in 1918. From the mid 1920s he taught poetics and stylistics at Leningrad University. In 1930s he was forced to give up teaching but in his last years he was allowed to resume teaching at the university where he also prepared some of his works on poetics and stylistics.

Tomashevsky played an important role at the 'OPOYAZ' by developing a theory of versification. He wrote *Russian Versification. Metrics* and articles like "The problem of verse rhythm", "Verse and Rhythm", the "Rhythm of the Four Foot Iamb based on observation of Eugene Onegin", "the Five Foot Iamb in Pushkin", etc. *Russian Versification. Metrics* is a concise introduction to the problems of Russian versification defining poetic speech as speech organized in its phonetic aspect and concentrating on the role of stress and intonation in the metric division of verse. But he also saw the need to investigate the interrelations between intonation and syntax, sound and semantics, thus paving the way for the functional approach to the study of metrics.

5.4 KEY CONCEPTS

Going back to Matthew Arnold, we find him proclaiming that the greatness of a work of art depends on the greatness of action. With such proclamations, Arnold emphasized the importance of the 'content' of literature. In stark contrast, the Russian Formalists were pre-occupied with the question of form. The questions they raised and resolved were, in a way, more important: what makes a work of literature 'artistic' and 'literary'; what is the object of literary and critical study? How is the study of artistry of a given work related to language? Let us now discuss some of the key concerns of the 'formalists'.

5.4.1 LITERARINESS

The Formalist critics were preoccupied with the artistic/literary quality of a given work. For them, 'literariness' elicits the distinction between literary

language and the language of practical discourse. Roman Jakobson held the view that the object of literary study is not literature per se, but ‘literariness’. That is to say—the sum of special linguistic and formal properties that distinguish literary texts from non literary texts.

As ‘poetic’ language focuses on the ‘message’ for its own sake, a verbal message, on the other hand, calls attention to itself. Consequently, the relation between sign and its referent is disturbed. We must understand that ‘poetic’ function is not confined to poetry only. It points to any verbal message that foregrounds the signs more than making them a vehicle for meaning. However, that ‘poetic’ function, to Jakobson, is not all about the ‘palpability of signs’, but also suggests a basic organizing principle underlying all verbal discourse. Jakobson says, “poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into that of combination.” In poetry, a particular word is selected from among a stock of equivalent words (synonyms, autonyms etc.) The chosen words are then combined not according to the grammatical rule of combination, but according to the same principle of equivalence. Along the axis of combination, this equivalence is created through various means such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, parallelism, or other rhetorical devices. These two ways of organizing verbal discourse are likened to metaphor and metonymy.

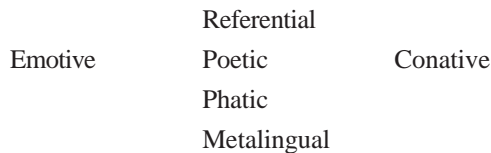
Jakobson not merely expounds the metaphoric and metonymic principles, but tries to understand different ‘genres’ and types of literary work in these terms. Poetry exhibits the principle of metaphor whereas metonymic principle is the very heart of prose literature. Thus, we can see that the issue of literariness marginalizes the content element of a given work of art. What is worth discussion, to the formalist, is not the ‘what’ but the ‘how’ of literature.

Stop to Consider:

In order to understand the distinction between ‘practical’ and ‘poetic’ language, we must see how Jakobson formulates the functions of language. Language is not merely a means of communication. Jakobson describes six functions of language schematizing six elements of linguistic communication in this way:



In a verbal communication, the 'addresser' sends a 'message' to the 'addressee'. The message is placed in specific 'context' and sent through a physical channel (Contact). Both the addresser and the addressee may use a common 'code'. To each of these six factors of verbal communication is attached a particular function of language. For instance, 'referential function' is linked to the context while 'emotive function' indicates the predominance of the addresser. So these functions can be schematized in this way:



Emotive: It focuses on the addresser and conveys the speaker's attitude

Poetic: It focuses on the message and makes verbal signs palpable.

Conative: it is oriented towards the addressee. It consists in the vocative and imperative use of language.

Referential: It consists in what the message 'means' or 'denotes'.

Phatic: It implies those messages that establish or prolong communication as
Metalingual: Its focus is language itself, instead of denoting objects or events or expressing attitude.

5.4.2 FORM

The 'Formalists' were manifestly oriented towards form. If there can be dispute over meaning and scope of the term, we can say that 'form' includes all formal aspects, compositional elements, constitutive principles, as well as the rhetorical devices that go into the making of a literary text. The neo-classical critics defined form as a combination of component elements according to the principle of decorum. Coleridge upholds 'organic form' that develops from the very heart of the creative process like a growing plant, where the parts are inseparably related to the whole.

The New Critics use the term 'structure' synonymously with 'form'. It implies a paradoxical relationship of elements that gives rise to tension and ambiguity and all taken together constitute the totality of meaning. What prevailed throughout the different phases of critical tradition is the form/content dichotomy. (The Marxists, however, argue that it is the content that determines the form and not the other way round.). The 'formalists' resist the idea that form is a container or an envelope. Instead, they define form as something

concrete, dynamic and self-contained. Form determines structure and meaning. Even ‘form’ is itself understood as ‘content’.

To the New Critics, form is by itself, not important; formal aspects are important as they are decisive to the understanding of a poem. The Formalists in contrast, do not go beyond form because it is the ultimate ‘telos’ of literary pursuit. Insisting on the distinction between literary and practical language, they emphasize that neither the referential function of language nor its mimetic relation to reality is essential to literature where the signs do not refer to an external signified. A text foregrounds its formal aspects and marginalizes the referential function.

Hence, it is the form that remains to be studied as the proper object of literary study.

SAQ:

Would you agree with the following:

1. New Critics—form= structure =meaning
2. Formalist—form= structure + meaning=literature? (70 words)

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5.4.3 FABULA AND SYUZHET

One important area for the formalists to explore was the language of prose fiction. The concepts of ‘fabula’ and ‘syuzhet’ are explained by Boris Tomashevsky. The *Dictionary of Narratology* however, defines fabula as ‘the set of narrated situations and events in their chronological sequence’. Syuzhet implies a logical ordering of events and situations. In fact, it is the content/form or material/device opposition that gets translated into the fabula/syuzhet division.

Fabula is a straightforward account of event and situations. Ordering of which has nothing to do with the artistic effect to arouse suspense. Syuzhet, on the other hand is the artistic re-arrangement of the representational

elements. How can we then make a distinction between fictional language and ordinary language? Tomashevsky asserts that more than a difference in language, it is a difference of presentation. How does a detective novel work, for instance? It manipulates the fable with a certain artistic aim in view: a certain of maximum amount of suspense. The artistic effect of a fictional narrative depends on how the content elements are unfolded, manipulated, and hence 'defamiliarized'.

Similarly, Shklovsky elaborates the story/plot distinction. The story is the basic succession of events that the artist is disposed to. Plot is the distinctive way in which the story is organized so as to defamiliarise the familiar materials. Plot, therefore, has to do with the 'form' of a novel, the 'how' of its telling, like rhythm in poetry. (Shklovsky finds in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* an archetype of the novel, in which the focus is not on the story per se, but on story-telling. As syuzhet (or plot) works upon the Fabula (or story), and 'defamiliarize' familiar material, one fabula can give rise to a number of syuzhets.

Such a formulation is also akin to structuralism. This story/plot dichotomy was carried forward by structuralists and subsumed in their theories of narrative. Vladimir Propp is an important link between these two movements. Propp was greatly inspired by the distinction between fabula and syuzhet, and his *Morphology of the Folktale* is evident manifestation of formalist influence. Here, Propp studies many Russian folktales and fairy-tales and reveals that underlying all of them there is only one story. The individual tales (syuzhet) are variations upon a basic fabula.

Stop to Consider:

Morphology of the Folktale by Vladimir Propp, is a major contribution to 'formalism' as well as an important step towards the poetics of fictional narrative. Narrative, Propp says, is characterized by its syntactic structuring. He sees narrative not in terms of character but as constituted by 'functions' that the characters have within the plot. Propp identifies certain functions that confer uniformity on the tales. He concludes that a character is attached to a certain function. The functions are distinguishable and they are constant elements independent of their agent. The number of functions Propp distinguishes are thirty-one.

He also concluded that all the characters could be resolved into only 7 broad character types in the 100 tales he analyzed:

The villain — struggles against the hero.

The donor — prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object.

The (magical) helper — helps the hero in the quest.

The princess and her father — give the task to the hero, identify the false hero, princess marries the hero, often sought for during the narrative. Propp noted that functionally, the princess and the father can not be clearly distinguished.

The dispatcher — character who makes the lack known and sends the hero off.

The hero or victim/seeker hero — reacts to the donor, weds the princess.

[False hero] — takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess. (www.Wikipedia.com)

In a particular fairy tale, one character might be involved in more than one sphere of action. In the same vein many characters can be involved in a single action.

Such an analysis of Propp's ideas regarding Russian folktales may help in your understanding of Russian Formalism to a considerable extent. This is rigorous analysis at its abstract best: the cultural elements, as associated with mythical ideas of doom, evil, power, weakness, etc., is left aside. The focus is on elements of the construction of the narrative. The characters or figures in the folktales are seen as signifiers or as coded functions. The various combinations give us the syuzhet.

5.4.4 FORMALISM AND 'LITERARY HISTORY'

The idea that 'formalists' are pre-occupied with the concepts of form, devices and technique would have us believe that formalists view literature synchronically. The formalist notion of form not only explains the 'literariness' of art at a given point of time, it also explains historical change. A particular form is valid only until when it can retain its artistic effectiveness, or can defamiliarize. When the form loses its artistic effect, it is regarded as outmoded and is pushed to the background. A new form emerges to impede the reader's familiar perception, not to express new content. Thus, literary history is a service of the substitution of literary forms and defamiliarizing devices cater to shifting artistic sensibilities of readers.

SAQ:

How do literary forms reflect cultural changes? Do you think that the Russian Formalists gave enough attention to this problem? (75 words)

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History, to the formalist, does not have unity, coherence or purpose. It is also not development, because it does not replace any artistic form with a developed one, because all forms are equally artistic at the specific periods of their use. As history involves substitution of forms, it is never a peaceful or continuous process. Instead, it involves struggle of old and new values, as well as competition between various schools. Of course, this history has nothing to do with the history of a particular person; we can quote Boris Eichenbaum in this context, - “For us, the central problem of the history of literature is the problem of evolution without personality the study of literature as a self-formed social phenomenon”.

5.4.5 DEFAMILIARIZATION

Defamiliarization as expounded by Shklovsky is a theory about artistic perception. When we are accustomed to an image, idea or a phenomenon, the perceptive effort is reduced. Art defamiliarizes images, ideas or situations which are otherwise familiar to us and thus impede our perception. Art and literature assume significance only against the backdrop of ordinary habitual perception. Devices to achieve defamiliarisation are not eternal, but are time-bound. When they cease to dehabituate our perception, they lose validity. Therefore, defamiliarisation implies perpetual change in literary tradition. (For an elaborate discussion of this concept, you can go through Unit VI of this block)

An important reason why the Formalists were so much occupied with the formal aspects of literature or the literary devices that make a work ‘literary’ was the assumption that form determines content; the formal devices defamiliarise the content elements. Let us look at how Tony Bennett puts it in *Formalism and Marxism*: “the formalists sought to reveal the devices

through which the total structure of given works of literature might be said to defamiliarise, make strange or challenge certain dominant conceptions ideologies even, although they did not use the word of the social world.” You must, therefore, be aware of the fact that defamiliarisation is, in a broader sense, not just a set of literary devices; it is also a mode of representation that has a subversive potential. This subversion can be a subversion of already existing literary genre, ideology, or a dominant perception prevalent at a particular point of time. If we look at twentieth century avante garde literary practices, (consider, for instance, the works of James Joyce and Franz Kafka) they subvert, through their own unique mode of representation, the realistic trend of the nineteenth-century novel. Kafka makes strange the familiar world that was so plausibly delineated in a Victorian novel.

Check Your Progress:

1. Give a brief sketch of the critical concerns of the Russian Formalists with regard to ideas of language and the role of metaphors in language.
2. Describe the works of the Russian Formalists with special reference to their ideas of ‘form’ and ‘content’. Explain their stand in contradistinction to that of the New Critics.
3. Highlight the contributions of the Russian Formalists to literary theory with reference to their ideas touching upon the role of art, the special status of poetic language and the relation of art to social reality.

5.5 SUMMING UP

How we then understand the Formalist view of literature? Firstly, they held that if we want to find out what is specific to a given literary work, we must examine its formal properties. So, it is not necessary to take into account how large the historical and social factors are in shaping a literary work. Secondly, the formalists resisted the mimetic theory of literature which propounded literature as the result of imitation of reality. A literary text does not reflect reality but defamiliarises our perception of reality. In other words, it does not reflect the real world but signifies it through its inherent semiotic process.

After post-structuralism, the basic formalist assumption that there is something distinctive about literary language and that it differs substantially from ordinary uses of language has been contested. The possibility of multiple meanings is not a specific property of literary language but a common trait in any language. Again, such diverse trends as post-colonialism, feminism, neo-historicism are all in indifferent ways reactions against the formalists exclusive focus on the insularity of the literary text.

What is of lasting influence in formalism is their linking of literary study with linguistic investigation. In subsequent critical trends the question of language has become an issue of paramount importance although different critical school study different aspects and questions such as gender, power, subjectivity and so on. These are all conducted through an acute investigation of language.

5.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Propp

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Unit 6

Victor Shklovsky: “Art as Technique”

Contents:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introducing the Critic
- 6.3 Reading the Text “Art as Technique”
- 6.4 Key Concepts
 - 6.4.1 Defamiliarization
 - 6.4.2 Literary Devices
 - 6.4.3 Art as Technique
- 6.5 Critical Reception
- 6.6 Summing up
- 6.7 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit you have already read about Russian Formalism and Victor Shklovsky. In this unit however, you will get to read Shklovsky’s essay “Art as Technique” which is regarded as one of the representative texts of Russian Formalism. By the end of this unit you should be able to

- *discuss* the essay in detail
- *see* for yourself the role it has played in establishing formalism as a dominant mode of criticism
- *grasp* the idea of ‘defamiliarisation’ as the effect of a literary work of art

6.2 INTRODUCING THE CRITIC

Victor Shklovsky was born in 1893 in St. Petersburg, Russia, and studied in St. Petersburg University. Better known for his involvement with the OPOYAZ, Society for the Study of Poetic Language, which became instrumental in the development of critical theories and techniques of Russian

Formalism, Shklovsky developed the concept of ‘defamiliarization’ in literature. In his essay “Art as Technique” he explained this idea as follows:

“The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.”

Shklovsky’s work pushed Russian Formalism towards understanding literary activity as an integral part of social practice, an idea which fully flourished in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and other Russian and Prague School scholars of semiotics.

Shklovsky died in Moscow in 1984.

His essay “Art as Technique” was crucial to the Formalist movement in Russia because it served as a manifesto of the earlier Formalist schools. There was a strong impulse of sociological analysis and moral consideration in the Russian critical tradition. Against such a dominant strain of sociological study and moralism in the realm of literary study, the essay “Art as Technique” offers a radical statement of the nature of art and literature. By implication, it also specifies the object of literary and critical study. The concept of defamiliarization expounded in this essay gained widespread currency, giving the ‘Formalist School’ the rigour of a movement. It also served as a rationale for diverse critical separations and assessments on formal aspects of literature.

6.3 READING THE TEXT “ART AS TECHNIQUE”

The publication of the essay “Art as Technique” (1917) is one of the significant events in Russian Formalism. It made an important ‘statement’ of the early Formalist method as it announced a break with the early ‘aesthetic approach’ by providing a methodology of criticism and the purpose of art. This essay is a reaction against Potebnya who propounded the notions that ‘art is thinking in images’ and that the purpose of art is to present the unknown in terms of the known. Theoretically such views recognized neither the richness of poetry nor its intrinsic value. Shklovsky presents an example from Wordsworth.

“The world is too much with us: late and soon’
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:”

Shklovsky points out that these lines are certainly poetic, yet it is not always right to argue that its poetic quality comes from the deeply latent imagery. At the end of the poem, the poet resurrects Proteus and Triton as images to evoke a feeling that many persons have had first hand; but Shklovsky says that the image here is less familiar than the thing it stands for. The Potebnya-Symbolist description of poetry, then, was inadequate both theoretically and practically.

The Formalists learned much from the philologists like—Alexander Potebnya (1835-1891) and Alexander Vesolovsky (1838-1906) who worked toward a distinctively literary study of literature. Each contributed to the discovery of an approach to literature that would prevent its subservience to any other disciplines. Potebnya saw poetry and prose as distinct, separate approaches to the understanding of reality through language. His two basic conclusions are: that the study of literature as literature must be primarily a study of language, and that the primary problem in such a study is to define the peculiarities of poetic language as opposed to prose or practical-scientific language. The New Critics who were initially influenced by I. A. Richards’ books—*Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Science and Poetry* preferred to characterize poetry as a discourse. This formed an extensively semantic orientation amongst the New Critics which could be seen as their weakness in their appraisal of poetry and literature. Although, Potebnya avoided that weakness, he could not help making ‘metaphor’ the basis of all poetry. (This relates to his saying: “Art is thinking in images.”). This essay “Art as Technique”, as you have already come to know, is a reaction against Potebnya’s ideas. Shklovsky points out that Potebnya’s metaphors work in only one direction; they work only by presenting the unknown in terms of the known. Thus, metaphor is reduced only to an aid to understanding the general truth of poetry. The course of Russian poetry and criticism in the first two decades of the 20th century led to intense simplification and it was this simplification that a formalist like Shklovsky had to attack.

Shklovsky in this essay also decries the usually accepted principle of creative or of reduced mental effort because it cannot explain the nature of the poetic effect and fails to distinguish between ‘poetic’ and ‘practical’ language. This

position of Shklovsky shows an affinity towards Roman Jakobson, especially when the latter makes a distinction between poetic function and referential function of language. Poetic language foregrounds signs; through rhythm, rhyme, sound pattern, attestation and employment of other rhetorical figures of sound and sense, poetic language calls attention to itself. Practical language, in contrast, stands for what it refers to.

Now Shklovsky shifts to a conceptualization of a general law of perception. He describes a general process of cognition which is part of our normal life. The force of habit lacks much of our mental or perceptive effort as we often begin to perceive things automatically. He writes: “as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic; if one remembers the sensation of holding a pen or of speaking in a foreign language for the first time . . . he will agree with us.” The consequence of such automatization of perception is that the objects are reduced to symbols. The object fades without leaving any impression on us, and its essence is forgotten. The effect of such over-autoimmunization is disastrous: it robs life of its meaning and value.

It is against this uninspiring, backdrop of perception that Shklovsky discusses art, its aim and the nature of artistic effect. Does art give us knowledge? Or does it give a certain perception of things? He makes a distinction between knowledge and perception. Knowledge involves automatization of habit and minimizing of perceptive effort. Art gives us the sensation of life. It makes us ‘see’ things, feel the ‘stoniness’ of the stone. To recover the sensation of things, the object must be shifted from its familiar context. In normal perception, we know a thing without attending to its form. Defamiliarization is the opposite of the minimizing of perception effort; it prolongs the process of perception. This prolonged perception is the artistic effect of a work of art and is itself the very aim of art. He explained this idea as follows:

“The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.” (Shklovsky, “Art as Technique”, 12)

Hence, defamiliarization is an effect which can be achieved using some artistic devices and techniques. Although Shklovsky states earlier that poetry has its peculiar language that functions differently from practical language, defamiliarization is not confined to poetry alone. It can well occur in any form of art. He refers to Tolstoy's use of some such devices. In "Shame" for instance, Tolstoy is said to have defamiliarized the idea of flogging. Flogging is a usual form of punishment whereas Tolstoy describes the act in all its cruelty as though it is painful, agonizing, strange and illogical to the narrator. This Tolstoy does with a certain end in view; by defamiliarizing the idea of flogging, the author presents a critique of the act. In *Kholstomer*, Tolstoy defamiliarizes the idea of private property through a narrator who adopts an unusual point of view. The narrator defamiliarizes the concept when he sees things through the eyes of a horse: "... I simply could not see what it meant when they called me "man's property"...such are the words 'my' and "mine" which they apply to different things, creatures, objects, and even to land, people and horses...I don't know the point of all this, but it's true." Thus, Tolstoy employs a method of looking at things out of their normal contexts.

Check Your Progress:

If we study 'time' as common metaphor, "Time, the great destroyer and creator", what is the renewed perception telling us? Select appropriate ideas from the ones given below:

- a. that time is an active agent
- b. that time is linear
- c. that time is great
- d. that we can think of time as a multifaceted personality
- e. that time creates only to destroy
- f. that destruction and creation are both aspects of historical time
- g. that time is God-like
- h. that we cannot ignore the multiple effects of historical change.

The examples Shklovsky cites from Tolstoy as instances of defamiliarization are important. Defamiliarization impedes perception and hence increases the perceptive effort, and the author declares it as the artistic effect, the end-in-itself. In specific contexts of Tolstoy's fiction, we have seen how the

‘perception’ itself is not an end in itself, but a vehicle for social criticism. Can we then define defamiliarization as a purely aesthetic effect?

Coming to the application of this theory, Shklovsky states that defamiliarization is ubiquitous. It is also the basic principle of riddles. Lack of recognition is a common technique found in many fictional narratives. In poetic speech, it is the organization of words and lexical structure that disturbs habitual perception. In a broader sense, defamiliarization is characteristic of any artistic work, where perception is impeded, so that the object is not recognized at once, but is perceived in continuity. In order to achieve defamiliarization in poetry, we must make use of the resources of language. We must know the poetic as well as practical use of language, and how they influence each other. Shklovsky states that the distinction between ordinary speech and literary language is not absolute as they are in constant flux. He reflects on the evolution of the Russian language attending to how both literary and practical language influence each other. The use of defamiliarization, thus, is conditioned by the fluctuations of language.

SAQ:

By showing how Tolstoy ‘defamiliarises private property, is Shklovsky endorsing fantasy as a valid poetic technique? Does it help to redefine ideas of ‘realism’ in literary writing? (20 + 50 words)

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6.4 KEY CONCEPTS

6.4.1 DEFAMILIARIZATION

We have already discussed defamiliarization in the previous section ‘Reading the Text’. Let us summarize our reading, and understand different aspects of the concept.

In our daily life, the process of learning involves ‘making the unfamiliar familiar’. When for instance, we enter a foreign language class, the whole linguistic environment inside the class would seem to us strange. We would

attend to the words spoken, the sound-pattern, etc., only because we do not know the language. After we learn the language, we will not feel awkward on entering the class and the words, and sound-patterns would not affect us, because we are familiar with the language. So we do not attend to the words and can direct our attention elsewhere. This is a matter of habit, without which we would be able to accomplish nothing. But this force of habit prevents us from seeing the novel aspect of a thing or a phenomenon. As Shklovsky puts it, “Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war”. Art makes us attend to a thing or an idea which we have previously taken for granted. It evokes the sensation of the object by defamiliarizing it. Unlike practical language, poetic language impedes perception by means of devices such as imagery, rhythm, parallelism, comparison, hyperbole and another rhetorical figure. Practical language follows the principle of economy of creative effort.

The Formalists were insistent on the distinction between the poetic and practical language. Roman Jakobson held that practical language implies a referential function whereas poetic language calls attention to itself. Do you think that in the context of defamiliarization, Shklovsky’s and Jakobson’s positions on language are the same?

Defamiliarization is found everywhere. It is not a special technique used by distinguished writers. Of course, it can be used more self-consciously as Tolstoy did it. Defamiliarisation is not a device but an effect. In narrative, one can use complex narrative techniques to maintain the gap between story and discourse.

<p>SAQ:</p> <p>What are the implications of the saying, “Defamiliarisation is not a device but an effect”. Illustrate (60 words)</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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6.4.2 LITERARY DEVICES

From the 1960s, when literary studies have a post structuralist turn, the age-old distinction between ordinary language and literary language has been radically questioned. Derrida for instance, talks about the metaphorical nature of all languages. A signifier points to a signified, which in turn, becomes a signifier and so on. But let us not forget that such a distinction was a valid one in the hey-day of formalism.

If we talk in terms of defamiliarisation, what is the function of poetic language? It defamiliarises ordinary speech making it difficult, palpable and draws attention to itself. Secondly, literary representation defamiliarises our ordinary perception of things. It does not happen naturally. The poet or the artist has to resort to some literary devices to create this affect. Here we will mention not only those mentioned by Shklovsky in your prescribed essay, but other devices as well, emphasized by other formalists.

Shklovsky refers to a major technique used by Tolstoy in his fiction: to describe something—an object, a phenomenon or a concept—without giving it a name. When the familiar name attached to a concept or an object is withheld, our knowledge about it is suspended; what is enhanced instead is our perception of the object.

To see things out of their normal context is also an important device. It entails the adoption of an unusual point of view. I have mentioned in Section 3.3 of this unit that Tolstoy defamiliarises the idea of private property by looking at it from the point of view of a horse.

You must also be aware of the fact that such a formulation has a greater ramification in our recent times in ideological and political terms. After feminism and postcolonialism a wider variety of fictional and non-fictional writing has emerged that looks anew at some thing that have so far been seen from the point of view of the White European male.

To the same class of defamiliarising devices perhaps belong much poetic devices like rhyme, rhythm, assonance, and alliteration which enhance or even undo our normal perceptions of familiar things. Metaphors and symbols carry out a similar function in casting familiar objects into unfamiliar roles so that they begin to seem out of ordinary. Such figurative devices tap the hidden resources of language so that ‘defamiliarisation’ takes place,

particularly in poetic language. Prose as used for communicating patterns of logic and common sense, can often exclude these linguistic devices. (We should remember that prose can sometimes be highly evocative and even be ‘poetic’.) In the case of prose, centered on the convergence or depiction of objective facts, the proportion of metaphors or symbols to non-metaphoric language will be high. This is due to the avoidance of communication which is unambiguous and precise.

What Shklovsky finds in Tolstoy is part of the latter’s descriptive art. Let us ask a more general question. How does prose fiction defamiliarise? The formalists, and Shklovsky himself, make a distinction between story and discourse or story and plot (fabula and syuzhet). According to Shklovsky story is the chronological/causal sequence of events that underlies narration. Plot is the way in which the story is actually told in the narrative. Thus plot can present a story in an order other than that of the story. Hence, plot points at the way in which the story is defamiliarised.

SAQ:

Would you affirm that devices of defamiliarisation in prose are necessarily different from the devices used in poetry? (70 words)

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Let us look, for a better understanding of how defamiliarisation is achieved in narrative at how Eric S. Rabskin explicates the story/plot distinction. Rabskin identified five common components in the story of a typical romance-

- a. Boy meets girl in the spring
- b. Boy and girl are in love in summer
- c. An obstacle prevents the consummation of their love
- d. Boy undergoes tests/trials/penance in the winter
- e. Boy and girl consummate their love in the spring

Now, the narrative can start with the episode of the boy suffering in the winter (d₁), then the boy bemoans the nature of the obstacle (c), then he is reminded of the girl (a) and how they love each other (b) and hence, he steels himself to complete the trial (d₂) and wins her at last (e). So, the plot ordered in the sequence d₁-c-a-b-d₂-e is a clear defamiliarisation of the normal story a-b-c-d-e. Thus, as Rabskin says, “By defamiliarising the fabula structure, plot makes us “feel things””.

6.4.3 ART AS TECHNIQUE

The essay is not about defamiliarization alone; it also offers a precise, clear and unambiguous definition of art and literature. This is in stark contrast to the New Critical ethos according to which poetry cannot be paraphrased because it is an embodied, and hence ontologically different experience. If the New Critics emphasized the irreducibility of literary texts that need completeness of response from the reader, they nevertheless mystify and elevate literary culture to a dignified position. It can be traced back to Matthew Arnold who seeks to define literary and poetic culture with the utmost reverence; he even envisages a time when “ religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.” Poetry to him is part of a larger culture which is the repository of “the best that has been thought and said in the world.”

SAQ:

How would you state the difference between the Arnoldian view of literary art and the Shklovskian? Would you agree that Shklovsky shows a heavy predisposition towards the ‘scientific’? (70 Words)

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Against all these formulations and theorizations of art as occupying a higher realm, as well as conferring some quasi-religious aura to art, Shklovsky’s essay is a discordant voice. In a way he demystifies art and literature, reducing it to the level of technique. We can see the implications of such an undertaking in this way. At the basic compositional level, art has nothing to do with

larger questions of life, society, morality etc: Thus art is essentially the subject of almost a scientific investigation.

Such a definition welcomes all kinds of innovations that have been going on down the ages in literary culture, because the techniques are not eternally exciting formal properties; they have to be perpetually renovated and new techniques employed to defamiliarise our perception of the world.

Stop to Consider:

Defamiliarisation and Narrative:

In his article “Special Form and Plot” Rabskin mentions three basic narrational aspects in fiction.:

- a. Narration
- b. Dialogue
- c. Description

Narration reports occurrences in a reading time less than actual time the events that would have taken place in the real world. In dialogue (“How are you?” I asked. “I am fine,” she said with a smile.”) The reading time taken by an occurrence to a greater or lesser degree, coincides with the actual time. In description, the reading time is usually greater than the actual time. What happens in a narrative is that all these three elements are interwoven so as to defamiliarise story materials as well as readers consciousness through the shifting relationship of reading time and actual time.

6.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Seen in the context of critical, philosophical, political reflection on the status of art, Shklovsky is perhaps best known for the concept of *otstranenie* or defamiliarization in literature as explained in the important essay “Art as Technique” 1917. Shklovsky’s writings are influential in making Russian Formalism understand literary activity as integral parts of social practice, an idea that becomes important in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Russian and Prague School scholars of semiotics. Reception theorist like Hans Robert Jauss has also drawn on Shklovsky’s idea of *otstranenie* or defamiliarization. Shklovsky’s scientific method for understanding social meanings in general and literary meaning in particular exerted a major influence on thinkers like Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman, and on structuralism as a whole. The

relevance of Shklovsky's can be traced in modern literary criticism as he helps to develop the structuralist and post-structuralist trends. Although under Stalin, Russian Formalism came to be known as a pejorative term for elitist art and Shklovsky's concept of *otstranenie* or defamiliarization denoted an escape from the political, the relevance of Shklovsky lies in exploring the relationship between aesthetic and political practices.

One notable example of how defamiliarisation can be applied as a particular mode of representation is Bertolt Brecht. You must know that Brecht's famous concept of 'alienation effect' has its roots in Shklovsky's idea of defamiliarisation. In an article entitled "On the Theater We Have in Mind" Brecht writes, "It's a young man's agreeable business to acquire sin...sin is what is new, strong, surprising, strange. The theater must take an interest in sin if the young are to be able to go there...yes, what appeals most to us in any episode was its strangeness and incomprehensibility." Brecht visited Moscow in 1935 when Piscator invited him for a conference. Nowhere prior to this visit to Moscow did Brecht speak or write about "Verfremdung" (alienation). As Eric Bentley puts it, in *Brecht: On the Theater*, "The formula itself (ie. the theory of alienation effect) is a translation of the Russian critic Victor Shklovsky's phrase 'priem ostranenie', or 'device for making strange', and it can hardly be a coincidence that it should have entered Brecht's vocabulary after his Moscow visit."

6.6 SUMMING UP

By this time, you must have gained the basic ideas central to Shklovsky's essay "Art as Technique" which is regarded as one of the representative texts of Russian Formalism. Moreover, this unit has also helped grasp the idea of 'defamiliarisation' as the effect of a literary work of art. It is however wrong to think that defamiliarisation is a radically new idea expounded by none but Shklovsky. Of course, Shklovsky's formulation of the concept is startling and he gives it the rigour and consistency of a theory, whose impact on Russian Formalism was deep and lasting. Still, this very idea of making things strange is also articulated, if in bits and pieces, in Romantic criticism. By now, you must have seen the role it has played in establishing formalism as a dominant mode of criticism as the relevance of Shklovsky's concept can be traced in various trends of modern literary criticism.

Check Your Progress:

1. State the main propositions of “Art as Technique” by Victor Shklovsky.
2. How does Shklovsky view “technique” in art? Outline the argument by which he establishes the importance of technique in literary art.
3. Explain the interactions between ‘fabula’ and syuzhet’ in Russian Formalist Theory. How does it affect defamiliarisation in the reader’s perception?

6.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Links:

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~cultagen/academic/shklovsky1.pdf>

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**Institute of Distance and Open Learning
GAUHATI UNIVERSITY**

**MA in English
Semester 3**

**Paper XIII
Theory III - Twentieth Century Criticism**

**Block 2
Later Trends**



Contents:

Block Introduction:

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Unit 3 : Structuralism to Post-Structuralism

Unit 4 : Jacques Derrida

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Unit 6 : Psychoanalysis and Jacques Lacan

Unit 7 : Feminism

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Block Introduction:

Literary theory is fashionable, exciting, and liberating in many ways. With 'literary theory' behind us we can afford to discuss different kinds of writing, – not considered to be 'literary' in the older terms – to discuss literary texts in newer ways, and to explore new concepts. You would realize all of these ideas by the end of this block just as you must already be observing that 'theory' can drop unexpected questions in front of you. In many ways, literary theory has become one of those disciplines that have thrust English literary studies into fresh interdisciplinary areas giving it a formidable reputation of analytical ability. Theory has cut through those borders of disciplinary exclusiveness which used to impart pride to those who wished to remain enclosed within the 'purity' of their disciplines. The only fact that we should note at this moment is that some critics are eager to pronounce that theory is 'over'. Theory *did* face some resistance through its circulation from the later part of the last century but it can be debated whether it is 'dead' or 'alive'. For us, here, however, theory must be taken at its best – and applied.

If you are studying on your own, at a distance from the institution, and have to buy all the books you need for your study, the market will supply you with a bewildering array of works on, of, or about theory. No single book – be warned! – is going to be enough. In the 'Block' here we have tried to bring to you some of the very basic ideas that you should be familiar with. At the very least you will be made familiar with at least a couple of concepts in some major theories. One problem with the subject (the discipline) is that it is not settled, or stagnant, but is still developing. The remarkable fact is that the spread of 'theory' has led to a lot of new work. Most of the major theorists we take up here are no longer living. But the applications have continued and refinements within the applications are likely to continue. Due to lack of space, however, we have not been able to include some of the more famous instances of the application of theory. Our 'block' begins with an overview of the field showing how changes in other disciplines in the 'humanities' stream have been instrumental in transforming approaches in literary studies. Indeed, 'theory' shows itself to be the case of the 'literary' world responding to changes in the larger environment.

You must use this 'Block' as your guide, not as your library. It is not possible to substitute the actual works with Study Material! So, as always, your main strength will lie in your using this 'Block' to follow up with readings from authoritative editions of theoretical works. For instance, you can read the Unit on Lacan and then read the collection of essays in *Ecrits* to gain the first-hand experience of Lacan's use of language and his actual arguments which he presents in his own inimitable way. With Barthes, you would definitely find the reading of his own works much more persuasive than what we can convey to you of them. Reading Foucault is far more persuasive and interesting than what any commentary can help you with. Our 'Block' here, however, makes for you the necessary connections between these theories. To that extent, you will find our material to be useful.

We have indicated some questions to help you prepare for exams. Some of the questions have been taken from older question-papers. However, no student worth her or his salt will ever be taken by surprise by an unexpected phraseology of the question. You should take greater care of the "short notes" since they demand more detailed knowledge.

This block contents:–

Unit 1: Literary Theory: A Composite View

Unit 2: Major Movements

Unit 3: Structuralism to Post-structuralism

Unit 4: Jacques Derrida

Unit 5: Roland Barthes

Unit 6: Psychoanalysis & Jacques Lacan

Unit 7: Feminism

Unit 1

Literary Theory: A Composite View

Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction - General Overview
- 1.3 Trends & Figures
 - 1.3.1 Philosophical Approaches
 - 1.3.2 Historical Approaches
 - 1.3.3 Psychoanalytical Approaches
 - 1.3.4 Postmodernist Theories
- 1.4 Understanding the Concepts
- 1.5 Summing up
- 1.6 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with a topic which is not easily described or narrated. It covers a time-span which is full of diverse events both intellectual and historical. In such a scene any connections between events may be over-simplifications or even inadequate. However, you may be able to find some useful clarifications which will later lead you on to wider and more fruitful readings. At the very least, by the end of the unit, you should be able

- *describe* some important ideas in literary theory
- *identify* the different approaches in relation to these ideas
- *make connections* between different concepts, and
- *relate* literary study with these critical movements,

1.2 INTRODUCTION - GENERAL OVERVIEW

You can get a good grasp of twentieth-century criticism by first seeing that many ideas it works with come from developments in allied fields. In the

previous Block called *Trends in Formalism*, you have already seen the range of ideas in formalisms, and in the work of critics like T.S.Eliot, F.R.Leavis and I.A.Richards, among many others. Probably you have noticed that all these critics concentrate on literary texts. Here, you will note that the sequence of developments or trends in literary criticism is not easily charted along a well-defined time-line. So, even while some critics were formulating important concepts in the study of literary texts, other developments in Europe, for example, were giving rise to newer, more radical concepts.

Stop to Consider:

New Critics & Russian Formalism: In a sense, Russian formalism was inspired by the Futurists' verbal experiments. Anglo-American New Criticism was much influenced by T.S.Eliot. Despite this difference, both movements aimed at asserting that art is autonomous — it cannot be re-stated as a historical document, a social statement, or a psychical statement. Both schools denied positivism which lays stress on historical or empirical data (like the author's biography, etc.). Both were equally opposed to Marxist notions of literature as determined by economic or material factors. But the idea of aesthetic autonomy is traceable back to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Marxism, on the other hand, is influenced by Hegel. Another influence to be seen on New Criticism which sees each of work of art as being untranslatable is that of Benedetto Croce (1866 - 1952) who saw genres as imposing on the unique character of a work of art or literature.

The criticism of **F.R.Leavis and T.S.Eliot** can be linked to concerns in English and American intellectual circles. Leavis' concerns show "how deeply the study of English can become entangled with other discourses whose values it opposes". When Leavis was writing down his thoughts about criticism, in Britain there was current a wide thinking about scientific management. It is against this background that his advocacy of a professional vocabulary for English took shape. T.S.Eliot was influenced by the American New Humanists like Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer and took his concept of 'tradition' from Ezra Pound and Babbitt.

Criticism took its shape in the West, in the twentieth century, against the two world wars. While *Scrutiny* ran its course under the editorship of F.R.Leavis, from 1932 to 1953, with the espousal of aestheticism, Marxism provided the grounds of belief in the period between the wars. Again, in the 1960s came a resurgence of Marxism and revolutionary fervour. But it was also in 1960 that the

highly influential journal, *Tel Quel*, published in France the writings of Derrida (and deconstruction), Julia Kristeva, and Lacan. The journal became the centre of a new intellectual milieu and itself moved from aestheticism to activism.

From criticism to cultural critique:

If we grant that one dimension of the definition of literature has to do with its function of being the vehicle and repository of cultural values, we can also grant that literature and literary studies are prominently engaged in the development of cultural critique and cultural studies. Terry Eagleton says that literature “has the most intimate relations to questions of social power.” He suggests that literature expresses the cultural hierarchies that organize the ways in which we experience or understand the world.

The more radical concepts of deconstruction, postmodernism, new historicism, post-structuralism, or Foucault’s discourse-theory, emerged from a concern with discourses, texts, or language. This means that even in disciplines like philosophy or historiography, the preoccupation was with language, or with linguistic constructions, rather than with historical fact, or positive truth. You can imagine, therefore, what kind of challenge this posed for purely literary criticism. All these tendencies have their own particular reasons for their emergence. It may not be best for us to cover all of them here but to go over these gradually through the numbered sections below.

SAQ:

What kind of difference do we propose when talk of an “historical” fact as distinct from a fact which exists in discourse? (60 words)

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However, you should pay attention to the fact that literary theory itself has become a potent discipline cutting across boundaries to decide “the conduct of enquiry in numerous other fields of thought”. We see this extended influence in areas like ethnography, psychoanalysis, political theory, gender-studies, theology, anthropology, postcolonial historiography, ethics, philosophy of

science, and the history of ideas. One sign of this influence has been the view that gives importance to its capacity to transform the traditional attachment towards positivist conceptions of ‘truth’. In other words, literary theory allows the questioning of accepted categories like ‘fact’ or ‘fiction’.

SAQ:

Perhaps an interesting way of thinking about literary theory is to ask yourself the question: how many differences can we mention between ‘pure’ theory and ‘pure’ criticism? Or, can we, at all? (70 words)

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1.3 TRENDS & FIGURES

The period under consideration is long and exciting in terms of the ideas we come across. You might, at first, find it almost confusing to take stock of all the events that make up this age of criticism. Raman Selden looks at it thus: in the late nineteenth century the English-speaking academic world gave importance to ‘scholarship’ under the influence of Germanic philology. ‘Criticism’ came to be given importance from the 1920s through the works of T.S.Eliot, T.E.Hulme and I.A.Richards. ‘Theory’ has been the buzzword from the mid-1960s till the present day. But Raman Selden also observes that it would not be correct to see the sequence of theories as being “an unfolding progression”. That is to say that it is futile to look for a clear logical movement in the development of theory. There are divergences within trends which makes classification difficult. Examples we can see in how the Bakhtin school displays both formalist and Marxist perspectives and how the ideas from Saussurean linguistics have spread and evolved in unexpected ways. These only go to show that we cannot expect clear lineages or logical connections among various critical positions.

SAQ:

What would you consider to be the major difference between ‘formalism’ and Marxism? (70 words)

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You should be aware that in spite of our general remarks regarding the lack of some simplifying logic of development in the field of literary theory and criticism, the issues behind it all are difficult and complex. One problem that seems to be implicit in literary theory and criticism is how to study a subject like literature, this itself begging the question, what is literature? If you happen to have crossed over from another discipline and are engaging with literary study for the first time some features of this discipline will be most striking for you: the ‘objects’ to be studied (literary texts) are so disparate and non-recurrent that any generalizing principle seems impossible. Then, because in this humanistic study the ‘objects’ are unique and non-recurrent, they can be studied or catalogued only in chronological order. Again, the study of literature entails an attention to cultural values. You may find it interesting to see what Samuel Weber wrote of the practices involved in literary study: “the object that defines this field of study — literature — has traditionally been distinguished from other objects of study precisely by a certain *lack* of objectivity”. [Davis & Schleifer]. Some critics also point out that part of the business of studying literary texts in Western culture has been the one of recognizing the assumptions which lie behind our own interpretations. That is, as we try to understand what literature is, we also get involved with the problem of how to read. What this means is that recognizing the practices of reading are also important in our discipline.

Stop to Consider:

For us in Indian conditions, it is important to recognize that the literary theory and criticism we are about to take up is a singularly ‘Western’ phenomenon and is spread over England, USA and Europe. This leads us to keep in mind the different cultural circumstances in which the different theories came to be formulated. If we take up Russian Formalism, for instance, we note how it was

late in being accepted in the West. On the whole, formalism is common to all cultural traditions but its specific mode and manner is specific to the culture within which it takes root. So, for example, we can turn to Russian Formalism which may show some similarities with New Criticism but which was already taking on a structuralist position even in the late 1920s. Similarly Czech structuralism, which found belated acceptance in the West was really the result of a long history of critical practices, like Russian Formalism, in Eastern Europe.

The background of “literary theory” (from New Criticism to poststructuralism) is one of calamities and disasters. The two World Wars, the Great Depression of the 1930s, fascism, the Cold War between the Soviet bloc and the Western countries, to name only the major catastrophes. In the 1980s and the 1990s saw the rise of movements like New Historicism, reader-response theory, the critiques of capitalist society by thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari. There have been more recent critiques by Richard Rorty, Clement Rosset, Vincent Descombes and Jacques Bouveresse. Movements which consider themselves to be “oppositional” have derived inspiration from Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, Freud, Henri Bergson, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Saussure or Sartre. How ‘oppositional’ these ideologies are can be measured by their engagement with or their originating sources in the ideals of the Enlightenment. Mainstream liberal-humanist thought in the West has always rested on its roots in the Enlightenment.

One feature of these contemporary critical tendencies is, nevertheless, consistent — their preoccupation with the role that language plays in our construction of the world.

Feminist thought, in this sense, has frequently highlighted the problem, not only of language as the instrument of constructing the world but also of the status of ‘theory’ itself. As some critics have shown, some feminists have even questioned ‘theory’ on the grounds of its close allegiances to male-dominated academic institutions which therefore renders it a ‘male’ discourse liable to reproduce the older male-formulated categories of thought. Along similar lines, **postcolonialist thought** has also brought forth questions regarding modes of analysis of literary texts or cultural artefacts. You should find it interesting to read Chapter 1 (“Literary Theory and ‘Third World’ Literature: Some Contexts”) of *In Theory* by Prof. Aijaz Ahmad. Both these two important movements, **feminism** and **postcolonialism**, along with **Marxism**, have been extremely productive in dislodging older modes of thought in criticism. They are now, in fact, critical approaches of overriding importance as you can see in the contemporary focus on “class, race, and gender” in all critical analyses.

Critical trends in the twentieth century can thus be seen against the larger background of social, political and economic developments across Europe and America. Another view emerges if we look at the discipline of English literature itself. You are already familiar with the work of I.A. Richards who helped to introduce the Practical Criticism paper in the examination at Cambridge, the Tripos, in 1926. This shows the obligations under which English literature had begun to function in the university. Richards's contribution was to push the discipline more towards a scientific footing. "This new orientation is partly the result of an increased awareness of the contributions made to England's victory in the First World War by science and technology. Ezra Pound's advice to poets to 'consider the ways of the scientist' was offered in a Britain dominated by 'the cult of technology'. Richards' work shows how scientific and bureaucratic values were beginning to enter the study of English." (Gary Day) Through such means literary study no longer came to mean how a work appeared in a reader's perception of it but came to be based on empirical grounds which took stock of the work in itself. It was no longer important how a work came to mean for an individual reader but rather what could be an objective response to it. We can perhaps align these ideas with Eliot's doctrine of impersonality in poetry ("poetry is not an expression of personality, but an escape from personality"). This was also in keeping with views current in contemporary society of large-scale industrial production and huge bureaucratic organizations characteristic of modern society.

You will find it easier to understand this trend if you also consider how the universities at this time were collaborating with industry. The role of the universities, by the 1930s, was being seen in terms of their capacity to help society improve its performance. In this climate, English was now being seen "as a career qualification" rather than "as a valuation of human experience". With the whittling away of the emotional or subjective component in English literature, it became more fit for a scientific, technological society.

This was all very different from the scene around the beginning of the twentieth century when the critical approaches of the preceding century were still current. Figures like A.C. Bradley, George Saintsbury and Arthur Quiller-Couch had been important around the end of the nineteenth century. In America the names of critics like Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris and

William Dean Howells – among others - were important. In France the important mode of criticism, the *explication de texte*, concentrated on the biographical and historical aspects of a given work of literature. This had an appeal for those English critics who were raised on the Arnoldian tradition of viewing literature as an antidote for the disease of modern civilization. Other critics whose ideas conceived of literature along these lines, as a discipline which could provide resistance to industrialism and a rational commercialism, included names like G.Wilson Knight, John Middleton Murry, D.H.Lawrence, Herbert Read, C.S.Lewis.

Stop to Consider:

The New Humanism of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More (as well as Norman Foerster, and Stuart Sherman) stands as a movement which looked back to classical principles and also upheld moral concerns. (Babbitt's influence is to be seen in the work of T.S.Eliot.) On the whole, this movement was part of wider reactions to the cultural contemporary scene at the beginning of the twentieth century.

You can read in *The Function of Criticism* by Terry Eagleton, the thoughts that invigorated intellectuals and academics, especially critics like F.R.Leavis, within the conditions of their society. Eagleton shows the conflicts and the clash of forces in early twentieth-century Western society and how an important journal like *Scrutiny* functioned or played a role in such an environment. What should be noted is that Eagleton makes it clear just how literary criticism finds its own aims and methods in contemporary culture. That should help you to understand that academic work like literary criticism is not isolated from social pressures.

The critical movements of the later twentieth century were already being foretold at the beginning of the period in the tendency to separate aesthetic concerns from moral or religious ones or in seeing aesthetic values as the ultimate defense against the dehumanization and commercialisation typical of the modern world, and also to exalt criticism to the level of a science.

1.3.1 PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES

The tendency to view literature as an autonomous body of aesthetic principles was evident, as you have already seen, in the work of F.R.Leavis as also in

the works of critics like the New Critics, R.S.Crane, Richard McKeon, Elder Olson (the Chicago School), Irving Howe, Lionel Trilling, Susan Sontag. We have to consider these critical trends within the frame of catastrophic events in the Western world in the shape of the two world wars, the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism, the Holocaust, and so on. We must keep in mind the fact that Western intellectuals went through different phases of either engaging with socio-political realities through Marxism in the period between the wars or of disengaging with these very socio-political realities of debased values by retreating into idealizing philosophies. Two such philosophies which belong here were phenomenology and existentialism. For both these schools of thought perception and interpretation are important points of consideration—points that call up two important aspects of literary criticism.

Phenomenology nowadays is associated with the name of the philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) whose writings in the first forty years of the twentieth century contributed to its development. Husserl's turn towards phenomenology stemmed from the influence of his teacher, Franz Brentano (1838-1917).

Phenomenology starts with the belief that the philosophical task is concerned with the study of appearances since our experiences are involved not with things in themselves but with our perception of their appearances. In this way it attempts to overcome the mind-body dichotomy present in philosophy since the time of Descartes. German philosophy, in the middle of the nineteenth century, had become more impressed with the methods of the natural sciences and had become increasingly dissatisfied with the idealism of Schelling, Kant, Fichte and Hegel.

Phenomenology seeks to show how objects-in-the-world cannot be the proper focus of inquiry for philosophy. In the definitions posited by both Husserl and Heidegger, phenomenology takes the relation of perceiver (subject) and the object of experience to constitute a continuous field of experience. What is proposed is that it is the contents of consciousness itself which should be investigated. If we trace this thought through the definitions of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ludwig Binswanger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Gaston Bachelard, literary experience is seen to be a gestalt (seeing the sum of a whole rather than the parts posing little separation between a text and its interpretation).

In this context, -to take two examples- important questions are raised in relation to what the grounds of logic are since these can be neither empirical facts nor

empirical psychology. ‘Intentionality’ is a key concept in Husserl’s thinking in that all mental states is intentional in being directed towards something. ‘Intentionality’ is taken from Latin *intendere*, meaning “to aim, to point towards”. For Brentano, who stresses on ‘intentionality’ , it is the most notable of mental states as it is not possible to hope, believe, or wish, -for example - without hoping, wishing, or believing in, something (the object intended). According to Husserl, meaning is not based in language but in intention. Thus language is not the original vehicle of meaning. Meaning is explicated through intentional acts. Existentialist phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) consider the notion of the ‘life-world’ to be Husserl’s most important contribution. According to this concept, “the life-world designates the pre-reflexive structure in which consciousness is embedded or which surrounds consciousness; it is like a horizon within which we operate, but which is not apparent to normal thought.” (Robert Holub)

SAQ:

Explain the importance, for literary study, of perception and interpretation. (50 +50 words)

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We do not have enough space here to cover some of the main arguments of Husserl’s philosophical position but we can refer to one of Husserl’s most famous students, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who argued against the atemporality (or the neglect of historical time) of phenomenological methods. In *Being and Time* of 1927 (*Sein und Zeit*), Heidegger casts the essence of human existence as being-in-the-world. Subjectivity is a sustained process of production; the world is the result of our projections and we are continually involved with the objects of our consciousness. ‘Being’, thus, is not a pure presence separable from time. Heidegger proposes the concept of ‘Dasein’ (from German, “existence” but also meaning “being-there”). ‘Being’ has no fixed nature but is always in the process of being invented. Thus Heidegger insists on the the historical situation of the one who perceives.

Heidegger's discussion of aesthetics in "The Origin of the Work of Art" marks a transition between his early and his later ideas and shows him moving away from phenomenological terms. Heidegger sees phenomenology as being intertwined with hermeneutics since phenomena, not being always apparent, require interpretation. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art' Heidegger's main concern is to explore the relationship between art and truth. His argument poses that art is more fundamental than either the artist or the work of art. The origin of the work of art cannot be the artist since our recognition of the creator takes place via the evaluation of a work as a work of art. Heidegger gives art a close proximity to truth. Truth does not consist in correctness or in a straightforward congruence with reality; it designates a close correspondence with Being. By placing art as the means of the realization of truth, where truth happens and becomes, Heidegger gives to art a position of privilege. He sees poetry as the essence of all art because Being discloses itself only in language.

Heidegger and Language

In the later part of his career, Heidegger is deeply concerned with language based on his argument that it cannot simply reflect reality. Heidegger's obsession with language comes with his conclusion that "Language defines the hermeneutic relation". Hermeneutics is important because it brings tidings through exposition, "a recovering of the hidden significance of the messages which are destined to us in language" (David Woods). In other words, as explained by Hubert Dreyfus, "language has the crucial role of reflecting and focusing the current practices in any epoch". You might understand this by translating it to mean: the practices to be found in society at a given point of time come to be focused in language, get a name therein. Heidegger is not saying the obvious - that language names what is already there. That would be mere reflection. What we get here is that language is like the turning of a focus and thus bringing to realisation what it names.

Roman Ingarden is probably the best known of the students of Husserl, who applied phenomenology to aesthetics as in *The Literary Work of Art* (1930) or *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (1968). In keeping with Husserl's ideas, he distinguishes between ontology (inquiry into the essence) of literature and its phenomenology (inquiry into its perception).

In *The Literary Work of Art* he investigates the ideal structure of the work of art. The literary work is an object which has an intentional structure. A problem that his inquiry brings up is the conflict between idealism and realism. Empirical objects in the world are real, as distinct from our abstractions (circles or squares) which are ideal with no empirical existence. Of these two categories, literary works of art occupy neither as they have no empirical existence nor are they ideal since they are not unchanging (they change with every reader, or even with the same reader at different moments). As he argues, the literary work of art is ontologically heteronomous, with no determinate form or autonomy but dependent on an act of consciousness. Originating in the mind of the author, the real word signs that constitute the text and the ideal meanings to be drawn from the sentences give it its continued existence.

Ingarden is concerned with indeterminacy and its elimination during the reading process. Our cognition, as we interact with the literary work, is active in relation with all its aspects. Ingarden's main attempt is to account for the wide variations in individual responses to the same literary work. He proposes the concepts "concretization" and "concretion". Concretization refers to the bridging of the gaps that a reader accomplishes, any move by the reader to fill in a place of indeterminacy. 'Concretization' is to be distinguished from 'concretion' which refers to the more concrete realisation of potentials in the text (as the perceptual experience we have when a play is staged).

Stop to Consider:

The view of art and language in phenomenology (Husserl) and Sartrean existentialism

By erasing the line dividing appearance from essence, the argument in phenomenology posits that reality consists in the sensory material with which we come into immediate contact. In the arguments used by both phenomenology and existentialism, art is that sphere which represents the process of becoming. In this, art is not simply something limited to surface impressions but is the process which gives shape to the world. Art holds special importance in the phenomenological scheme of reality. This assertion continues down the line extending from Kant to Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Phenomenology tries to overcome the dualism of 'interior-exterior' inherent in both empiricism and Cartesian rationalism. As consciousness is always consciousness of something, it follows that the very fact of experience points to an object or realm independent of experience. The conceptual distinctions that we apply to experience are studied by phenomenology as part of its attempt to redescribe appearances. From this angle, writing is of great significance as it involves the imposition of generalities on particular experiences. Language and the manner in which description occurs is of especial importance to phenomenology.

In the terms of Sartrean existentialism, writing is of special importance due to the way in which it separates consciousness and experience. For Sartre, the changing of an experience to be described through verbal description becomes a theory of the self as well as that of the committed writer.

The relation of truth and language posed important concerns for other schools of philosophy as well. Immanuel Kant can be named as the philosopher who espoused artistic autonomy. The Kantian distinction between 'phenomena' and 'noumena' stands as an important contribution in giving to the world of appearances a firm foundation. Phenomena refers to objects as they appear to us; noumena refers to objects that may be, in themselves, outside our experience but are thinkable. Kant thought of art as being autonomous based on the argument that what is beautiful lies outside the realm of conceptual thought. This does not imply that aesthetic judgment is arbitrary. Kant's explanation is that "Beauty is not a concept of an object, and a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment." Those objects belonging to the realm of the Beautiful do not need conceptualization. What is beautiful is recognized as the object of necessary pleasure. Kant's thoughts of the objects of aesthetic pleasure as being autonomous in relation to affective, economic or political interests takes into view the ideal observer who regards these objects with disinterested pleasure, seeing them as purposiveness without purpose. To some extent, Kantian aestheticism underlies the doctrine of 'art for art for art's sake' as also the belief in the autonomy of art in New Criticism. It is possible to compare Kant's view of the Beautiful as "analogous to the linguist's view of the expression plane: neither can be reduced to conceptual knowledge." (Peter V.Zima)

German idealism, which rejected the notion of things-in-themselves, posited a break between language and the world. Truth does not relate to a correspondence between language and the world. With the conception of language and thought to be self-referential and the conception of the world being constructed through the role of the perceiver, came a profound effect on the conception of truth in language. This came to be addressed by the founder of mathematical logic, Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) who upheld a distinction between ‘sense’ and ‘reference’ leading to a reassertion of the relation between truth and language. Frege is remembered for his work *Begriffsschrift* (no English equivalent for the term but roughly meaning, “the putting of concepts into notation”) of 1879, *The Foundations of Arithmetic* of 1884, two volumes with the English title *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic* of 1893 and 1903. Bertrand Russell (with whose autobiography you are already familiar) drew attention to Frege’s work in 1903. Frege did the work of developing a theory of meaning showing mathematics to be objectively valid. He equated the meaning of statements in general (not only mathematical statements) with their truth conditions. This meant looking at those features in statements that related them to truth or falsehood.

Frege’s work can be taken to pinpoint the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy. Frege’s ideas began an entirely new philosophical direction and led Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein to develop logical analysis as the inquiry into the ‘logical forms’ of sentences. This inserted a distinction between the ‘logical forms’ of sentences and their grammatical (often misleading) forms. Russell’s own work and the work of others like Rudolf Carnap (*Logische Syntax der Sprache*, 1934) helped to reveal how ‘logical syntax’ functioned, and how patterns of inference occur. How language latches onto, as it were, the world thus came to be clear. We should take up the description given by Peter Lamarque of this work in philosophy: “Thus was the linguistic turn born. An ambitious programme, as well as a methodology, in philosophy grew out of the revolution in logic. The new symbolism of Frege and Russell, which made logic a powerful tool of linguistic analysis, led to a focus on language unparalleled in the history of philosophy.”

Richard Rorty, who published *The Linguistic Turn* (1967), describes ‘linguistic philosophy’ as “the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use.” Three directions

can be seen in philosophy from this juncture with reference to which we can say that Wittgenstein was influential for all three courses of development. However, by the 1960s the optimism resulting from the linguistic turn in philosophy subsided and by the 1970s very few aligned themselves with linguistic philosophy although analytic philosophy found new support.

Philosophical Inputs into Literary Theory

Arthur Schopenhauer is important for the tradition he opened up in the anti-Hegelian mode. His ideas were later taken up by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, Husserl, Heidegger, and Derrida. We remember him for the extensive influence he had on Wittgenstein. Schopenhauer anticipated the ideas of Freud in seeing the conscious mind as being limited; as seeing sexuality to be central to the economy of human motives; and as seeing the unconscious as the seat of our motives, to name some features. In seeing 'energy' as lying behind the matter in this world Schopenhauer (like Kant) voiced an idea which has been borne out by twentieth-century physics.

He had wide influence on creative artists, examples of which we can see in the works of Hardy, Conrad, Turgenev, Proust, and Thomas Mann, and the composer, Wagner, among others. The anti-bourgeois, anti-Enlightenment strain in Schopenhauer's thought places philosophy and poetry as the way of release from constraints of the utilitarian and materialism of the bourgeois world. For him, poetry and philosophy could lead to true knowledge of the underlying reality of the world of being, the reality behind the phenomena. As art is the work of genius, "genius is the capacity to remain in a state of pure perception, to remove from the service of the will the knowledge which originally existed only for this service." Schopenhauer saw the function of art as cognitive, not as expressive. The aesthetic perspective gives us knowledge of ideas rather than of the object as individual thing. In the view of poetry as encapsulating objective and disinterested knowledge, Schopenhauer is similar to Henri Bergson and Matthew Arnold.

Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, represents a challenge to mainstream Western thought. His ideas opposed the legacy of Platonic philosophy, the ideals of the Enlightenment and those of Christianity. Nietzsche's ideas pose a fundamental challenge to the basic assumptions of Western thought and cannot be subsumed under any generalizing label. We can see his influence in existentialism, modernism, on Marxism of the Frankfurt School, the poststructuralism of Derrida and Foucault, as even in the philosophy of science. In many ways Nietzsche anticipates later forms of positivism, the ideas of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey.

At the level of metaphysics, Nietzsche makes a sustained effort to overturn the concept of truth. His effort was to reveal ambivalences and contradictions of important concepts in European metaphysics. Much before the advent of deconstruction he showed that metaphysics was based on neat distinctions between apparently oppositional values (truth/lie, good/evil). This is summed up in his question, “What, then, is truth?”, answered by “a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms”.

1.3.2 HISTORICAL APPROACHES

Changes in historical methodology have had a critical impact in revising older notions of art, culture and society. The support for these changes has come from literary criticism. First of all, however, you may need to be clear as to what historicism has attempted through its practices. A visible problem for historians is how to grasp the past, whether this can be adequately done so that the past becomes available on its own terms, especially in the light of our superior knowledge. Since this involves hindsight, it also becomes a question of how much hindsight can actually change our understanding of the past. Related here is the notion that the past can also be characterised through its conception of its future, how it judges the consequences of its actions. The advantage we have, being situated in our time, over the past cannot be ignored since we know what actually followed on the actions of the past. R.G. Collingwood declares (in *The Idea of History*) that the past may be seen as “the reconstruction of an ideal object in the interests of knowing the present”. Our knowledge of the past can also perhaps alter our understanding of the present than merely confirm it. If you survey the western intellectual tradition, you will see how all these ideas animate discussions in it. You may find these notions in Plato’s theory of knowledge, in Kierkegaard, in Nietzsche, as also in Walter Benjamin.

Historicism has brought many innovations into critical practice. It has usually been seen to provide a contrast with excessive formalism which, again, has come to be associated with poststructuralist techniques so pervasive in recent literary theory. But we should keep in mind that historicism has been central to nearly all of western intellectual movements. Historicism binds criticism to philosophy and to historical practices.

SAQ:

Collingwood's definition above helps us to see the past in very detached terms. Do you think his definition is tenable (or acceptable)? What, do you think, is meant by "ideal object"? (50 + 20 words)

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Paul Hamilton observes that almost all critical movements, regardless of how formalist they might seem to be, claim to be historicist. These claims are justified thus: "By virtue of their location of historicism's workings in apparently ahistorical linguistic structures, these readings declare themselves to be wiser in and more knowing about the cunning of reason, as Hegel called it, than approaches which deal more ostensibly in the currency of historical context. History effaces itself with consummate, more self-defining artistry behind just those discursive mechanisms which appear to transcend it." You may find this sentence difficult to understand unless you are familiar with the arguments for and against historical study. Formalist theories (as also theorists influenced by Saussurean linguistics) generally tend to prefer to base their arguments on ahistorical premisses; to perceive structures in synchronic, timeless terms. Those who help to situate the working of historicism in seemingly 'history-neutral' linguistic structures do in fact show the very historicity of those structures. Thus their historicism is more subtle and anterior to historicist approaches!

How do poststructuralists take their stand regarding historicism? Anti-Hegelian poststructuralists accept the idea forwarded by Kant and Hegel that we cannot think without concepts. But what happens when an individual uses a generalising concept? Should we take note of the individual element that must surely enter here? What further happens when many individuals use generalising concepts? Do they mean in exactly the same terms? We could even, perhaps, take the view that with each historically individual application of a concept, the generalisation undergoes alteration. This is a view acceptable to the poststructuralists. The description of this process given by Theodor Adorno, is "disenchantment of the concept". (in *Negative Dialectics*)

“Historicism opposes criticism which empirically identifies historical knowledge with history; but historicism is equally antagonistic towards a criticism which idealistically sees formalism as transcending historical consciousness rather than being a product of it. . . .Historicism does not offer unequivocal interpretations of the text in front of it in accordance with concepts of literary criticism, historical criticism achieves its ends by contextualising its interpretation of literary expression by reference to events or other discourses contemporary with that expression. Historicist criticism . . . interposes another plane of interpretation which takes as its subject those present prejudices or assumptions by which such historical critics decide that something is indeed historically relevant.” (Paul Hamilton) The definitions here are brought to you to show you how historical criticism is related to many issues of interpretation and constructions of knowledge itself. Knowledge of history does not make us historicist; formalism is itself a product of history. In other words formalism should be seen as the attribute of a combination of historical traits and conditions. Historical relevance of an object is itself perhaps historically determined through the assumptions of the moment. Perhaps we can see here that the ‘God’s plenty’ we find in Chaucer’s *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* is a quality issuing from our own dispositions and cannot be taken to typify either Chaucer’s original innovations or to be unique in any sense! Our interpretations of a literary text may actually be derivations of our contemporary concerns.

These issues spread over to other areas of inquiry as well: “Literature, ideas and their possible *historical* interrelation are . . . problems of very wide interest and import for twentieth-century literary studies.” (Timothy Bahti) The history of ideas has been of great interest to literary studies especially since 1933 and 1936 when A.O.Lovejoy produced *The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea*. How are ideas in history defined? Lovejoy’s answer to the question is that ideas are “the persistent dynamic factors . . . that produce effects in the history of thought” and that these are “the elements, the primary and persistent or recurrent dynamic units, of the history of thought”. The contributions to literary theory from this field of inquiry take up, briefly, the questions of “whether literary criticism, literary history, and literary theory can do without both a privileging of literature *vis-à-vis* history and a privileging of historical periods within history.” (Bahti) This can have, as you would see, important implications for the way in which we normally conduct our literary studies.

SAQ:

Attempt both an “historical” and a “formal” analysis of a well-known ode of your choice. (You could try one of Keats’s odes.) (70 words)

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Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 - 1975)

His name stands as one of the leading theorists of language, and of the novel, in the twentieth century. The concepts of “dialogism”, “carnival”, “heteroglossia”, or “polyphony” are indelibly associated with his work. In his famous first essay on the novel, “Discourse in the Novel” of 1934-35, he explains that “the study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract “formal” approach and an equally abstract “ideological” approach. Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon - social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors”. This brief glance at his stance will enable you to understand the scope of Bakhtin’s work.

Bakhtin’s view of the novel is involved with his view of language as much as with his critique of the history of philosophy, together with understanding subjectivity, objectivity and the mechanisms of understanding. Bakhtin historicises language by seeing it as being placed within society and thus carrying much ideological baggage with it. “The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance.”

Hans Robert Jauss, together with Wolfgang Iser, is associated with the approach developed at the University of Constance in West Germany in the late 1960s and early ’70s. This approach, known as ‘The Aesthetics of Reception’ (*Rezeptionsästhetik*), came to be known in the English-speaking world only around 1980 when some translations were made. This school of thought is really a response to the changes and the reforms undertaken in post-war West Germany in this period. The title of Jauss’ celebrated lecture in 1967 was ‘Literary history as a provocation to literary scholarship’ capturing the idea of the revitalization of approaches to texts. The main

target that Jauss aimed at was to respond to the Marxist demand for historicism in literary studies and yet to keep abreast of Russian Formalist advances in aesthetic approaches. In Jauss' considerations, the Marxist-Formalist dichotomy posed the extrinsic-intrinsic divide. Jauss' strategy is to foreground the interaction between reader and text but what is important for us here is to note that literary history is the platform for our perspective on any particular text. Jauss stands for 'reader-reception theory' of which you will find more details in the next unit (Unit 2). Historicity is an important aspect of any literary text or piece of writing and what Jauss proves is that "the aesthetics of reception entails not only the introduction of the reader as a guide to value and interpretation, but implicitly a model for understanding encounters with the past in which we simultaneously form and are formed by artefacts." (R.Holub)

Historicism shows itself most powerfully in approaches like feminism and postcolonialism. Both of these enterprises explore and negotiate the suppressions and erasures over the ages through various social mechanics leading to a state generally assumed to give us 'normality'. Studies in postcolonialism and in feminism engage, in subversive fashion, with history and historicism while making the negotiations mentioned above as they attempt to address the pervasive inequities that belonged to the preceding ages and had underlain their establishment. You will read more in detail about these two literary approaches in the units below.

Check Your Progress:

Write short notes on the following:

1. *Scrutiny*
2. The critical tradition of Matthew Arnold
3. 'The Linguistic Turn'
4. The doctrine of impersonality in poetry
5. (Old) historicisms and New Historicism
6. Phenomenology and the attention to language
7. *Rezeptionsästhetik*
8. Marxist-formalist debate
9. Heteroglossia
10. Carnival

The pervasiveness of the historical standpoint can be understood by remembering the words of Raymond Williams in his famous work, *The Long Revolution* (1961): “If all activity depends on responses learned by the sharing of descriptions, we cannot set ‘art’ on one side of a line and ‘work’ on the other; we cannot submit to be divided into ‘Aesthetic Man’ and ‘Economic Man’.” Looking at this statement closely, you can see that it lays stress on language through the passage of history. Again, it implies that the division between ‘art’ and ‘work’ or the difference between the aesthetic and the economic aspects of human existence are distinctions evolving through time. Our responses to diverse occurrences are determined through conventions of explanations. Williams was making out a case for a new form of cultural history which would investigate “the historically specific institutions through which culture is transmitted”. In this way Williams sought to revise the study of cultural products, or ‘culture’, not as mere reflection of the economic base (the economic and material base) but as the set of institutions and practices evolving through historical periods (even while taking the impact of the base) in very concrete fashion. Williams, therefore, called it ‘cultural materialism’ to distinguish and to identify his position against conventional Marxist notions of culture. The “manifest forms of culture production” (John Drakakis) are sought to be investigated through a preoccupation with materialist concerns in this kind of intellectual enterprise which was already to be seen in such works as Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) in which he had tried to bring to the fore the cultural and literary production of the English working classes.

Similarly, E.P.Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) marked an attempt to chart a new socialist history in terms of the radicalism which went back to the mid-seventeenth century in England. Such works relate to Williams’ cultural materialism in exploring the connections between non-literary textual production and literary work against a background of English class-politics. However, we also have to remark on the fact that such work was taking place against a heavy influence of ‘continental theory’. This happened through numerous translations of the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*, Barthes’ *Mythologies*, Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* and his *Writing and Difference*, Pierre Macherey’s *A Theory of Literary Production*. The journal *Screen* was also instrumental in generating discussions of culture. A

definite intellectual reorientation took place and by the late 1970s and early 80s it was possible to read the changes in volumes like *Language and Materialism* by Rosalind Coward and John Ellis which recorded the effects of Saussurean structuralism. In that very year (1977), too, was brought out Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* as also some selections from his *Ecrits*. Coward and Ellis therefore were to propose that one could not place conventional psychoanalytic views as preceding discourse — the human psyche could not be modelled beyond the reach of culture and discourse. Such theoretical influences comprised a major challenge to classical Marxism. In 1985, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield were raising questions as to the status of literary texts. In 1982, Peter Widdowson spoke of “the ‘crisis’ in English” in terms which asked “as to what English *is*, where it has got to, whether it has a future, whether it *should* be a discrete discipline, and if it does, in what ways it might be reconstituted”.

1.3.3 PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACHES

Storytelling and literary analysis provide common ground to both literature and psychoanalysis. In 1956, Roman Jakobson picked up Freud's terms ‘condensation’ and ‘displacement’ and equated them with metaphor and metonymy in his essay ‘Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances’. Lionel Trilling, in *The Liberal Imagination* (1964) called psychoanalysis “a science of tropes, of metaphor and its variants, synecdoche and metonymy” which bears out what he had observed in 1947: that “Freudian psychology makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind”. All of the above should make it clear to you that it is almost inevitable that psychoanalytic positions should bring to bear on literary theory its concepts.

A summary glance at Freud's works:

Studies on Hysteria (with Josef Breuer, 1895)

The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)

The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1901)

Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious; ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’ (1905)

Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1910)
Totem and Taboo (1912 - 13)
Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)
Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921)
The Ego and the Id (1923)
“Dostoevsky and Parricide” (1928)
Civilization and its Discontents (1930)

Freud provided another connection between literature and psychology: his dream interpretation and his case studies followed the traditional assumption that a ‘true meaning’ underlay the images or narrative. This should also be taken to show that Freud himself saw language as posing the problem of meaning - simplistic notions of literal meaning as inapplicable. He deployed literary devices in his writings and formulated major concepts on the basis of literary models. Freud extended the analogy of narration to the psychoanalytic process itself: a fiction is engendered in the psychoanalyst by virtue of the patient’s neurosis, within which the traumatic event experienced by the patient takes its place for explanation. Freud viewed literary texts much as he viewed dreams and applied the concept of wish fulfillment to his literary analyses. If you take up one of his best-known concepts, the Oedipus complex, you can apprehend just how closely Freud keeps to literary works. The creative process is by nature amenable to psychoanalytic interpretation but here, what is perhaps most striking, is that Freud grounds his theory in literary works.

Freud and literature:

“Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”, 1907:

Initially a lecture, in this essay Freud attempts to explain the process at work in creative writers. He traces the pleasure of phantasy to the playful constructions of childhood. For the adult who day-dreams, or phantasizes, this activity is to be kept secret. Daydreams, or fantasies, operate as wish-fulfillments. Developing his arguments, Freud opens up the field to certain lines of critical analysis. The psychology of the author is linked to the creative work in an integral manner, art is sketched out in terms of fundamental psychic tendencies and art and literature are brought into line with other forms of human activity.

Freudian interpretations characterise the work of his biographer Ernest Jones (*Hamlet and Oedipus*, 1948), Otto Rank (*The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, 1909), Ella Freeman Sharpe, Marie Bonaparte, Melanie Klein. Others who have resorted to psychoanalysis for their interpretations are I.A. Richards, William Empson, Lionel Trilling, Kenneth Burke, Edmund Wilson and Harold Bloom. Writers like Robert Graves and W.H. Auden were influenced by Freudian thinking; so were William Faulkner and James Joyce. Critics like Simon O. Lesser and Norman Holland, feminist critics like Juliet Mitchell and Julia Kristeva, and Herbert Marcuse (of the Frankfurt School) are among many others who are, in various ways, indebted to Freud.

Carl Gustav Jung differed widely from Freud in that he incorporated models from anthropology. His work takes the form of archetypal criticism as so productively used by Northrop Frye and Maud Bodkin. Jacques Lacan applied to Freudian psychology the insights of linguistics and structuralism. You will be reading about him in the unit below (no.5) so we do not need to detail his views here. However, Lacan is extremely interesting due to his re-reading of Freud and the manner in which he connects his study of the unconscious with language.

1.3.4 POSTMODERNIST THEORIES

Literary critics first used the term 'postmodernism' in the 1950s to describe the literary experiments arising out of aesthetic modernism (Patricia Waugh). Poets like Charles Olson, critics like William Spanos who was also the editor of *Boundary 2*, a well-known journal, remarked on a new literature which no longer exalted the human figure, and was anti-human in seeing 'man', like any other object, as being situated in the world. The emphasis in this kind of writing lay emphasis on situatedness or immanence, believing in contingent (or conditional) experience, on culture as complicit with other social practices, and opposed to the modernist writing which derived support from New Critical ideas and in other aesthetics which stressed "objectivity, transcendence and impersonality".

By the time of the eighties, "the term had shifted from the description of a range of aesthetic practices involving 'double-coding', playful irony, parody, parataxis, self-consciousness, fragmentation and the mixing and meshing of

high and popular culture, to a use which encompassed a more general shift in thought and which seemed to register a pervasive cynicism towards the progressivist ideals of modernity.” Postmodernists often refer to Nietzsche’s statement: “ We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual: whereas nature is acquainted with forms and no concepts . . . but only with an X which remains inaccessible and undefinable for us.” (Nietzsche, ‘On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense’). One way of understanding postmodernism is by relating it to Jean-François Lyotard’s proclamation in 1979 that the modernity bequeathed by the Enlightenment was now confronting a ‘legimitation crisis’ from which it could not hope to recover. What does this tell us? It is recognition of the profound change and transformation that Western society was in the grip of. One aspect contained the question of the status of knowledge. As Waugh points out, “Since the Enlightenment itself, there had, of course, always been an anti-Enlightenment current in philosophy and art . . . but never before had it seemed to chime so convincingly with the changes taking place in western societies.” In the 1960s, the changes in western societies took the shape of increased dependence on technologies, expansion of post-industrialisation, greater consumerism and ‘lifestyle niche’ advertising, more democratisation and wider access to secondary and higher education, the globalisation of information technology, growth of mass media, the spread of youth and sub-cultures, the spread of the ‘knowledge’ industries, ‘the retreat from both colonialism and utopianism in politics’, and the emergence of new identity politics based on gender, race and sexuality. This went in parallel with changes in artistic and literary expressions accompanied by scepticism towards positivist thought and science. This was also when western governments were undertaking the reconstruction of their post-war states and societies within the structures of ‘welfare capitalism’.

SAQ:

Attempt explanations of “post-industrialisation”, “consumerism”, “sub-cultures”, “identity politics”, “positivism”, “welfare capitalism”. (80 words)

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Yet another definition of postmodernism itself strikes at the heart of the term. The argument can be seen like this: postmodernism appears to name the unnameable, as Fredric Jameson believes. It attempts “to find a form in which to represent the seemingly unrepresentable global networks of technologised late capitalist culture”. In postmodernism, a work of art might be seen as a parodic re-presentation of an earlier avant-garde’s work, or as showing surface without depth so typical of consumerist culture, or as making the best of whatever is at hand, thus bringing to us the notion that in our world where the object of knowledge cannot be known transcendentally, it can only be known from a situated standpoint. Thus knowledge is dependent on perspective. In this state of affairs postmodernist art is the only form that can become critique. Again, if postmodernism itself, as a “mood” of western late capitalism, is the name of a ‘legitimation crisis’ of western systems of knowledge and political structures, or is the name of a variety of aesthetic or cultural practices, then we cannot be certain of the validity of the term itself. We cannot be sure of any ‘theorising’ under the name of postmodernism since no object of knowledge is separate from the means of knowing it — language games are productive of objects of knowledge; there can be no grand narrative that tells us of ‘postmodernity’. Thus postmodernism denies its own status as an object of knowledge since the ‘grand narrative’ of theory has not valid foundation. Nietzsche’s warning (quoted above) thus provides a valid reference-point. Waugh also uses a quotation from Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* (1864) to preface her account of postmodernism:

“Where are the primary causes on which I can take my stand, where are my foundations? Where am I to take them from? I practise thinking, and consequently each of my primary causes pulls along another, even more primary, in its wake, and so on *ad infinitum*.”

Modernity & modernism:

This happens to be a most disputed, discussed term. Its manifestations are to be seen in concrete terms in music, architecture, dance, in pictorial art, or in visual representation. We normally associate the term with trends in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, but the term had made its appearance even at earlier junctures to denote a certain kind of consciousness. In that sense, modernism is not unique to the point of time we have mentioned above. If we try

to examine the problem posed by the question, what is modernism, historically, then we can turn to France in the late seventeenth century and to Germany about a hundred years later when the ‘quarrel’ of the ancients and the moderns took place. For literature and aesthetics this ‘*querrelle des anciens et des modernes*’ (quarrel of the ancients and the moderns) is an important marker.

The debate revolved around the paradoxical issue that certain areas of knowledge had advanced in modern societies. In areas like science and technology, modern societies were definitely better than what had been the case in ancient Greece and Rome. In the aesthetic arena, however, the ancient works were better than, or at least equal to, what modern societies were capable of producing. What a scrutiny would show is that art had gradually broken free of classical norms. Equally true was the fact that there had occurred an evolution in consciousness and concepts.

This quarrel, in Germany of the early nineteenth century, changes its shape with the adoption of ‘romantic’ and ‘classic’ in place of ‘ancients’ and ‘moderns’. Also, the view began to come into focus that classical art faced its demise, and romantic art arose, as part of a larger historical process. The resolution of the quarrel thus did not mean taking any one side. So the realisation came to be that rather than aiming at the description of differences, evolution and process should explain the bases of classical and romantic, or ancient and modern. Aesthetic or literary norms should be seen as open to modification and thus originality and creativity are the only invariable features. If the modernism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is to be seen as the consciousness of a break with tradition then its intellectual beginnings can be traced back to the “romantic endeavour to distinguish itself historically from classicism”. (Robert Holub)

1.4 UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPTS

Representation occurs in thoughts, pictures, words, and sentences, all of them suggesting a relation between two things (“x represents y”). But the existence of the relation does not necessarily imply that the thing represented exists (a picture of a unicorn does not mean that it exists). So, representations do not always reflect a pre-existing reality. A representation represents only because it is interpreted. Ultimately, it represents whatever it is capable of suggesting. (Wittgenstein showed how the picture of man walking uphill could also be a picture of a man sliding backwards down a slope)

Meaning has been a central concern of philosophers and linguists. It refers to questions over the relationship between language and reality; between

words and things; between words and ideas; how words convey certain meanings and concepts; whether language embodies universal principles; whether meaning is possible without saying; essentialism; and whether what the world 'is' or what we 'take it' to be are equivalent. Ideas about language are woven together with ideas about knowledge, reason, truth, and meaning. Two definable positions related to questions regarding meaning are realism and nominalism.

Reading and textuality constitute two aspects of our cultural existence. Reading is now recognised as not a mere physical but a cultural act which has to do with our modern social existence in which we decipher and decode countless signs, cultural artefacts, texts of communication, or objects which convey varieties or different levels of meaning. We can only make sense of our lives by constantly reading the texts brought to us by our historical circumstances, our social sites, our political systems, and the abundant supply of images available to us. The world in which we live can also be conceived of as a text not linear in structure but as a medley of narratives which can even turn back on itself.

1.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have read a lot about some disciplines which are allied with literature. You might be wondering whether this will help you in the exams! Just keep in mind the fact 'literature' itself is a term hard to define or to describe. An advantage that students of literature have over many other disciplines is that its study leads us to cross many borders. We often have to know something of economics (to understand who the yeoman is in Chaucer), political theory (to understand the 'subaltern' in postcolonial studies), philosophy (to explain the 'action' in *Waiting for Godot*), and so on. Strong reasons for reading about what has been happening in other disciplines! As you have read so far, you should have been able to grasp why literary theory has acquired its present form. As you read further, over the next many units, you will be able to relate the composite view drawn up here to the particular movements whose details you will find out. Read on. Another point that you must note - no critical movement is worth its salt unless it is able to pose questions, and answer them, in relation to a wide number of textual materials.

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Unit 2

Major Movements

Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction - Developments in Critical Trends
- 2.3 Marxism
 - 2.3.1 New Historicism
 - 2.3.2 Cultural Materialism
- 2.4 Reader Response and Reception Theory
- 2.5 Narratology
- 2.6 Post colonialism
- 2.7 Feminism
- 2.8 Summing up
- 2.9 Reference and Suggested Readings

2.1 OBJECTIVES

We are going to make here a brief survey of the main features of some major critical movements. You should expect that by the time you have finished working through this unit, your understanding of critical movements will enable you to

- *make connections* between literature and critical thought
- *name* the major concepts related to a critical approach, and
- *distinguish* between critical approaches

2.2 INTRODUCTION - DEVELOPMENTS IN CRITICAL TRENDS

A very simple way of describing our present field of study would be to look at the 'contemporary' critical scene of 'theory' and make a list of all the theorists. It would then include Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor,

Pierre Bourdieu, Stuart Hall, Fredric Jameson, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Richard Rorty, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Gianni Vattimo, and Slavoj Žižek. This would be a simply impossible description!

What you should take care to remember is that contemporary theorists draw upon the work of precursors in the critical tradition. However, it is not fully appropriate to say that a clear dividing line can be drawn between contemporary theory and the critical tradition in the background. The thinkers in the field of philosophy have had much impact on non-philosophers in other disciplines. Also, contemporary theory has been deeply influenced by thinkers in the modern European critical intellectual tradition.

SAQ:

Can you identify the nationalities of the thinkers listed above? How many nations are represented in this list? (30 words)

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In the unit above you have read of many nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century thinkers whose work has been very influential. But there are even earlier thinkers whose thought show itself in contemporary thinkers. Let us look at how Jon Simons charts out the connections:

“Foucault’s earlier work is based on a familiarity with Renaissance as well as early modern thought, while his later work delves into Greek, Roman and early Christian thought and culture. Derrida’s deconstruction of Plato is as instructive as his critique of Husserl or Freud, while both he and Levinas reach back to Talmudic sources. . . Rousseau is the central figure in Derrida’s grammatology, as is Spinoza for Deleuze’s concept of expression and Leibniz for his concept of the fold. Derrida and Foucault argued about Descartes, whose dualism of mind and matter continues to haunt contemporary theory as well as the critical tradition that preceded it.”

By this time it must be clear that ‘theory’ as a field of thought is not simple, but that it may help in simplifying abstractions. What we shall cover below

is intended to give you a preliminary view of the range of thinking that constitutes it. It may spur your interest to discover more on your own.

2.3 MARXISM

Marxist theory, in literary terms, is intricately tied up with historicisation. However, it is certainly not limited to that alone. As a comprehensive philosophy it attempts to give a coherent understanding of the nature of our worldly existence. Thus it brings into its purview all aspects, from the economic to the aesthetic, of philosophy.

Historical Materialism:

Friedrich Engels, in the introduction to *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1892), defines historical materialism; that it designates “the view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggle of these classes against one another.” According to William H. Shaw (*A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*), “Historical materialism is not, strictly speaking, a philosophy; rather, it is best interpreted as an empirical theory”.

Society and the nature of individuals are determined not by mere ideas but by the conditions and the activity of material production. These material relations give specific shape to laws, art, religion or morality.

The passage that is taken to clarify the Marxist conception of culture and society is from the preface of 1859 to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. This mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, their social existence that determines their consciousness.”

Engels, in a letter of 1894: “It is not that the economic situation is *cause, solely active*, while everything else is only passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of economic necessity, which *ultimately* always asserts itself.”

Walter Benjamin & Fredric Jameson and others have continued to develop the insights of Marx and Engels. The Frankfurt School thinkers, as also Walter Benjamin, did important work on cultural formations in this age of technology and mass culture. Althusser, Lucien Goldmann, and Pierre Macherey brought into combination with Marxism, ideas of structuralist analysis. Fredric Jameson combines dialectical theory with literary criticism, especially in major works like *The Political Unconscious* (1981).

You may be able to understand Marxist literary theory by first considering what Fredric Jameson has to say, “Always historicise!” This can be taken to mean that cultural products (like literary texts) can be fully understood only when placed against the social relationships of their time. The problem contained herein is that if we see a cultural product as purely a result of the social relationships which gave it shape, the danger lies in not seeing it in absolutely aesthetic terms. Its aesthetic qualities may simply ‘vanish’ if we consider it only in material terms. Its form, for instance, cannot be explicable in purely material terms. We should also be aware that there can be a variety of Marxist approaches to literature. But Marxist approaches themselves are to be identified in the priority they give to the material processes which produce ‘culture’.

Aesthetics in Marx and Engels:

“The aesthetic views of Marx and Engels were shaped and dominated by their ideas about literature (including the texts of dramas), while the other arts scarcely drew their attention. The thoughts, opinions, and incidental comments, offered for the most part in their correspondence, cumulate in several pungent, distinctly original contributions to literary theory (and thus criticism). But these Marxian themes do not form a comprehensive system of literary theory and they are not self-sufficient, being oriented primarily by what tradition terms the ‘content’ rather than the ‘form’ of writing.”

“Class was a crucial element in Marx’s thought . . . and Marxist literary thought is necessarily oriented to the value-clusters in literary production and reception that social class affects. At the same time this theme has to be seen as emerging cumulatively from the insights as well as the errors of numerous critics of specific literary works. Indeed, the key concept for a class analysis of literature - that of class *equivalents* - was provided not by Marx or Engels but by Plekhanov, who may be regarded together with Mehring, as one of the first Marxist literary theorists.” (Lee Baxandall, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*)

Janet Wolff: “theories of the relationship between art or literature and the society in which it arises are indebted to Marx’s formulation, in the 1859 Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, of the metaphor of base and superstructure, in which the aesthetic is explicitly cited as part of the superstructure, and as one of the ‘ideological forms’ in which class conflict is carried out. . . At its crudest, such an account reduces art to nothing more than a reflection of social relations and class structure, automatically produced out of these material features. More complex accounts of art as ideology can be found in the work of more recent writers, for example, Goldmann.”

Walter Benjamin: “Scarcely any twentieth-century author rivals Walter Benjamin’s influence on the contemporary understanding of art and the aesthetic implications of new media. Benjamin stated that “I have been concerned with the meaning of the connection between the beautiful and appearance (*Schein*) in the realm of language.” . . . a cursory glance at Benjamin’s collected works will reveal that the majority of his texts explore the theory of representation in literature. . . For Benjamin . . . the study of literature addresses not only the ways in which linguistic representation must be distinguished from visual or auditory media, but the possibility that all art may constitute a negation of expression as such. . . For Benjamin, art is of crucial importance for any political project because it forces us to evaluate what we mean when we say we understand something historically.”

Marxism tries to place literature within society. The “base” is the mode of production, the economic and material infrastructure, while the “superstructure” includes the legal, the political, religious, the philosophical and aesthetic formations whose typical characteristics are decided by the base. This is only the preliminary, unrefined model which was initially used to explain the type of literature and other cultural forms. In this view, literature is assumed to ‘reflect’ a particular mode of production - as in the classic example of Christopher Caudwell’s 1937 study, *Illusion and Reality*. Much earlier, in 1890, Engels had distinguished ‘vulgar’ marxist interpretations from his and Marx’s own. The economic factor, he said, could not be taken as the *only* factor in the production and reproduction of actual life. It is the determining factor only in “the final analysis”. Marx’s own remarks in the *Grundrisse* (c.1857-58) contribute to the debate (on art, etc. as ‘reflection’) by suggesting that the economic mode of production is a consideration in the final analysis, and that the superstructure has its own relative autonomy.

SAQ:

Bring out the significance of the term “materialist” in Marxist approaches to art and literature. (50 words)

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Raymond Williams offers a revision of these terms of economic determinism which gives out a new scope for the materialist conception of literature. In his work of 1980, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, shows the limits of the base-superstructure model and suggests that economic determinism should instead be looked at as setting limits and exerting pressures. Another influential Marxist critic, Lucien Goldmann, spoke of ‘social totality’ and ‘homologies’. This set up parallels and correspondences between different levels of activity. Perhaps the most sweeping revision has come from Louis Althusser who attempted to reconcile the two principles of materialist analysis and the relative autonomy of the superstructure without being reductive.

Althusser found fault with classical ‘humanist’ Marxism which located social contradictions in the economic base thus eventually providing the grounds of revolution. He preferred to theorize society as a combination of different levels of social activity with contradictions specific to each such level. These various contradictions work to either reinforce the others or counteract them. Althusser developed this conception in his major work, *For Marx* (“Contradiction and Overdetermination”), showing the extension of structuralism in his ideas. In the Althusserian conception the elements he pointed to are distinct but interrelated so that change results not from a single cause (which is a contradiction on a particular level) but because contradictions accumulate. No single contradiction (or contradictions) can be taken as cause or even as effects. Each one determines but is also determined within the same movement. Each contradiction is determined by the levels and instance of the social formation that it activates. In principle, this is ‘over-determination’. The economic level is yet the final determination of all other levels but this does not happen mechanically or immediately in particular cases as other elements in the social structure are “relatively autonomous”. As you can see, Althusser’s explanation is structuralist because

the elements conceived are considered to be distinct from each other, but are necessarily interrelated so that none of these can be set apart as the single cause of social transformation. Thus the economic determinant may be the ‘ultimate’ or the ‘dominant’ one but that ‘ultimate’ stage cannot be isolated since the political and the ideological determinants will also be simultaneously evident.

The ‘materialist’ perspective on literature:

Materialist approaches to literature are likely to take into account details about a book’s production including publication, printing and bookselling, and its reception by an audience. This aspect, however, is not the sole privilege of marxist approaches. Feminist approaches and postcolonial approaches also can deploy such methods in their total analyses. While conventional marxist analysis tends to exclude, on these grounds, more abstract concerns of the book’s formal features or its metaphysical alignments, there is deeper problem that troubles such analysis. If a book, like a human individual, is merely the *result* or the *effect* of its material circumstances, then its potential or capacity to be the agent of change cannot be explained. It may be worthwhile to remember that Eliot’s *Wasteland* was definitely the *product* of its time, —post-war society — but the extensive influence it cast on a new generation of poets who were experimenting with new forms, remains to be accounted for. What happens to English poetry thereafter cannot be explained by a “mechanical materialism”. Marx commented on the limits of the doctrine in *Theses on Feuerbach*: “The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated.”

We can compare this with Shelley’s preface to *Prometheus Unbound*: “Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are in one sense the creators, and in another the creations, of their age”. This is the problem of dialectics which forms the content of Marxist thought. Literary texts derive their shape from the contexts of their production and distribution but equally, they also exert a determining influence on these contexts.

Check Your Progress:

1. How do Marxist critics relate literary texts to cultural production? Give a brief sketch of typical approaches.

2. Write briefly on Althusser's incorporation of structuralism with Marxist conceptions of literary activity.
3. Explain the Marxist notion of the materiality of culture.
4. Give a brief assessment of the contribution of Lukacs to studies of realism and modernism.

The contribution of Georg Lukacs to marxist aesthetics is of great interest in that he attempted to reinterpret the idea of determinism in the conception of historical process. For Lukacs, novels like Sir Walter Scott's for instance, could provide the basis for the historical study of literature, for the "theoretical examination of the interaction between the historical spirit and the great genres of literature which portray the totality of history". He took a consistent stand against modernism and contributed extensively to the study of realism, especially in the 1930s and 1940s. Brecht, however, thoroughly called into question Lukacs' canon of realist writers and the definition of realism that he theorised. Lukacs led a sustained attack on modernism in his *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1958). Lukacs' analysis of modernism occurs through his study of Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann.

In his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Lukacs showed himself to be an unorthodox Marxist by claiming that Marxism is a method rather than doctrine. This work was greatly admired by the leading thinkers of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. It was this anti-doctrinal stance of Lukacs which eventually led them to develop the analytical method, 'Critical Theory'.

SAQ:

Attempt a historical comparison between 'realism' and 'modernism'.
(70 words)

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Adorno and Horkheimer are most remembered for their critique of the Enlightenment, the study of totalitarian and fascistic trends in modern democracies, and their analysis of modern culture. Max Horkheimer had been director (from 1930) of the Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt, founded in 1923. Adorno's contributions to the Frankfurt School were in collaboration with Horkheimer, of which the best known is the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). This collaboration took shape most of all during their wartime exile in America. Critical Theory combines insights from Freudian psychoanalysis (with Horkheimer) with Marxist critique of ideology. *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) was the result of the study of anti-semitic fascism in Nazi Germany. Adorno's attempt was the exploration of a new method which could be grounded in both psychoanalysis and Marxism. The particular focus which occupied both Horkheimer and Adorno regarded the study of modernity and the space it provided to totalitarian thinking. In this connection, the two philosophers probe the darker workings of reason which, since the Enlightenment, was considered to have made social progress possible. The critique of modern cultural forms under the label of "culture industry" probes the cultural forms and the processes by which capitalism maintains its hold over society through a form of 'mass deception' cast as entertainment which is, however, the instrument ideologically slanted to reinforce capitalist economies.

Frankfurt School:

The most prominent members of this school of thought are, besides Horkheimer and Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas, with other members of the Institute - Friedrich Pollock, Erich Fromm, Franz Neumann, Otto Kirchheimer, Leo Lowenthal, as also to some extent, Walter Benjamin. A most influential line in their thought has been their critical attitude towards Marxism itself. 'Critical theory' is the name applied to the line of thinking issuing from this school but there were wide differences of opinion among the members. Among the common themes was the effort to develop a critique of ideology, to examine how social conflicts and contradictions are expressed in thought and how such unequal interests get produced and reproduced through domination. By analysing such systems of domination, critical theorists "hoped to enhance awareness of the roots of domination, undermine ideologies and help to compel changes in consciousness and action."

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, influenced partly by the catastrophic times through which they lived, Adorno and Horkheimer undertake an extensive critique of the Enlightenment and its assumption of 'modernity' through the stress on reason. But what the Critical Theorists investigate is how the darker side of this emphasis masks the tendency towards exploitation and the self-preservation it contains.

Ideology was a sustained preoccupation of the critical theorists: "They tried to develop a critical perspective in the discussion of all social practices, that is, a perspective which is preoccupied by the critique of ideology - of systematically distorted accounts of reality which attempt to conceal and legitimate asymmetrical power relations." (David Held, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*)

What is to be understood by 'ideology'? Marx and Engels used the concept to put forth the idea that ideas do not develop independently of their social and political contexts. According to them, the economic base of a society or a culture consists of its mode of production (e.g.: feudal, capitalist, ancient) and the forces and relations of production (the ownership of the means of production decides the power structures). Conflict between the classes drives history. Social change comes with the modifications to the base. Institutions and ideology belong to the superstructure of society and these confirm the relations of power that obtain among the classes. All intellectual production carries the traces of struggle at the material level. Reading, or writing, are both marked by the struggle over meaning and are thus implicated in the relations of power and knowledge. Art is also - but not exclusively - determined by economics although the question is not quite so simple.

Antonio Gramsci (1891 - 1937) uses the concept of 'hegemony' in explaining the relationship between reality and ideology. Power, in this explanation, does not take the form merely of economic or political dominance but of cultural and ethical values. This does away with the idea of coercion since power is not exerted through force alone. The world-view of the ruling classes takes the shape of cultural and ethical values which the rest of society accepts as common sense. Thus the dominance of the ruling classes appears to be a part of the 'natural' order of things and thus convincing even for those who are oppressed by such values. While 'ideology' shows us that ideas and beliefs, practices and representations hold society together, Gramsci's explanation was aimed at showing that political groupings, classes,

and sections live on the basis of a social and political unity among them. This makes clear the fact that ideology takes diverse forms, is embedded in material practices, and that people also are involved in the production of their own conditions. So ideology is not arranged as monoliths restricted to a particular class but allows complex relations of forces rather than simple antagonistic struggles between different classes.

Literature & ideology:

Althusser's account of ideology, indebted to Gramsci (his *Prison Writings*), has been highly influential. Like Gramsci, Althusser is concerned with analysing why people who live within capitalist societies and whose are exploited by these systems continue to support them. His essay of 1970 - 71, entitled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISA), lays out the idea that such societies require that labour power, with attendant skills, are in constant supply. This demand is met through the training and education given out to schoolchildren, and to apprentices, etc. The power of the State is extended in "repressive", or in "ideological" ways. Ideological State Apparatuses include institutions like the Church, the family, culture, the educational system, systems of communication, political systems, sport, the legal system and other forms of organisation (trade unions, for instance).

The repressive power of the state is extended through the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) like the police, the army, the administration, the courts, the government, the prison. The main distinction between the ISA and the RSA is that one operates through ideology, the other through coercion. What this distinction projects is coercion and consent both of which are necessary to the functioning of State power.

Modern society is intricately concerned with the continuation of the capitalist mode of production. When Althusser says: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence", it refers back to the idea that we contribute to the continuance of an exploitative capitalist system by accepting it. This acceptance is unconscious because in capitalism we are encouraged to think of ourselves as individual even though the function to which capitalism allocates us is absolutely replaceable and dispensable. So our perception of our relation to society is crucially different from what that relation really is. And we do not actually recognise this difference.

Althusser sees ideology as both 'material' and as something in which we live. That is to say, we cannot say - ever - that we are 'outside' ideology. Our very subjectivity is constituted by ideology. This is important for his concept of

‘interpellation’ which says that the subject - the individual - comes to recognise itself in language. This is one reason why Althusser has been so important for literary and cultural studies, as much as for feminist theorising.

Althusser stated that art gives us a special knowledge of ideology. Art is neither knowledge nor ideology and the knowledge that it gives us is of a special kind. Even while it remains within ideology, it gives us knowledge of ideology, a special knowledge. Both art and science allow us to know ideology; art allows us to ‘see’ or to perceive it while science allows us to ‘know’ it. Many Marxist thinkers (including Marx himself) had come up with the problem of why certain writers who held political views wrote against those very views. Althusser’s suggestion seems to resolve this problem.

Pierre Macherey took up this question in his *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966, 1978) According to both Althusser and Macherey, ideology, being illusory and full of contradictions, is not embodied in a literary text. Ideology can be made visible in a text because it is made up of multiple, disconnected parts.

You may have noted by now that in order to study culture, we keep turning to the problem of history. New Historicists (of whom you will read below) have distinguished their analytical methods from “old” historicisms. Here it is important for us to relate to what Walter Benjamin posits as a politically oriented sense of history required of Marxist analysis. Rather than view history as a determining background for literature, twentieth-century Marxist critics have “reconceived history as a field of discourse in which literature and criticism make their own impact as political forces and, in effect, participate in an historical dialectic.” In other words, Marxist historicism moves away from seeing literature purely in terms of base and superstructure with literature being shaped by the material ‘base’. “In the Marxist view of literary criticism, the critic is a member of an intellectual class that promotes cultural revolution through a political commitment expressed in literary studies.” (R.Con Davis & R.Schleifer) Contemporary Marxist work situates not only literature, but also criticism. Terry Eagleton argues in *Literary Theory* “that the history of modern literary theory is part of the political and ideological history of our epoch”. Critics like Fredric Jameson, Raymond Williams, Eagleton, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Catherine Belsey, among many others, acknowledge a strong sense that criticism is itself a historically situated activity deeply involving the critic. Thus the critic cannot stand apart from the text but must recognise his or her own effect on the text being read and interpreted.

Check Your Progress:

1. Elaborate on the significance of 'ideology' to Marxist approaches to art and literature.
2. Discuss briefly the work of Marxist critics who have contributed to the analysis of 'culture'.
3. Write short notes on:
 - a) Ideological State Apparatuses
 - b) Base and Superstructure
 - c) Hegemony
 - d) Culture Industry

2.3.1 NEW HISTORICISM

Marxism is more clearly to be seen in 'Cultural Materialism' than in New Historicism, while anthropology makes its presence clearer in New Historicism than in Cultural Materialism, but the two sets of theories share many assumptions in common. In some senses, it has even been pointed out that Cultural Materialism is the British counterpart of American New Historicism. This is not absolutely incorrect but it does not give us the core difference between the two kinds of critical thinking.

Stephen Greenblatt says in his *Learning to Curse* (1990) that in New Historicism is combined many different trajectories: materialism, Marxist and feminist critical practices. New Historicism does, indeed, borrow from different works in theories of language and semiotics, psychoanalysis, cultural history, Marxism, as it places at the centre the work of Michel Foucault (the French historian of discourse) and Clifford Geertz (the American social anthropologist). New Historicism came as a turn to history in literary study after the period of formalism in New Criticism, structuralism and deconstruction. In 1980, Stephen Greenblatt published *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, a collection of essays to describe which he used the phrase "new historicism" (in 1982). This work bore resemblances with Foucault's work which had shown that 'discourses' or language (or vocabularies) which function to organise society, sanctioned by institutions of power, constitute the body of knowledge which shapes western subjectivity. Foucault's studies of madness, sexuality, punishment, medicine, representation, had been

conducted with a Nietzschean perspective on the congruity of knowledge and power, which exerted an influence on left-leaning critics and Marxist literary theory as evident in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (trans. 1968) and Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production*. This helped to create a complex foundation for theorising in literary studies the operations of class, body, text, and power.

You should note certain features about New Historicism: its focus on Shakespeare and the Renaissance, and the focus on culture. New Historicist criticism brings to focus those forces, political, cultural, or textual, which stand in between past and present. The problem for this kind of historicism involves the question of what meanings are to be gleaned from the materials of literature and history. The issue at the forefront is that for history to be meaningful it must be intelligible to us. But intelligibility is not absolute — it is relative to the conditions in which interpretations are being made. Greenblatt's reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* discovers the language games which go beyond purely aesthetic structures into the dark history of "linguistic colonialism". As Greenblatt helps to bring to our notice, our understanding of the past and its meanings, while giving due consideration to its difference from us, is actually tied up with the conflicts of ideology, language and culture.

Studying Shakespeare and the Renaissance:

Historical studies are a relatively new development since for a long period of time historical studies of literature were considered unnecessary. . After Coleridge, and after Romantic literary theory, critics in the early twentieth century - H.H.Furness, E.E.Stoll, Mark Van Doren - regarded Shakespeare's "genius" as transcendental, beyond the contingencies of history or politics. This sort of perception lies behind F.R.Leavis' estimates of 'great writers'. However, a different group of critics regarded Shakespeare as a 'Renaissance Man', whose works 'picture' or 'reflect' their historical background taking in the beliefs and ideas of their time. Critics like J.Dover Wilson, H.B.Charlton, Alfred Hart, E.M.W.Tillyard, and Lily B.Campbell based their readings on such a conception while maintaining, at the same time, that Shakespeare displayed distinctiveness of ability, or a permanent moral vision. Such critics also upheld a clear distinction between fact and fiction, between fiction and a historical reality that can be ascertained through objective facts.

Historicists in recent times, however, hold the idea that to think of literature as reflecting “a historical background of objective facts or moral truths” is not a reading that can give us the best interpretations. What is perhaps more informative or productive is to treat literary texts as ‘plural’. That is, texts take their shape from intersecting vocabularies of diverse social discourses. The most supple form of new historicist reading searches out sometimes surprising, sometimes different, points at which historical and literary vocabulary show up the structures of power which suppress marginal voices.

In the late 1970s and the early 1980s there came out a number of readings of Tudor and Stuart literature concentrated on the contradictions, the conditions and paradoxes of power in their time. In 1982, the British critic Derek Longhurst argued for a reading of Shakespeare which took into account contemporary ideas of family, order, authority, justice, religious beliefs, and so on. In 1985, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield edited a volume, *Political Shakespeare*, to which Greenblatt contributed the essay, “Invisible Bullets”.

Feminist critics have been largely cautious in their endorsement of new historicist approaches even as they have recognised new historicist recovery of suppressed marginal voices of the oppressed in history. There were some pioneering feminist studies of the early modern period in the late nineteen-seventies and the early nineteen-eighties. Some left-wing critics have also seen New Historicism to be not properly Marxist. On the other hand, new historicism can be seen in the studies of Romanticism that followed Marilyn Butler’s *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981). Other major studies include David Simpson’s *Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination* (1987), *Rethinking Historicism: Critical Readings in Romantic History* (1989; edited by Marjorie Levinson, Marilyn Butler, Jerome McGann, Paul Hamilton), and Alan Liu’s *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (1989). New historicism has also given rise to studies of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels.

Marilyn Butler’s study of Romanticism shows the effort to break with the conventions of New Criticism, psychoanalytical and formalist criticism. This reminds us of the re-grounding of literary study that New Historicism attempted. The relationship between literature and history has been brought to the fore in literary studies. As John Brannigan tells us, “the most important achievement which we can attribute to the turn to history is the recognition that the text is an event. For new historicists, literary texts occupy specific

historical and cultural sites, at which, and through which, historical forces clash, and political and ideological contradictions are played out. The concept of the text as event allows us to recognise the temporal specificity of the text, the definite and contingent function of a text in a particular discourse under particular historical conditions. It recognises also that the text is part of the process of historical change, and indeed may constitute historical change. This has shifted critics away from approaching the text as a simple reflection or rejection of historical trends, and instead has led critics to explore what [Louis] Montrose has called 'the historicity of texts and the textuality of history'.

Cultural Studies:

If we look at the title of Matthew Arnold's work, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), we can see how Arnold saw 'culture' as providing a unifying force of shared meanings and values. Arnold's seminal work began a tradition of literary and cultural criticism. This is known as the 'culture and civilisation' tradition in Britain in continuation, and in opposition, of which is to be seen the discipline of cultural studies since the 1960s in the English-speaking world. This tradition was liberal-humanist: "It both assumed the inevitability of progress in western societies towards a higher state of civilisation and stressed the inalienable right of the individual to realise him/herself to the full. It privileged the role of culture, and literature in particular, in this process of self-development." (Chris Weedon)

The work of F.R. Leavis in Cambridge from the 1930s to the 1950s reflects the privileging of literature as the repository of shared meanings and values. Leavis' interest in exploring the relation between culture and society - an integral part of *Scrutiny* - was linked to his conception that industrialisation led to the denigration of social values. This feeling forms the main theme of his work, *Culture and Environment* (1933), published together with Denys Thompson. The works of great literature was regarded by Leavis to be extremely crucial in the face of a stultifying mass culture (typified by Hollywood cinema) so that it became even more crucial that literature educate and perform the function of supplying what was absent - a healthy national culture.

The core of ideas that developed from here saw the construction of a 'canon' of literary works that could teach recognisable aesthetic and cultural values. What became later questionable was the exclusion of certain groups of writings as 'inferior' - as working-class writing, and so on. These exclusions became the centres of critiques in cultural studies. Marxist critiques of the culture and civilisation tradition as well as of mass culture became a high point in left-wing journals and cultural organisations in the 1930s.

Adult education provided a seedbed in the development of cultural studies. The most important figures of British cultural studies - Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall - studied English literature and worked in adult education. Each one of them advocated the inclusion of texts from working-class culture and popular culture. In its early years cultural studies was discursively related to literary studies and was, institutionally, a branching off from the discipline of English literature. Cultural studies became an independent discipline within British higher education when the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was founded at the University of Birmingham and Richard Hoggart became its first director in 1964. Stuart Hall succeeded Hoggart in 1968.

SAQ:

Try to analyse how literary texts can be equated with cultural artefacts. Do they reflect on culture or do they only 'reflect' culture? (80 words)

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2.3.2 CULTURAL MATERIALISM

Cultural materialism takes us into the British academy in the late 1970s and early 1980s when various critical trends (forms of Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism) came together to create a context for its emergence. European theory had been translated into English and as Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (1980) emerged there were already urgent debates surrounding 'tradition'. With the installation of the Reagan (in USA) and the Thatcher (in UK) governments there was a political edge to these debates but simultaneously departments of English were already facing a challenge from the theoretical issues raised in influential journals like *Tel Quel*, *Screen*, and *Representations*. Unlike New Historicism which has been rigidly confined to academic circles, cultural materialism has extended into general cultural politics.

Raymond Williams used the term to define his own critical practice which he saw as being in alignment with Marxist cultural theory in the twentieth century. He did so in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980) but we can perhaps agree with the notion that as critical practice, cultural materialism could be seen long before Williams' explicit statement, in works like Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Williams' long-held concern had been with the relationship of 'literary' to non-literary textual production. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985) made Williams' term more prominent in the context of the volume. In their foreword to the volume, Dollimore and Sinfield situated their approach within the breakdown of consensus in British political life of the 1970s and the parallel disintegration of traditional grounds of literary study. Their definition of cultural materialism said:

“Historical context undermines the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text and allows us to recover its histories; theoretical method detaches the text from immanent criticism which seeks only to reproduce it in its own terms; socialist and feminist commitment confronts the conservative categories in which much criticism has been hitherto conducted; textual analysis locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored. We call this ‘cultural materialism’.”

We can trace a line through the work of Richard Hoggart, Williams and then, Terry Eagleton. Their persistent concern remained a materialist approach to manifest objects of cultural production. Dollimore and Sinfield, like Williams, use the concept of ‘culture’ analytically. So they turn to those artefacts and practices which are normally brought together under ‘culture’ in an evaluative sense. Thus their analysis includes “work on the cultures of subordinate and marginalised groups like schoolchildren and skinheads, and on forms like television and popular music and fiction”. In adhering to the view that ‘culture’ is material since it is closely tied to the forces and relations of production, Dollimore and Sinfield continue with Williams' focus on the historically specific institutions that transmit culture.

Why Shakespeare, and the Renaissance? Anthony Easthope offers the explanation that it was not surprising that “Shakespeare and Renaissance literature should become a main arena for contestation since it represents

the hegemonic centre of conventional literary criticism.” We may add to this the information that in the context of the British academy, the “English Renaissance offered a well-documented but very selectively narrativised account of the interaction of all of those social and cultural forces that led up to the English Revolution of 1642 - 60, and the subsequent birth of the ‘modern’ era.” (John Drakakis)

“New historicists typically examine the functions and representations of power, and focus on the ways in which power contains any potential subversion. Cultural materialists, to the contrary, look for ways in which defiance, subversion, dissidence, resistance, all forms of political opposition, are articulated, represented and performed. If new historicists aim to describe the operations of power in the past, cultural materialists set out to explore the historical and the contemporary possibilities for subversion.” [John Brannigan]

Michel Foucault (1926 - 1984):

Foucault’s central concerns have often been those of the relationship of language with social institutions. He gives the name, “discourse”, to this relationship. His attempt is to make clear the institutional rules that direct modes of signification, and thus give shape to the particular forms of knowledge. Thus we have the emergence of modern categories of knowledge as with the diagnosis of madness which Foucault surveys in *Madness and Civilization* (1961), scientific medicine and the rise of clinics in *Birth of the Clinic* (1963), the emergence of the human sciences in *The Order of Things* (1966) as well as other important works like *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). “However, while Derrida’s work was largely directed against the disciplines of literature and philosophy, Deleuze’s against psychoanalysis, and Baudrillard’s against political economy, Foucault’s work challenged virtually all the main fields and disciplines”. In the period following the second World War, French intellectual life was under the influence of phenomenology and Marxism. In the 1960s, structuralism, psychoanalytical theory, and Foucault’s own work, became influential. Foucault was primarily interested in ‘historicizing’ knowledge. He used the concept of ‘epistemes’ to indicate world-views specific to particular moments (periods) in history. “By episteme, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which, in each of these discursive formations, the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formulization

are situated and operate; the distribution of these thresholds, which may coincide, be subordinated to one another, or be separated by shifts in time; the lateral relations that may exist between epistemological figures or sciences in so far as they belong to neighbouring, but distinct, discursive practices.” To some extent, ‘episteme’ echoes the Marxist idea of ideology.

Hayden White sums up Foucault’s position thus: “Structuralism signals, in Foucault’s judgment, the discovery by Western thought of the linguistic bases of such concepts as “man”, “society,” and “culture,” the discovery that these concepts refer, not to things, but to linguistic formulae that have no specific referents in reality.”

2.4 READER-RESPONSE & RECEPTION THEORY

The modern hermeneutic tradition runs through the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur. Hermeneutics as a tradition goes back into antiquity but its modern form arises from phenomenological foundations. The shift in hermeneutics in the twentieth century is the work of Heidegger and his student Hans-Georg Gadamer. In its basic form, hermeneutics was rooted in the discussion of understanding and thus involved the “art of interpretation” particularly when meanings are unclear. In the past, hermeneutics was a method to deal with textual artefacts but in the twentieth century it has become allied with topics of wider philosophical implications such as ontology. Thus hermeneutics in the last century has laid stress on understanding as deciding our experience of our being-in-the-world.

Reader-reception & Phenomenology :

You should try to understand the links between reader-response theory and the principles of phenomenology. Roman Ingarden, a student of Husserl’s, was convinced that literary works can be seen as posing important theoretical issues in phenomenology. In Husserl’s theory “intentional objectivities” of the real world have their origins in pure consciousness. The intentional structure of the literary work of art being beyond question, it helps to question some central tenets of phenomenology. Since objects in the empirical world exist in time and space, they are real. In contrast the objects we construct are abstractions (circles or squares, for example); they have no empirical existence and are unchanging. Literary works of art lie outside this dichotomy as they have no empirical existence,

but neither are they ideal as they change with each reader and even with the same reader at different moments. Problems arising from the conflict between realism and idealism can be highlighted through literary works of art. In *The Literary Work of Art* (subtitled, 'An investigation on the borderline of ontology, logic, and theory of literature'; 1930), Ingarden draws attention to these questions. He investigates the ideal structure of a literary work on the thesis that it is a formation which is "ontologically heteronomous". That is, it is "neither determinate nor autonomous, as both real and ideal objects are, but rather dependent on an object of consciousness. Although it originates in the mind of an author, its continued existence depends on both the real word signs that make up the text and the ideal meanings that can be drawn from the author's sentences." (R. Holub)

Roman Ingarden's conception of the structure of the literary work of art is closely tied to his conception of its cognition. This is extensively elaborated in his *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (1968). Real objects, in phenomenological terms, are "univocally, universally (i.e. in every respect) determined". In a literary work of art, however, the objects represented exhibit 'gaps', or 'points' or 'places' of indeterminacy. Ingarden writes, "We find such a place of indeterminacy whenever it is impossible, on the basis of the sentences in the work, to say whether a certain object or objective situation has a certain attribute". Ingarden's depiction of our process of reading shows indeterminacy and its elimination to play a central role. According to him we interact with the literary work in a number of ways and at different levels. He argues that our cognition has an active role with regard to all aspects of the work.

You might find it easier to grasp the rise of reader-oriented theories by looking back at what the New Critics, Wimsatt and Beardsley, had proposed in *The Verbal Icon* as "The Affective Fallacy" (1958). They called "a confusion between the poem and its results" a 'fallacy' or heresy because the meaning of a literary text not being contained in the object itself but in the reactions of the reader was an idea which denied the autonomy of the text. However, this very idea or conception is fundamental to reader-response theory. The American critic, Stanley Fish, argues that the meaning of a poem, indeed, consists in its results. About the same time as Fish posed his argument, the two founders of *Rezeptionsästhetik* or 'The Aesthetics of Reception' at the University of Constance in West Germany, Hans Robert Jauss (1921 -) and Wolfgang Iser (1926 -) countered the idea that one should seek out the correct meaning of a text.

You have already learnt a little of the contribution of Hans Robert Jauss to the debate over the meaning of a text as made out by the reader (in 1.3.2, above). The essay by Jauss - 'Literary history as a provocation to literary scholarship' - was an effort to overcome the intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomy. Jauss' aesthetics of reception proposed to alter the traditional perspective from which literary texts have been interpreted. On the one hand was the Marxist demand for historicity, while the Formalists had demonstrated the potency of aesthetic perception in the exploration of literary works. In meeting these conflicting demands, Jauss borrows the concept, "horizon of expectation" from several sources like Karl Popper (philosopher), Karl Mannheim (sociologist), E.H.Gombrich (art historian), Husserl and Heidegger. The concept of 'horizon' may have come from some of these sources, as also from Jauss' teacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer who conceived of understanding as a process of merging of a present horizon with a past one. Jauss does not define the term, but it seems to denote a structure of expectations, a mind-set, that a reader brings to a given text. As all our readings take place against some horizon of expectation, certain texts - parody, for example - foreground this horizon, or the 'system of references'. According to Jauss, the literary scholar should "objectify" this horizon so that we may make an estimate of the artistic quality of the work.

Jauss reorganises the concept of literary history. Conventional histories of literature assign a place to literary works through references to authors and texts. This ensures that literary histories are little more than "a series of loosely connected biographical essays". (R.Holub) To some extent Jauss adapts concepts taken from Russian Formalism to explain the historical process at work in aesthetic categories. From the new perspective that he works from, Jauss makes literary history take into account both the historical and the artistic significance of a work. Novelty in a literary work is seen both historically and artistically and not merely in the formalist sense of estrangement. Rather than explaining the production of literary works backwards (with hindsight) from a hypothetical final point, the evolutionary method offered by Jauss postulates "dialectical self-production of new forms". Novelty is thus explained as both an artistic as well as an historical standard of judgment. In traditional literary history, there is always a larger general history to which it constantly refers and which is made to be basis of literature's role of reflecting social, political or biographical concerns.

Jauss, on the other hand, lays stress on literature's function in social formations.

SAQ:

What is the reason for modernism's dissatisfaction with Romanticism?
(60 words)

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Wolfgang Iser's essay was received in a fashion similar to Jauss' writings. He came to be considered as one of the foremost theorists of the 'Constance School' largely in consequence of his lecture delivered and later translated as "Indeterminacy and the reader's response" (1970). His major work, however, appeared only in 1976 as *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Iser's approach is different from Jauss in many respects despite the many common features and takes in many important concepts from the work of Roman Ingarden. But both theorists fix their revisions of literary theory through attention to the text-reader relationship. Iser sees the meaning of text as generated through the reading process. Meaning issues not simply from subjectivity or from the text but rather from the interaction between the two. Literary texts are so constructed as to allow this kind of realization. What the reader does is to fill in gaps or indeterminacies present in the given structure. Such participation completes the work and thereby meaning is finally produced. There is a strong recalling here of the work of Roman Ingarden who was a Polish phenomenologist and a student of Husserl.

Phenomenological Criticism:

Phenomenology in France brings together the names of Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. French phenomenology is more likely to take the name of 'existentialism'. The impact of French phenomenology on aesthetic theory is to be seen in the work of Mikel Dufrenne, in his major work *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, (1953).

Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) provides the best example of the extension of phenomenological thought into literary criticism in works like *The Poetics of Space* (1957), and *The Poetics of Reverie* (1961).

Phenomenology is closely associated with the Geneva School of critics including especially Marcel Raymond (1897-), Albert Béguin(1901-57), Georges Poulet (1902-91), Jean Rousset (1910-), Jean-Pierre Richard (1922-), and Jean Starobinski (1920-). Marcel Raymond's *From Baudelaire to Surrealism* (1933) is said to have helped found this school of criticism. Georges Poulet's name has become closely identified with this school of criticism.

We can find traces of phenomenological arguments in New Criticism, as in Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1955). Phenomenological ideas are also present in Wolfgang Iser's work, particularly in his *The Act of Reading* (1976).

2.5 NARRATOLOGY

(From "Narratology" by Gerald Prince, CHLC)

'Narratology' is taken from the French 'narratologie' introduced by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969, in *Grammaire du Décaméron* where he wrote: "this work pertains to a science which does not yet exist - let us say *narratology*, the science of narrative". The theory falls within French structuralism exemplifying the structuralist view of texts as rule-driven ways by which we structure our universe. Narratology also expresses the structuralist tendency to distinguish between the necessary and the contingent elements of textual structures. In this sense, it is a part of semiotics which studies those features common to signifying systems and practices.

Narratology arises systematically (studying narrative rather than narratives) as a discipline only after 1966 with the appearance of analyses of narrative in *Communications*. Prior to that, in 1958 had appeared the English translation of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. Narratology became a critical movement spreading to several countries (USA, Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Israel) by the late 1970s.

Narratology starts with the simple fact that narrative (or story-telling) is to be found in a great variety of media. This fact is to be seen even when a story (or a folktale) is transposed from one medium onto another (as from novel into film). This brings up the argument that narrative - or the narrative component of any narrative text - can be isolated for study from the medium

in which it is embedded. One of the issues that comes up in the course of such an enterprise can be said to be that “the narratologist should . . . be able to examine the narrated (the story reported, the events recounted) independently not only of the medium used but also independently of the narrating, the discourse, the *way* in which the medium is used to present the *what*.” This description can be used for Vladimir Propp’s concerns in his *Grammaire du Décaméron* or in ‘Les Categories’ or in *Poétique*.

“Narrative Negotiation” :

This is the name of Chapter 12, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, by H.Porter Abbott. You will find it useful to go through this chapter if you wish to come to some sort of understanding of the study of narrative. Abbott uses the story of Oedipus to make his point regarding conflict in narrative. The story of Oedipus, we are told, had at least nine known versions, if not more. The main point here that is of interest is the conflict at the heart of the story. Despite the cultural difference that separates us from the ancient Greek setting of the story, we all relate to the narrative. Abbott tries to bring to us the question, what is narrative? If we take it up as a form of argument, then we find that as far as regards the conflict in a narrative, then “there is not necessarily any single privileged way of reading the conflict in a story”. A notable fact is that “even among highly varied readings of the same story, one almost invariably finds the same underlying orientation, *an attention to conflict of some kind and how it plays out*.” Abbott takes four famous readings of the story to show how differently these readings relate to the conflict. The first reading is from Aristotle, in his *Poetics*. The second is from Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) where Freud displaces one conflict with another. Vladimir Propp’s reading comes from his paper on the subject which he had written in 1944. Again, Propp relocated the conflict in the story away from Oedipus and his fate to cast it in historical terms. Propp was concerned to show the “hybrid” character of Sophocles’ version of the story. The anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss used the story of Oedipus in 1955 to show the ‘mythemes’ (constituent units) that made up the narrative.

The Oedipus story is an example of a classic masterplot evident from the way it has been repeatedly used in numerous versions. What the narratologist does is to isolate the different components and analyse their functions. But this is not the work of interpretation. All four readings are “based on the view that people think through the agency of narrative”, the same narrative appeals differently to different people and that the appeal of narrative is based on the assumption that it contains the representation of some kind of conflict.

Propp's work in *Morphology* was reviewed critically by Claude Lévi-Strauss, A. J. Greimas and Claude Bremond leading later to some modifications. This showed that similar to the aim of linguistics to decide upon a grammar of language, narratology should aim at establishing the grammar of narrative. Propp's work inspired many to undertake the narratological endeavour. Roland Barthes' ideas stand as one such contribution to the narratological exercise although his famous reading of Balzac's 'Sarrasine' in *S/Z* (1970) was forwarded as his dismissal of the science of narrative as a doubtful enterprise. However, *S/Z* remains an important reference-point for narratologists.

Above, you have learnt of the importance of narratology only with regard to story, or story-telling. In this aspect, narratology focuses on the narrated rather than on the narrating. Elsewhere, narratologists have viewed narrative as a mode of verbal presentation (not as enactment, for instance). In this case, narratology has confined itself to the study of narrative discourse rather than story (the narrative). This recalls, in some ways, the difference between *mimesis* and *diegesis* which was an accepted part of the universe of Plato's and Aristotle's ideas. The reason for this was that narratologists strove to account for the many ways in which the same sequence of events could be told and which they felt was not being done in the focus on the narrated and its structure. Gérard Genette is the most prominent among this group of narratologists. Genette's discussion of narrative discourse is recognised to be outstanding.

Other narratologists regard the narrated as well as the narrating as being pertinent to narrative and the understanding of its possibilities. We can see this in Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse*, Gerald Prince's *Narratology*, and Jean-Michel Adam's *Le texte*. Narrative discourse is probably the area most investigated by narratologists. We can find this in the work of narratologists like Tzvetan Todorov, Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, among others.

A List of Narratological Achievements:

The following is meant to help you gain an overall view of the extensive work done by narratologists. While we have not explained here what each term means,- for lack of space - the list below will help you to summarise what narratological

analysis can achieve. You must keep in mind that the narrated part of a narrative pertains to the actual story reported. Some of the terms here show you the internal parts of the narrated. Narrative discourse itself pertains to the larger structures within which narrative forms take their place. You should try to look up the meanings of the following for further understanding.

Areas of narrative that have been theorised, include:

temporal orders followed by a narrative text

the anachronies (flashbacks or flashforwards)

the achronic (undatable) structures

narrative speed, in terms of: ellipsis, summary, scene, stretch, pause

narrative frequency (singulative narrative, repeating narrative, iterative narrative)

narrative distance (the problem of narratorial mediation)

narrative perspective (zero focalization, internal focalization, external focalization)

types of discourse (narratized discourse, tagged indirect discourse, free indirect discourse, tagged direct discourse, free direct discourse)

major kinds of narration and their modes of combination

set of relations between narrator, narratee and the story narrated

the minimal constituents of the narrated (goal-directed actions, etc.)

the mechanisms underlying narrative suspense and surprise

the nature of characters and settings

how a story can be characterized semantically

Much criticism has been levelled at narratological analysis, some of which is justified. But in spite of these so-called deficiencies narratology has been widely accepted. Even where work does not directly deal with narrative or does not fall within narratological analysis, it is called narratological. The distinctiveness of a given narrative can be shown best through narratological analysis. Narrative has become a privileged theme due to the work of narratology. It is not an aid to interpretation, as Prince points out, but “through its concern for the governing principles of narrative and through its attempt to characterize not so much the particular meanings of particular narratives but rather what allows narratives to have meanings”. In these terms narratology is able to refute the charge brought against literary studies that they are concerned only with the interpretations of texts. Also, by examining the factors operating in all kinds of possible narratives, it has shown that many non-canonical narratives are just as sophisticated as canonical ones. Thus it has played a vital role in the ultimate shape of literary studies.

Check your Progress:

1. Write a short note on
 - a) Narratology
 - b) Phenomenology [G.U. 2005]
2. How is the historicity of the text sought to be established in terms of the textuality of history in contemporary criticism? Write a detailed answer. [G.U. 2003]
3. Write notes on
 - a) Narrative worlds
 - b) Implied author (Booth)
 - c) Narrative frequency
 - d) Plot and Closure [G.U. 2007]
4. How does Foucault revise or contest the traditional notion of the author and the more recent and radical idea of the disappearance of the author? Write your answer by using adequate illustrations from the prescribed text. [*This question refers to Foucault's essay, "What is an Author?"* - G.U. 2007]
5. Write a note on
 - a) Marxism and Literature
 - b) Narrativity and History
 - c) The reader in the text [G.U.2007]

2.6 POST COLONIALISM

A defining moment for postcolonial studies was in 1978 when Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published. But prior to it, postcolonial literature and criticism had already made its appearance in 1950 with Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, and *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon. In 1958 came *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, while *The Pleasures of Exile* by George Lamming came out in 1960, with Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* following in 1961. Later, important work by Gayatri C. Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Abdul JanMohamed, Benita Parry and Kwame Anthony Appiah, too, made its appearance.

Postcolonial criticism and theory is connected with the history of colonialism or imperialism which you have already studied in Paper I as part of your study of 'Literature & Social History'. In one sense, postcolonialism is part of the project of decolonization. It is difficult to pinpoint the absolute beginnings of postcolonialism. The "post-" in the term comprises a problem

rather than a solution. For one thing, even though “structures of colonial control” broke up in the late 1950s and reached a climax in the 1960s, we are still left to answer, after whose colonialism? Moreover, it is widely recognised that colonialism still persists in many ways. Thus the periodization of the concept is also problematic. Said’s work may be said to belong to the heightened consciousness of postcolonial critics of colonial power which underlies all postcolonial theory. Postcolonial criticism develops from theories of colonial discourses. In other words it is from the study of the operations and aims of colonial discourses that postcolonialism makes its advances. Since colonial power uses arguments to justify its domination over the colonised peoples its representations and modes of perception are important topics of analysis in postcolonial theory.

A crucial concept that lies at the heart of postcolonial theory is cultural identity. You can understand this from what Ngugi wa Thiong’o has to say:

“Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other human beings.”

Since colonialism meant cultural encounters in an exploitative political relationship of coloniser dominating the colonised, differences of culture, race, ethnicity, community and language become the primary zones in which the politics occurs. This is what lies at the basis of what Ngugi wa Thiong’o has to say:

“Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.”

Reading English Literature after postcolonialism:

Postcolonialism inevitably brought forth a challenge to the older ways of reading and judging literary texts. This is related to the fact that the study of English literary texts in the colonies was meant to inculcate in the indigenous peoples a sense of the *universality* of Christian moral values as manifested in *English literature*. Despite his vast analysis of ‘Orientalism’, Said’s comments regarding

the status of 'classics' have not laid to rest the problems regarding the 'canon' of English literature. However, it is through the intellectual apparatus of postcolonialism that foreign readers of English literature are allowed to raise issues of cultural values for discussion.

Extensions of postcolonialist approaches:

Migrancy - This is an important concept in the description of the relation of an individual to her/his 'home', community and the imagined sense of belonging. It allows the analysis of the relation that gets foregrounded in the context of the dislocations that are a necessary part of the colonial and the post-colonial world. It also relates to the cultural boundaries that tend to be drawn and re-drawn as part of the process of dislocation.

Hybridity - This concept has been formulated by Homi K. Bhabha to underline the ways in which postcolonial identities are determined through border crossings and re-crossings. The 'border' is an important related concept here as it shows how cultures are not 'pure' but are intermingled.

Subaltern studies - A group of "left-wing historians, the Subaltern Studies Group (of whom the best-known are Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha) and others in dialogue with them . . . The intention of the group is to produce historical accounts in opposition to the dominant versions, broadly categorized as colonial or neo-colonial, and nationalist or neo-nationalist, and which construe Indian history, especially the move towards independence, as the doings of the elite, . . and ignore the actions of the mass of the mass of the population"

Nativism - This is the topic of discussion by Benita Parry in her famous essay, "Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism" (1994)

Eurocentrism relates to the assumption in postcolonial theory that the intellectual and cultural traditions developed outside the west can undo the heritage of knowledge and ideas which led to the colonised people's feeling of inferiority. 'Eurocentrism' is the term signifying the opposition to western ideologies which devalue the intellectual heritage developed outside the west. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's phrase, "decolonizing the mind" and "moving the centre" evokes the opposition to 'eurocentrism' and implies the need to dismantle the intellectual authority and dominance of Europe.

If we take up postcolonialism as the production of colonial stereotypes through which colonial power sustained itself we get involved with the problem of representation and stereotyping of the people and culture of the

colonised nations. Thus there has been a preponderance of studies of discursive practices in the context of colonial structures. It is in this respect that Edward Said's *Orientalism* constitutes a seminal piece of work. His study shows that 'Orientalism' is a discourse which reveals more about the West's fantasies of power, and assumptions regarding the culture and the people of the Orient, than the Orient itself. Orientalist representations are thus bound up with the structures of political domination.

The concept of the nation is an important one in postcolonialist study since nationalist anti-colonialism constitutes an important plank from which to investigate Orientalist assumptions. Fanon writes of "National Culture" in his *Wretched of the Earth* to conduct a critique of the cultural domination that takes place in colonialism. 'Nation' was a concept used in the political overthrow of colonial power, especially in the early phases, thus making it a discourse of great potency. This is just one example of how postcolonialist study formulates its concepts. From the idea of nation and the elements that go into discourses based on it, issues relating to language, history, and race find a place in postcolonial study. To some critics, nationalism as a discourse is said to be derived from the west thus inscribing a question-mark over the status of anti-colonial nationalism. Partha Chatterji, in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), raises questions of this kind. Critics like Etienne Balibar raise further questions as to how nationalism can be complicit with racism.

In the opposition to colonial rule we see the emergence of many anti-colonial thinkers as, for instance, in India the names of Gandhi and Nehru. Gandhi's early text, *Hind Swaraj*, is an important text in laying down the principles of anti-colonial resistance. The work is remarkable in presenting clearly in dialogue-form the range of topics and concepts which needed to be addressed in conducting the struggle against colonial domination. As the attempt to chart out an alternative, in civilizational terms, to colonial domination, Gandhi makes a remarkable presentation of a vision of society as critique of a western conception of progress and development. Similarly, Nehru charts the history of the anti-colonial struggle in India and the range of issues it needed to address in his *Autobiography*. What Nehru, most perceptively, pointed out was the 'internalisation' of the "ideology of Empire" which tended to weaken the resistance on crucial aspects of economism and communal divisions.

The reading of literary texts in English, especially by writers of Asian or African origin, in the context of postcolonial studies has brought to the fore questions regarding literary value. Meenakshi Mukherjee, the well-known critic, explains that postcolonial study “makes us interrogate many aspects of the study of literature that we are made to take for granted”. Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian writer, denounced *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in 1975 on the grounds that Conrad was racist. Controversial, though this was, it helped in the reexamination of ‘classics’ and their relation with culturally different readers and writers. In this sense, ‘classics’ have been put to new uses different from the colonial ones of asserting colonial superiority on cultural grounds.

Edward W. Said:

Said adopts a Foucauldian perspective in *Orientalism* in bringing out the connections between knowledge and power. This gives him to scope to bring together a wide variety of discourses (history, ethnography, geography, politics, literature, linguistics) which produce knowledge of the Orient in their specific ways but all establishing categories of ‘truth’. Although all these different discourses (which produce knowledge about their object of study - the Orient) might well be in contradiction with each other, they articulate congruent (or matching) forms of knowledge about the Orient. This gives rise to a meta-discourse - Orientalism - which is powerful and seems to confirm the prevailing idea that only Westerners *really know* the Orient.

In his work, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said observes that representation is “one of the key problems in all criticism and philosophy”. The representation of the East in the West has been through strategies which “validate Western values, political and economic systems and structures of domination, by positing as Other anyone and anything at odds with Western institutions. The factors that make the Other especially menacing are its difference and its mysterious aura. According to Said, the strategies through which the Other is constructed are fundamentally textual, for images and stereotypes of the Orient have traditionally been emplaced through writing . . . Said underscores the textual dimension of alterity by pointing out that Orientalism’s imaginary Other first comes into being “when a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant. In such a case one has recourse not only to what in one’s previous experience the novelty resembles but also to what one has read about it.” . . . All Orientalist texts are ultimately fictional: accounts about the East, its inhabitants and its cultural traditions endeavour to present their contents as self-evident *facts* but what they invariably supply is actually a cluster of mythical presuppositions.” (Cavallaro, p.126-7)

2.7 FEMINISM

Like some of the other major critical movements described above, it is difficult to sum up in a few words the wide spectrum of ideas which have collectively come to be known as ‘feminism’. In another Unit (no.7) below, you will read of it in greater detail. However, you should note an important point in advance: feminism is not to be confused with feminist criticism. The two, naturally, are closely related: feminism gives rise to feminist thought which, in turn, helps in the formulation of critical concepts to be labelled, “feminist criticism”. However, if you are to search for what kind of analysis it enables the critic to practise then you should be clear that feminist criticism itself borrows concepts from different areas of thought such as marxism, and poststructuralism. This is to say that feminist criticism has developed great sophistication and subtlety over time and has emerged as one of the most potent discourses in our time. For instance, it has led to a largescale re-thinking in diverse areas such as in historiography where ‘women’s history’ is now considered to be productive of new meanings of the recovery of the past. As your attention will be better rewarded by your reading of the special unit on ‘Feminism’, we shall not provide you with much more details here.

Check Your Progress:

1. Write on the significance of postcolonial thought in twentieth-century criticism. Bring out the importance of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in this critical discourse.
2. Explain the importance of the concepts of nation and ‘national culture’ in postcolonial criticism.
3. Postcolonial studies often incorporate the ‘history of the Other’ - how far do you agree with this view? Give a detailed answer.
4. Write short notes on
 - a) hybridity
 - b) ethnicity
 - c) nationality
 - d) multiculturalism
 - e) tricontinental theory
 - f) *Black Skin, White Masks*
5. Comment on the frequent objection to current postcolonial theory that it indulges in excessive ‘discourse analysis’. Explain the grounds for such an objection.

2.8 SUMMING UP

By now you have gained a wide-ranging survey of some of the major movements and intellectual trends that are collectively given the name of 'literary theory'. Do take enough care to note that we have, here, left out feminism, which appears as a self-contained unit elsewhere. The same goes for the formalist movements, structuralism, and poststructuralism. We have given you just a few details regarding a rapidly-expanding and developing area like postcolonialism. It means that you have to do some careful reading of your own. We have let you at least learn of some important names (like Edward Said, Foucault, Genette) so that you can follow up with your own discoveries of their work. As you are aware, this is not a "text book" which pretends to comprehensively package knowledge. You would have seen by now that we give you some names so that your interest in the work of these critics is awakened. We also mention topics which we do not fully develop here but let you find out on your own. As usual, there is no substitute for independent discovery. At the very least, you should have found your way about, by now, through a virtual mine-field of 'theoretical' knowledge! Some very basic ideas have been dealt with here so that you can appreciate their 'theoretical' worth.

The debate over the circulation and the role of 'theory' continues. Some critics aver that 'theory' is 'dead'; others contest this. Some look upon our times as 'after theory'. Again, that is debatable. This only suggests that 'theory' is not yet over and that it has not yet reached its limits. All of this is so true that it gives us a chance to explain to you why it is difficult to sum up and tie together all the ends of 'theory' - it is a field which has not yet stopped growing.

2.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 3

Structuralism to Post structuralism

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Historical Background
 - 3.2.1 Non-Intellectual Background
 - 3.2.2 Intellectual Background
- 3.3 Structuralism
 - 3.3.1 Structuralist Thinkers
 - 3.3.2 Key Concepts
- 3.4 Post-Structuralism
 - 3.4.1 Post-Structuralist Thinkers
- 3.5 Summing Up
- 3.6 Glossary
- 3.7 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This is the fourth unit of this block. In this unit we will try to discuss both Structuralism and Post-structuralism so that you can see for yourself how the intellectual world of the twentieth century preoccupied itself with the idea of finding out ways in literary studies with the help of an interdisciplinary approach.

However, after going through this unit we claim that you will be able to–

- *see* for yourself what does the term ‘structure’ mean
- *formulate* the notion of Structuralism and Post-structuralism as theoretical trends
- *find* out the differences between Structuralism and post-structuralism as approaches to literature
- *trace* the unique historical and intellectual background out of which they emerged.

3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A study of the historical background of both Structuralism and Post-structuralism provides scope for a better understanding of the two terms. It is because they cannot be isolated from their own specific socio-political and literary backgrounds. For your understanding we have divided this sections into two subsections in which we will try to locate their history behind their emergence.

3.2.1 NON-INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

While reading such theories we are not sure whether we should read them as diagnosis of an epoch with social reality as its referent or as a radical turn against the entire process of representation and the referent. The twentieth century saw the instability of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed object, the reader and the text, the past and the present. Questionings of received ideas of form haunt the critical writings of the modernist thinkers. Debates about tradition and rejection of tradition, about the use and interpretation of history, and about the very survival and the value of the written word have taken on a renewed urgency as modernism evolved into a variety of postmodernism. It is against such a background that we can think of the emergence, strength and relevance of structuralism and post structuralism as theoretical trends. Because, going against tradition, they really changed the ways of conceptualizations and representations.

3.2.2 INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

In the West, the beginning of structuralism can mostly be anticipated in the works of the Canadian thinker Northrop Fry whose being the most influential theorist of America hastened the emergence of something called “Myth Criticism” functional in between 1940-1960. Drawing on the findings of anthropology and psychology regarding universal myths, rituals, and folktales; these critics were trying to restore the spiritual values to a world they saw as alienated, fragmented and commonly ruled by scientism, empiricism, positivism, and technology. In their view, myths were created as integral to human thought and believed that literature too emerged out of a collective effort on the part of various cultures and groups to establish a

meaningful context of human existence. Northrop Fry's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) emphasized on the point that criticism should be scientific, objective and systematic discipline. Fry's models which exhibited recurrent patterns, is later shared by Structuralist views of language and literature.

However, Structuralism can be said to have formally begun with the *Course in General Linguistics* a series of lectures delivered by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) at the University of Geneva. Although published posthumously in 1960, this book provided a new definition of the 'object of linguistics'. Saussure divided, what we call language, into two parts-*langue* (language) and *parole* (speech). The reason was to show that 'language has its own potentials' and that it can exist 'outside the individual' who can never create or modify it by himself. Language is a self authenticating system and is not supposed to be determined by the physical world. Whatever we see in language is simply the connection of a meaning to a particular sound-image. This is what provides Saussure with a scope to define Semiology.

About **Semiology** Saussure said:

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it Semiology.

But any attempt to understand the intellectual background is never complete without the reference to New Criticism and Russian Formalism two of the most significant theoretical trends provided grounds for the future development of structuralism.

The New Critics of the 1930s (the details of which you will read in Block III.) focused on the meaning of a literary text. Both the New Criticism of the United States and Practical Criticism of United Kingdom opted for providing 'interpretations'. The New Critics paid a particular attention to the formal aspects of literature, which they believed, contributed largely to its meaning and their attempt at 'close reading' made their effort easier. In his book *Practical Criticism*, I. A. Richards claimed that, "All respectable poetry invites close reading." Gradually, this motto became important for

every new critic as they could finally understand the point that with the help of irony, paradox, ambiguity, and complexity each word of a poem could be scrutinized in detail with regard to all its denotations and connotations.

Simultaneously with the New Critics, during the first half of the twentieth century, the literary theorist of Russia (Please refer to Block III, to know more about Russian Formalism) and Czechoslovakia developed a theory of 'literariness'. They argued that it was 'literariness' that differentiated literary texts from other forms of writings like an advertisement, or a newspaper article. Dealing with this they focused on the formal aspect of literature and the sort of language it employed. The Russian Formalists suggested that what makes the language of literature different from non-literary language is the employment of a range of devices that produce a defamiliarising effect. Later, they turned towards the more specific functions of those devices. Borrowing much from the Russian Formalists, the Prague Structuralists began to see a literary text as a structure of differences. Finally, a literary text differs from other texts because of its orientation towards itself, its own form and not towards any outside sources.

However, the most pertinent issue underlying such an intercontinental background of Structuralism, is a new awareness of the ways of receiving literary works. Structuralism challenges some of the most cherished beliefs of the common readers. Going against the assumption that the text is a place where we can form a communion with the author's thoughts and feelings, structuralism has finally established that the author is 'dead'. In their ahistorical approach, New Criticism, Structuralism and Russian Formalism together deemphasized and ignored literature's involvement in the ideological projection of its place and time.

Check Your Progress:

1. Name the major trends with collectively made structuralism a dominant theoretical approach?
2. Relate Structuralism with New Criticism and Russian Formalism
3. What do you mean by New Critical 'close reading'?
4. Why do you think a kind of 'literariness' became important for Russian Formalism?

A meticulous attempt to locate Post-structuralism in its background has been in the next unit. The history of post-structuralism has much to do with structuralism itself. It is because, Post-structuralism began partly as continuation of and partly as the reaction against structuralism. Hence, we cannot but accept the fact that the premises and findings of structuralism established the future grounds for post-structuralism.

3.3 STRUCTURALISM

After going through the first two sections you must be aware of the fact that the idea of Structuralism can be conceived in two different ways. Although the concept is controversial and elusive, it refers firstly, to a broad intellectual movement signifying various ways of theorizing in the human sciences of the twentieth century and secondly, to a particular set of approaches to literature and other cultural art forms which flourished in France during 1960s. Structuralism bases its premises on the ‘constructed’ nature of all human activity and its products. We can further say that a structure is the principle of construction and the object of analysis understood in terms of ‘system’ and ‘value’-two significant elements of Semiotics. Any element in a structure derives its meaning on the basis of its selection from a system of options and is consequently defined against other possibilities. Such an understanding of meaning radically establishes the point that meaning is derived not from nature or God, but from an arbitrary man-made system of cognition.

Although structuralism is closely related to Russian Formalism and the Prague linguistic Circle, French structuralism is distinguished by its variety and interdisciplinary character. Extending itself against the background of Humanism and Phenomenology Structuralism relates itself to the constitution of language and all symbolic or discursive systems. However, while dealing with concepts like these, we must be able to clearly distinguish between Structuralist theory and Structuralist criticism. Theoretically speaking, Structuralism intends to establish a grammar of texts, a set of general rules about how they work. Following Saussurean ideas based on the premise that language is a self-sufficient system operating by its own internal rules and on the relation between the signifier and the signified Structuralists try to formulate the idea that a text is a self sufficient system. In another sense, Structuralism tried to be more scientific and all-inclusive explaining the entire

signifying system of the text. Coming to the practical part, a Structuralist critic might try to point out how the text might be discussing the gap between the word and the world, between the structure of art and the structure of reality. Going one step further they tried to claim that writing is often concerned with the problems of writing about reality.

Stop to Consider:

Basing itself on Linguistics and analysis of culture and its institutions, Structuralism explores the various possible ways of making meaning rather than meaning itself. It tries to frame the structure and the interrelation of the various elements within that structure. Structuralism may, for instance, try to focus on the underlying structure of a detective novel. It may study the number of roles the characters are made to play or it focuses on the narrative aspects of a text in order to systematize the narratological possibilities and narrative strategies. Although it seems valid, it is also a dull technical approach to literature because a rejection of the conventional interest in life beyond the text will only end up with establishing every book a ‘construct’ working by certain rules.

SAQ:

What according to you is a structure? (50 words)

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3.3.1 STRUCTURALIST THINKERS

The practice of Structuralism is usually related to thinkers like Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Claude Levi–Strauss, Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, Gerard Genette, Jonathan Culler and so on. Let us try to examine very briefly the contributions of the thinkers who should be acclaimed for their innovative thinking which finally established Structuralism as a significant approach in literary studies.

Ferdinand de Saussure :

The contribution of Saussure is invaluable for us as his concepts like-arbitrariness of language, langue and Parole, diachrony and synchrony revolutionized contemporary studies on linguistics. We have already discussed in brief about Saussure's contribution on linguistics in sub-section 4.2.2. However, a conceptualization of these other concepts will further enhance your capacity to understand what he was actually trying to say. Attempting to answer the question-what is the object of linguistic investigation- Saussure made a fundamental distinction between Langue and Parole-Langue, being the social aspect of language and Parole, being the actual utterance. This distinction became a model for all Structuralist theories. Saussure believed that the proper object of linguistic study is the system which underlies all signifying practices, and not the individual utterances. In his views, words are not merely symbols which correspond to their referents, but 'signs' which are made up of two ingredients-'signifiers' and 'signified' whose relationship is always arbitrary. The elements of language derive meaning not because of the connection between the word and the thing but because of a system of relations. This means that there is no one to one relationship between the word and the object it signifies.

Roland Barthes :

Critics generally differ in their opinion regarding the French Literary critic Barthes as the basic question they face is where to situate Barthes in the world of literary theory. Barthes is one of the first critics to introduce Saussurean ideas of Linguistics to the study of literature, and towards his later years he became particularly concerned with the personal, subjective response of a reader to a text. Inspired by the methods of Structural Linguistics, during 1960s, Barthes wanted to explore the possibility of developing a science of culture. It was also the time when he came closer to the contemporary Structuralists like Claude Levi Strauss and Michel Foucault. His two books *Elements of Semiology* and *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* clearly verify his stand on Structuralism. The systems of classification and Binary Opposites such as synchrony and diachrony encouraged him a lot. The principle that human performances presuppose a received system of differential relations is applied by Barthes to almost all social practices. He refers to and interprets them as sign systems

which operate on a model of language. For him any actual speech always presupposes a system. Barthes recognizes a possible change in the language system and that change must be initiated in speech, yet at a given time there exists a working system meaning a set of rules from which all speeches are derived. (Read more about Barthes in Unit 5 of this block)

Claude Levi –Strauss :

It is believed that Claude Levi Strauss is instrumental behind establishing Structuralism as an intellectual movement. His application of the methods of structural linguistics to anthropological analysis demonstrated the adaptability of the system to other domains of Semiology. Levi-Strauss's Anthropological Structuralism does not have any direct impact on literarily studies. Yet, its indirect influence is quite visible in the later developments of both Structuralism and Post-structuralism. Like Structuralism it accepts its indebtedness to Saussurean concept of language as a 'sign system' based on differences. In its early phase, Anthropological Structuralism sought to record the myths, taboos, rituals, customs, manners or every thing that was recordable and retrievable of the non-Western cultures and study their function. Levi-Strauss deviated from this tradition in two different ways- firstly by adopting the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp's ideas on myths, he tried to show how the most diverse myths of a culture, having no connection with each other, can also be read as variation upon one and the same basic pattern. He calls the units of myth as mythemes (just like we have phonemes, and morphemes.) Making an analogy with Saussure, Levi-Strauss tried to show how the countless discrete elements that make up a culture could constitute a 'sign system'. Food habits, taboos, hunting rites, kinship relations-everything that has a cultural origin can be counted as a 'sign'. Such cultural elements are not meaningful in themselves, but draw their meanings from a system of signs in which they functions.

Stop to Consider:

Levi Strauss is not interested in the narrative sequence, but in the structural patterns which assigns the myths with meaning. He looks for a phonemic structure of myths. He believes that linguistic model can uncover the structure of human mind-structures which governs the way human beings shape all their institutions, artifacts, and their forms of knowledge.

Levi-Strauss is interested in the question of how our ancestors, in their evolutionary process, started to make sense of the world they found themselves in. The very basic mental operation began to develop on the basis of opposites- some things are edible, some are not, some animals are dangerous, some are not.. What is significant here is the fact that classification in terms of such oppositions in which the opposites are related to each other as the presence or absence of the one will influence the other, seemed to him to be quite natural. Our ancestors deployed this structural model to comprehend the idea of the world. Hence for Levi-Strauss, the structure of primitive thinking is binary. Later, having the structure of language, they might have started to categorize their world in a basic pattern of presences and absences like –light/darkness, man- made/ natural, raw/ cooked, clothes/ necked and so on.

Jacques Lacan :

Lacan, although better known as a Post-structuralist, began his theory of psychoanalysis, on the linguistic models of Saussure and Roman Jakobson as well as the on the psychoanalytic methods of Sigmund Freud. The point he makes is that language is a manifestation of structures in the unconscious and that linguistic patterns reveal important characteristics of the individual subject's psychic state. But he deviates from Saussure in a specific way. Where Saussure regards the relationship between the 'signifier' and the 'signified' as being almost fixed, Lacan argues that the 'signifier' can shift in meaning and that the 'signified' is always provisional. (Read more about Lacan in Unit 6 of this block)

Gerard Genette :

Genette, another French theoretician and Structuralist critic is known for his Literary Structuralism later established as Narratology. The focus of Genette was not on the underlying structures of the content of stories, but on the structure of narration itself-the way stories are told. In fact the underlying structures that make stories possible is what distinguishes Genette's Structuralist approach. Genette's book *Narrative Discourse* published in 1972 is one of the most significant contributions to Narratology

whose ultimate goal is to discover general rules of narration that will cover almost all the possible ways in which stories are told to produce the intended meaning.

Stop to Consider:

Genette's Contribution: Working on his Structuralist approach to narratives, Genette introduced a number of new terminologies redefining already-existing categories and insights. Genette was first concerned with the way the chronological 'order' of the events and actions of a novel, for example, is sought to be narrated in the actual story. We can express this relationship between the chronological order (formalist's idea of the 'Fabula') and the narrative order (the 'Syuzhet') in terms of their connection at a given point of time. The narration may lag behind the chronological order of events, it may be running with the events, or it may run ahead of them. Credit goes to Genette for his detailed analysis of all the possible relations between the order of events and the order of narration with the help of certain technical vocabulary namely, analepsis, prolepsis, achrony, proleptic analepsis, analeptic prolepsus.

The second concern Genette had is on the notion of 'duration' which meant the relationship between the actual time in which an event occurs in the reality of the 'world out there' and the time that the narrator takes to narrate that event. Hence, narration should speed-up the happenings so that there is no disastrous consequence-like watching a day long movie in the cinema hall.

Genette's third concern is with the notion of 'frequency' which actually covers the relation between the number of times that an event occurs in the world and the number of times that it is actually narrated. 'Frequency' is in use when we try to describe repeatedly occurring events only once like we might say we went to the beach every single day during the last summer.

One of Genette's most significant contribution to the way we talk about literature is his introduction of the term 'focalization' which deals with the complication of the relation between the narrator and the world that is being narrated.. On the basis of 'focalization', Genette draws broad distinctions between various types of narratives.

Jonathan Culler :

Making an attempt to assimilate French Structuralism to an Anglo American critical perspective, the American literary critic Culler sought to establish the notion that linguistics presents the best model of knowledge for the

humanities and social sciences. His highly acclaimed book, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (1975), firstly introduces ‘the linguistic model’ on the basis of the works of Claude Levi -Strauss, Roman Jakobson, A J Greimas, Vladimir Propp, and particularly Roland Barthes and draws attention to the theoretical limitations of each of these thinkers; and secondly , he attempts to synthesise ‘the linguistic model’ derived from European semiotics and Structuralism of the 1960s, especially that of Saussure and finally he articulates a Structuralist poetics, an effective model for reading literature whose very basic job is ‘to make explicit the underlying systems which makes literary effects possible.’

Check Your Progress :

1. Name the key Structuralist thinkers?
2. Do you think that Saussure is the real fore runner of structuralism?
3. What do you think about the contribution of these thinkers?
4. What idea can you have of Genette’s Narratology from this section?
5. Find out the significance of Levi Strauss’s Structuralist Anthropology?
6. Think about Levi Strauss’s ideas of binaries and try to understand their implications?

3.3.2 KEY CONCEPTS

Structure:

Sometimes understood along with the idea of a ‘form’ the ‘structure’ usually refers to the overall shape and pattern of a text. However, all critical theories, have tried to define the ‘structure’: the developing unity of a work. According to the characteristics emphasized of that unity, the term may mean pattern, plot, form, argument, language, rhetoric, paradox, metaphor, myth and so on.. Starting from such dispositions, the term ‘structure’ becomes an enabling reference to the internal means and emphasized features likely to be mostly found in literature and language.

Text:

A text is a structure composed of elements of signification by which the elements make themselves manifest. Consequently, a text comprises elements of signification, the unit of these elements and the manifestation of this unity. Any attempt to understand the text leads to the question as to how, following what mode of being, the elements of a structured whole are to be defined. Structuralist conceptions dominate the debate around the status of a text. Saussure proposes that language is a system of signs determined by their differences. The interpretation of the text as the system of 'signs' limits the mode of manifestation of the things themselves to the purely functional structures.

Stop to Consider:

In literary theory and criticism the term 'text' has so far replaced the idea of a 'literary work'. This is significant because a 'work' generally imply the idea of an author, authorial control, and a false notion of aesthetic completeness. With the emergence of theories there could be found a shift from the author to the reader. Moreover, the term 'work' used to privilege literature at the cost of other forms of rewritings. Hence, the emergence of the idea of a text helped in imposing textuality on almost everything. A modern theory like that of Barthes sets itself against the assumptions which impose authority over the meaning of the text to the author rather than the reader. It is in the context of such an understanding Barthes's *Death of the Author* hold its point.

In comparison to Structuralism, Post-structuralism views the world itself as a text. The entire cultural network of our life is a text in which we live, think, and chose. This view has been very boldly presented by Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* where he mentions that "there is nothing outside the text.". This means that we know the world through language and that we can locate a kind of textuality of almost everything.

Binary Opposite:

The phrase refers to two mutually exclusive terms such as man / woman, black / white, nature / culture and so on. This is on of the most dominant underlying concepts of Structuralism which argue that such oppositions are basic to all cultural phenomena. More specifically Structuralism even argue that meaning itself is relational in the way that we know the meaning of

‘right’ by virtue of its contrast with the word ‘wrong’. In effect, this means that language is built on a self contained system of interrelationships. Structuralist linguistics, defines language as the system of relations, presupposes binary opposites of the phonological elements of language as the basis and model of analysis. As Jonathan Culler points out in his *Structuralist Poetics*, the significance of binarism ‘lies in the fact that it permits one to classify anything.’

Sign, Signifier and Signified:

In his *Course in General Linguistics* Saussure presented the distinction between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’. For him the linguistic ‘sign’ unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image. The ‘signifier’ whether audible as speech or visible as writing, is only an object of perception. What relates and holds both the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ is called the process of signification. Moving out of the traditional philosophical thinking Saussure did not grant any priority to the ‘signified’ as he could very radically claimed that the relationship between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ is arbitrary.

SAQ:

1. Can you form an internal connection amongst the concepts you have just read? (100 words)

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3.4 POST-STRUCTURALISM

The term Post-structuralism became a popular critical and theoretical usage during 1970s. It is not a unified school of thought or movement. Thinkers most commonly attached to this term are Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault,

Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes. The dismissal of any 'real' (which means an original, authentic, stable referent, experience and meaning) is both a topic and an effect of Post-structuralism. However, the problematic relationship between 'signifier' and 'signified' or event and concept is perhaps the strongest point in Post-structuralism. What makes Post-structuralist theory a relevant way of looking at the contemporary world of change is the 'erasure' or weakening of divisions between 'signifiers' and 'signified', reading and writing, literature and criticism.

Stop to Consider:

There is no denying the fact that Post-structuralism is the working out of the various implications of Structuralism. But it is also quite evident that Post-structuralism tries to deflate the scientific pretensions of structuralism. If structuralism tried to master the manmade world of 'signs', Post-structuralism refused to take such claims seriously. We can also say that Post-structuralists are actually Structuralists who suddenly shift their interest finding an error on their ways.

The important thing to notice is that Structuralism set out to master the text and open its secrets. Post-structuralism instead believed that this desire is futile because there are various unconscious, or linguistic or historical forces which cannot be mastered. Post- structuralism explores the differences between what the text says and what it thinks it says. We may also be irritated by Post-structurailsm's failure to arrive at conclusions but we should not forget that while doing this they are only trying to be free from the trap of 'Logocentrism'.

Post-structuralism has radically revised the traditional notion of theory by raising it to a position of prime importance and significance. The thinkers opined that theory has more than literature to account for. Since everything, from the unconscious to social and cultural practices, is seen as functioning like a language, the goal of Post-structuralist theorists are to be found in an understanding of what controls interpretation and meaning in all possible system of signification.

It is also argued that Post-structuralism began with a suspicion of Structuralism's tendency to impose a comprehensive theory on literature. It is concerned less with having a firm hold over the text than with celebrating the text's elusive nature and the fallibility of all readings. As a theoretical

tool, it has derived much from Derrida's idea that language is an infinite chain of words having no extra-lingual origin or end. According to Derrida, a text should be seen as an endless stream of 'signifiers' without any final meaning. Such a view rejects the functionality of elements like common sense, and reason the readers have in their minds as they want to pull the text into his or her own frame of reference. At the same time, any attempt at imposing an order on language on the part of the writer, also proves to be inadequate. Such thinking resulted in his most acclaimed theoretical concept known as 'Deconstruction' which is often used interchangeably with Post-structuralism. In another sense, Post-structuralism takes an interdisciplinary stance by incorporating all other approaches that developed after Structuralism.

3.4.1 POST-STRUCTURALIST THINKERS

It is never an easy effort to make a complete list of the Post-structuralist thinkers because being an interdisciplinary approach it has influenced people from various disciplines starting from humanities to social sciences. Following is an attempt to know some of the prominent ones.

Jacques Derrida:

Derrida was a French thinker who taught philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. He made a tremendous impact on contemporary literary studies, especially in the universities of America where his notion of 'Deconstruction' became a major force in 1970s and 80s. Derrida joined a polemic of tradition directed against metaphysics that extends from Nietzsche to Heidegger. His critique of metaphysics and of presence of consciousness owes much to Sigmund Freud's discovery of the unconscious. His challenge against the idealist concept of language is an extension of principles laid down by Ferdinand de Saussure and his Structuralist undertakings. (Read more about Derrida in the next unit)

Michel Foucault:

Foucault was the professor of the History of Systems of Thought at the College de France in Paris. However, he has been described variously as a

philosopher, social scientist, and historian of ideas. Foucault likes to be called a Post-structuralist. His works call our attention to the role of language in the exercise and preservation of power. He thought that Structuralism ignored the superficial appearances or common sense view of cultural phenomena in its efforts to have a firm hold over the conditions of their possibilities. While the Structuralists like Levi-Strauss and Barthes, used language and linguistics as their methodological tool, Foucault used the history of social and political institutions and discourses. His claim over the instability of any universal truth had a powerful impact on writing of literary history in Britain and America.

Foucault believes that the world is more than a galaxy of texts, and that some theories of textuality usually ignore the fact that any discourse is discursively formed out of a power-politics. Such discourses reduce the political and cosmic forces and ideological and social control to aspects of signifying processes. His publications include *Madness and Civilization* (1965), *The Order of Things* (1970), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and a multi-volumed *History of Sexuality* left unfinished by his death.

Jacques Lacan:

Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, entered the Freudian psychoanalytical movement in 1936. But his radical critique of the orthodox psychoanalytical theory and practice led to his expulsion from the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1959. The publication of his research papers and articles later published as *Ecrits* in Paris in 1964, made him one of the leading figures who became instrumental in the International Dissemination of Structuralist and Post-structuralist ideas of language, literature and the nature of the human subject. His most celebrated theory, “The Unconscious is Structured Like a Language”, implied his borrowing of methods and concepts of modern linguistics and tried to question Saussure’s assumption that there is nothing problematic about the bond between the ‘signified’ and the ‘signifier’ by pointing out that the two ‘signifiers’ ladies and gentlemen may refer to the same signified—a toilet . He concluded that language, the signifying chain, has a life of its own which cannot be anchored to a word of things. Perhaps, this is how his poststructuralist inclinations come to the fore front.

Roland Barthes:

Roland Barthes' Post-structuralism is best represented by his essay '*Death of the Author*'. Rejecting and dismissing the traditional notion of the author's being the origin of the text, the source of meaning and the only authority of the interpretation. His author is stripped off all metaphysical status and finally reduced to allocation where language with its citations, repetitions, echoes and references crosses and re-crosses. The reader is thus free to enter the text from any direction. Barthes' Post-structuralist notions lie in the premise that readers are free to open and close the text's signifying processes without respect for the signified.

Paul de Man:

De Man was the Sterling professor of the Humanities at Yale University. Credit goes to Paul de Man who in a way established the 'Deconstruction' as a valid theoretical tool. Inspired by Derrida, during 1970s, he made Yale the center of 'Deconstruction'. He was mostly interested in the interdisciplinary mix of literature, philosophy and linguistics the components of theory. He is known for his influential books *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971) and *Allegories of Reading* (1979). These two books are regarded as rigorous works of 'Deconstruction'. His *Blindness and Insight* circles around the paradox that critics achieve insights only through a certain kind of blindness. Citing an example of the American New Critics de Man said that they based their practice upon the Coleridgian notion of organic form, according to which a poem has a formal unity analogous to that of natural form. However, instead of trying to discover in poetry the unity and coherence of the natural world, they reveal multifaceted and ambiguous meanings. This ambiguous poetic language seems to contradict their idea of a totality. His other book *Allegories of Reading* develops a rhetorical type of 'Deconstruction' already discussed in his first book. He is concerned with the theory of tropes which accompanies rhetorical treatise. Figures of speech (tropes) allow writers to say one thing but mean something else: to substitute one sign for another (metaphor) and to displace meaning from one sign in a chain of signification to another (metonymy). Tropes tend to pervade the world of language by destabilizing Logic, thereby denying the possibility of straightforward literal or referential

use of language. To the question “Tea or Coffee?” one may reply “What’s the difference?”. While doing so, one may produce two meanings. One rhetorical- “It makes no difference which I chose”, and the other, literal- “what is the difference between tea and coffee.” De Man grounds his theory on a meticulous ‘close reading’ of specific texts, and considers that it is the effect of language and rhetoric that prevents direct representation of the real. For De man, every reading is a mis- reading, because tropes intervene between critical and literary texts. His most radical belief is that literary texts are ‘self-deconstructing’ means that a literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of his own rhetorical mode. The interpreter or deconstructor has nothing to do except to collude with the text’s own processes.

J Hillis Miller:

Known for his books like *The Disappearance Of God* (1963), *Poets of Reality* (1965) the American Professor in English Miller became an enthusiastic disciple of Derrida by applying his theory and method to interpret the idiom of literary criticism. Taking the deconstructive practice a step further, J Hillis Miller in his essay entitled *Stevens’ Rock and Criticism as Cure* explained, “Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself.” In this process, texts are subjected to a kind of uncovering of structures that operate in a text and showing of how these structures can be dismantled by making use of the elements of the text itself.

Check Your Progress:

1. Relate the ideas of the key thinkers of Post-structuralism?
2. What relation can you make of Derrida and Paul de Man?
3. Re-read Lacan and Foucault to understand the significance of what they are saying?
4. Think about Paul de Man’s ideas on figurative and literal meaning of a text?

3.5 SUMMING UP

If we are to judge the significance and implications of Structuralism and Post-structuralism we cannot help saying that these are two valid but very dull, technical approach to literary studies. Referring to Structuralism, we can say that it tends to reject a life beyond the text preferring to see every book as a 'construct' working by certain rules. Moreover, any attempt to interpret a text is often affected by the interpreter's own sense of reality and his/her own values. Hence, the focus on the text alone, rejecting interpretation in favour of a description of the text's operation cannot be fully accepted. Considering everything as a 'construct' and 'order-system' structuralism presented itself as yet another ordering system. Perhaps, this is the transitional point in which structuralism becomes Post-structuralism. With the emergence of Post-structuralism, we enter into an area of total chaos. Because unlike Structuralism which emphasized on having a firm hold on the text, Post-structuralism came to acknowledge the text's elusive nature and the fallibility of all sorts of readings.

3.6 GLOSSARY

Prague Linguistic Circle: Often referred to as 'the Prague School' was founded in 1926 by a small group of Czech and Russian linguists. Although seen merely as an offshoot of Russian Formalism, it had a broad agenda ranging from the study of folklore to aesthetics, from Semiology to philosophy. It played a vital role in the development of modern structuralism.

Phenomenology: A philosophical method founded by the philosopher Edmund Husserl in the first two decades of the 20th century.. It seeks to provide a descriptive analysis of the objective world as it appears to the subject. 'Phenomena' in the Greek sense means the appearance of things. It extols the notion that the world out there is governed, ordered and made meaningful by consciousness itself.

Semiotics: It means the study of signs. In literary criticism, it is concerned with the entire signifying system of the text and its underlying codes which we need to know in order to master the text.

Empiricism: A form of epistemology which claims that all knowledge is derived from experience through the five senses. British empiricism is

generally associated mainly with John Locke, David Hume, and John Stuart Mill. According to the empiricists, knowledge is associated with a neutral and dispassionate observation of the world.

Metaphysics: A branch of philosophy dealing with the most general and abstract questions, such as those pertaining to the nature of existence, the categories of space and time, and the existence of God or the immortality of the human soul. It seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the uncertain world.

3.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 4

Jacques Derrida

Contents:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introducing Derrida the Theorist
- 4.3 Reading “Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences”
- 4.4 Practicing Deconstruction
- 4.5 Key Concepts in Deconstruction
- 4.6 Summing Up
- 4.7 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading unit 4 you must be well-aware of the changes in terms of interpreting a literary text because of Structuralism and Post-structuralism. Although, references have been made to Derrida and ‘Deconstruction’ in that unit, here we will be discussing more specifically about the Post-structuralist thinker Derrida and his practice of ‘Deconstruction’. However, after going through this unit, you will be able to–

- *find out* Derrida’s unique approach to interpretations
- *situate* Derrida in a significant phase of world intellectual history
- *read Structure Sign and Play* with attempts to understand what Derrida wanted to expose
- *contextualize* ‘Deconstruction’ in the Post-structuralist phase of the later twentieth century
- *reduce* the difficulties in understanding ‘Deconstruction’

4.2 INTRODUCING DERRIDA THE THEORIST

Derrida was born at El Biar, Algiers, on 15th July, 1930 of Jewish parents. Derrida moved to Paris in 1950, and studied philosophy at the Ecole Normale Superieure, where he later became a lecturer in 1955. Then he continued lecturing at Sorbonne between 1960 and 1964. He became visiting

professor at Johns Hopkins and Yale Universities from 1972, and then at the University of California, Irvine. His name is also attached to the International College of Philosophy, Paris as its founder member. Derrida published his *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference* (1967); *The Truth of Painting* (1978); *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (1990), and succeeded in having an unprecedented impact on the contemporary literary and cultural studies, as through these critical books Derrida tried to establish his notions about Post-structuralism in general, and Deconstruction in particular.

As a radical philosopher and thinker, Derrida joins hands with Nietzsche and Heidegger who critiqued the notions of Western Metaphysics by radically questioning the validity of certain philosophical concepts like 'knowledge', 'truth' and 'identity'. According to Derrida, Western Metaphysics is dominated by a discourse of 'presence' in the assumption that truth is a function of the presence of consciousness to itself and to its object or in the assumption that time is oriented towards its end-the destruction of history. Derrida connects these assumptions to the 'Logocentrism' (refer to section 5.5) of the Western Metaphysical tradition in which 'presence' bestows a spoken word a privilege over the written one. In the history of the Western thought writing or graphic representation has been constantly devalued in favour of the presence of the 'presence', of voice or speech in thought and consciousness. Derrida claimed that his 'Deconstruction' overturned such tenacious metaphysical foundations. Another influence that can be very persistently seen on Derrida is of Sigmund Freud whose psychoanalytical practices violated traditional concepts of a coherent human consciousness and the unitary self.

Stop to Consider:

Derrida is credited with the inauguration of the most significant phase of Post-structuralism- 'Deconstruction' as it is known today. Derrida shows that the Structuralists posit a contingent superficial extremity of language to articulate thought. Most of the early works of Derrida is dedicated to the re-reading of Western philosophy or writing and to the examining of this relationship between philosophy and linguistics. Concepts of 'Supplement' and 'Difference' further extends the Sausurrean idea of difference to conceptualize the dislocation of the metaphysical 'presence' inscribed in the 'sign'. Derrida's critique of the 'sign' opens new ways of for textual criticism. It further leads to the re-examination of the relation of language with truth, error, knowledge, power, reason, desire and so on.

Although Derrida tried to deconstruct numerous texts, he most interestingly does not claim to have explained or revealed their true meanings. Those who try to find a single, homogenous, or universal meaning in a text are actually imprisoned by the structure of thought which limits the reading of the text to only one of the various readings. Along with *Writing and Difference*, Derrida's *Of Grammatology* contains most of his programmatic statements and resumes many of his central concerns. In this book he begins to redefine writing by deconstructing some of the ways by which it has been sought to be defined. His greatest influence can be seen in the new critical skepticism associated with the Yale School of 'Deconstruction'. 'Deconstruction' as a reading strategy was later established most dominantly by thinkers like Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller and Barbara Johnson.

4.3 READING "STRUCTURE SIGN AND PLAY IN THE DISCOURSE OF HUMAN SCIENCES"

"Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" is originally a paper contributed to a conference entitled "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man", held at Johns Hopkins University, in 1966 and later compiled in Derrida's one of the most acclaimed books *Writing and Difference*. This essay is a critical commentary on the works of major contemporary figures and general theoretical tendencies they represent in Western Culture. Analyzing certain problems of Levi Strauss's method, Derrida concludes by contrasting two views of interpretation –one retrospective which tends to reconstruct an original meaning or truth and the other prospective, which explicitly welcomes the indeterminacy of meaning. Here, it is an attempt to summarise the essay so that you can find it easier to understand the notion of the structure, the 'sign' and its 'playfulness' although it is always better for you to read the original text by Derrida. This essay marks a very crucial historical moment in which Post-structuralism began as a major theoretical movement. This was also a moment in which 'the structurality of the structure had to begin to be thought,' as opposed to classical Structuralism, traditional Humanism and Empiricism.

Derrida begins his essay with an epigraph from Montaigne- "We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things." Derrida then introduces

the idea of an ‘event’ which has occurred to signify some sort of ‘rupture’ or break. He considers it to be a major break in the fundamental structure of Western science and philosophy. This shift or break became possible also because of awareness about the ‘struturality of structure’. In another sense, this was the moment when Structuralism, while explaining a structure, claimed that language itself was a structure and following the same logic, it could be said that every system –whether language, or philosophy itself had a structure. Unlike Saussure, who looked at the structure as linear, Derrida insists that all structures have a center. There has to be, Derrida claims, something that all the elements in the structure refer to, connect to, something that makes the structure hold its shape, keeps all the parts together.

The ‘center’, while holding the whole structure together, limits the movements of the constituting elements in the structure-this movement Derrida calls the ‘play’. According to Derrida, this center is the crucial part of any structure and nothing can take the place of a center. Derrida writes, “The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure-one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure-but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form.” (Lodge, 90). Then he also continues by saying “the center also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible... Thus it has always been thought that the center which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. (Lodge, 90)

The center is then the cause and the ultimate referent for everything within the system. Perhaps, that is why Derrida says that the center is a part of a system or structure because it is a part of the structure, but not the part of it, because it is the governing element. Derrida further puts it like this – the center is the part of the structure which “escapes struturality”. Citing the Puritan belief, we can say that God created the world and rules it, and is responsible for it, but isn’t part of it. The center is the center, but not a part of what Derrida calls ‘the Totality’ of the structure. The idea of a centered structure, according to Derrida, is ‘contradictorily coherent’. The idea of the center is useful as it limits play. So, before the ‘rupture’ which Derrida refers to in the very beginning of the essay, what happened in the history of

philosophy was the continual substitution of one centered system for other centered systems. Thanks to the findings of Structuralism that made it possible to see all philosophical systems as insisting on a center. Derrida's 'event' or 'rupture' was the moment when it was possible to see for the first time that the center was a 'construct', rather than something that was true or just 'out there'. The assumption that the center is the basis or origin for all things in a system makes the center indispensable and special, and gives the center what Derrida calls 'central presence' or 'full presence'.

The central preoccupation of this essay of Derrida is the notion of a 'center' as the ultimate source of meaning or that it is the center in a 'structure' that makes meaning possible. It is interesting to see how Derrida manipulates the idea of the 'center' to talk about the playfulness of the 'signifier' while producing meaning.

Then Derrida brings in the idea of 'transcendental signified' -the ultimate source of meaning which cannot be represented or substituted by any adequate signifier. For example, the idea of God is probably the best example of a transcendental signified. God cannot be represented by any signifier, yet God is the entity that all signifiers constantly refer to as it is believed that God created the whole system. But when the 'structurality of the Structure' had begun to be thought it became necessary to think about both the law governing the desire for a center in the constitution of the structure, and the processes of signification which orders the displacements and substitutions for the law of central presence. Henceforth, it was necessary to think out that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign substitutions came into play. This was the moment, Derrida says, when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of the center or origin, everything became discourse that is a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified, consequently, extends the domain of the play of signification infinitely.

Then Derrida starts wondering how we can really think and talk about systems and centers, without making a new system with a center. He remembers Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger as trying to do the same but failing because of their own systems with centers. In other words, Derrida says, no one can talk about any system without using the terms of that system: “we have no language-no syntax and no lexicon... which is foreign” to a system. Then referring to the ‘sign’ he says that as soon as one tries to say that all ‘signs’ are equal as there is no transcendental signified that holds any semiotic system together and that signifying systems have no centers, therefore all signs have infinite playfulness or infinite ranges of meaning. The only way to talk about the sign is by using the word sign, and assuming it has some fixed meaning. And then you are again back in a system that you are trying to “deconstruct”.

Ethnology (or Anthropology) began for Western European Societies with a view to ascertain their status as the ‘center’ of civilization, to compare all other cultures with whatever Western Europe had already inherited. This is called “Ethnocentrism” (assuming one culture as the measure or standard of all other cultures.). But then ethnologies too started to look at other cultures as autonomous, as existing at their own terms, and not necessarily in relation to Western culture as the ‘center’. Derrida equates this moment in Ethnology to the rupture in Western philosophy. Derrida uses the notion of Ethnology as a way to get back to his main topic- Claude Levi Strauss’s structural view of the binary relation between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’. Claude Levi Strauss as a structuralist found out the basic structures of myth (and hence all aspects of culture) as binary oppositions-pairs of ideas that gave each other values: Light / Darkness (Light is value because it is not darkness), Male / Female, Culture / Nature and so on. Looking at the Nature-culture dichotomy Strauss defined the ‘Natural’ as the ‘Universal’ and ‘Cultural’ as dictated by the norms of a particular social organization. The basic rule of binaries is that they have to be opposite, so nature/ culture, man/ woman/ or universal/ specific all need to be absolutely separate. But most interestingly “language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique”, which nullifies all rules governing those oppositions.

Once a system is deconstructed on the basis of its inconsistencies, by showing where there is a play in the system, Derrida talks about two choices. One is that one can throw out the whole structure as no good. Usually then, one

tries to build another structure with no inconsistencies, no play which is of course impossible—just like substituting one center for another and not considering that the center is only a concept which has play and not a fixed and stable truth. The other (which is Levi-Strauss’s choice) is to keep using the same structure but at the same time recognizing that it is flawed. In Derrida’s terms, this means to stop attributing “truth values” to a structure or system, but rather to see that system as a system, as a construct, as something built around a central idea that holds the whole thing in place, even though that central idea is flawed or even an illusion.

Stop to Consider:

Both Derrida and Levi Strauss agree on the notion of the “bricolage” and the “bricoleur.” In his *The Savage Mind* he presents the idea of ‘bricolage’. A bricoleur, Levi Strauss says, is somebody who uses the ‘means at hand’ that is the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been specially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary. There is of course a critique of language in the form of bricolage, and it has often been said that bricolage is critical language itself. Derrida contrasts the bricoleur with the engineer. The engineer’s job is to design a building which has to be stable. Thus, he becomes the person who sees himself as the center of his own discourse, the origin of his own language and thus breaking with all forms of the bricolage.

Then refereeing to the idea of the ‘play’ Derrida writes that the play is the disruption of the presence. The presence of the element is always the signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always a play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Derrida concludes his essay by referring to two different ways of interpreting interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned towards the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or throughout the entire

history has dreamt of full presence, the reassuring foundations, the origin and the end of play.

SAQ:

1. What ideas do you derive of the 'center' from this section? (80 words)

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2. The sign is playful: comment on this idea? (100 words)

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3. What is Derrida's deconstruction? (60 words)

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4.4 PRACTICING DECONSTRUCTION

As you have already been told, in his '*Structure Sign and Play*', through his discussion on Claude Levi-Strauss, Freud and Saussure, Derrida provided the readers with examples of deconstructive method in practice. And Derrida has done it firstly with a critique and inversion of the hierarchical binary opposition that has structured Western philosophies and by making them examples of 'Logocentrism', and secondly, by dispersing the meanings in accordance with the principles of 'difference'.

So, Derrida's 'Deconstruction' starts out as a critique of the theory of language first propounded by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who had emphasized on the system-bound nature of language which was supposed to be self-contained with its own internal rules or 'grammar'. But the reference to language was taken only as a model which was later to be appropriated to other analysis of cultural phenomena. 'Deconstruction' actually argues against this notion of deep structure determining meaning within a system or of 'signs. For Derrida, meaning-formation is an evolutionary process as what we consider to be a 'sign' is a signifier signifying not the

‘signified’ but another ‘signifier’. Hence the ‘sign’ always fails to achieve full meaning. Language is a chaotic phenomenon and any attempt at structural ordering limits its possibilities. This radicalism can be further seen as destabilizing the Structuralist notion of binary relationships which is nothing but the extension of the idea of Saussure’s differential meaning. ‘Deconstruction’ instead argues that binaries always privilege one term over ‘the other’. In one sense, ‘Deconstruction’ attempts to expose and challenge the contentious cultural ways - man/woman, day/night, raw/cooked and the sinister ideological connotations. ‘Deconstruction’ believes that identity is internally fractured and any fixed position like man/woman is actually an illusion.

In his *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams writes that ‘Deconstruction’ as applied in criticism designates a theory and practice of reading which claims to ‘subvert’ or ‘undermine’ the assumption that the system of language provides grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence of unity, and the determinate meaning of a text. A deconstructive reading seeks to expose the various contradictory forces within the text itself, dissipates the fixity of the structure and meanings into an incompatible and undecidable possibilities. A deconstructive reading is a sort of double-reading which means that it acknowledges the ways a writer makes an attempt to order things, but at the same time also points to the contradictions and problems in the text. Derrida’s ‘Deconstruction’ as method, considers closely an individual text, searching for contradictions within the text. But he did not propose ‘Deconstruction’ as a mode of literary criticism, but as a new way of reading all types of texts.

The new-critical explications of the texts had undertaken to show that great literary work, in the tight internal relations of its figurative and paradoxical meanings, constitutes a freestanding, bounded, and organic entity of multiplex yet determinate meanings. On the contrary, a radically deconstructive close reading undertakes to show that a literary text lacks a ‘totalised’ boundary that makes it an entity, much less an organic unity, and lacks also any adequate ground for its own linguistic procedures. As a consequence the text, by a play of internal counter forces, disseminates into an indefinite range of self conflicting significations. The claim is sometimes made by deconstructive critics that a literary text is superior to non-literary texts, but only because by its self reference,

it shows itself to be more aware of features that all texts inescapably share: its functionality, its lack of a genuine ground, and especially its patent 'rhetoricity' or use of figurative procedures—features that make any 'right reading' or 'correct reading' of a text impossible. (Abrams, 229)

Although the ultimate aim of 'Deconstruction' is to critique Western idealism and philosophy, it arose as a reaction against the practices of Structuralism and Formalism—two structure-oriented theories of reading. Structuralism believed that all elements of human culture, including literature, may be understood as parts of a system of signs. Following Saussure's linguistic theory, structuralists attempted to develop 'Semiology' or a science of signs, arguing that anything done or used by people to communicate information constitutes a sign. Derrida expressed doubts regarding structuralists' explanation of the laws governing human signification which provide the key to understanding the form and meaning of anything. Formalism, on the other hand, assumed that a work of literature is a freestanding, self-contained object whose meaning can be derived from the complex network of relations amongst its parts. But Formalism which associated literary with figurative language, ranked some figures above others in a hierarchical manner. For example, they preferred symbols and metaphors to metonyms, arguing that the former are less arbitrary figures than the latter. Deconstruction has questioned this hierarchical framework of the formalists by arguing that all figuration is a process of linguistic substitution. It also differed from Formalism in terms of the patterns of meaning. Formalists extolled ambiguity as the characteristic of literary texts but they also believed that a complete understanding of the text was possible by solving those ambiguities. Deconstruction, instead argued that the conflicts and ambiguities are undecidable embedded as they are within the text. Consequently, in deconstructive practices, the text is seen as more radically heterogeneous unlike the formalist ones.

Deconstruction then is not merely interpretation, the very act of choosing amongst all possible meanings. It can more accurately be defined as 'reading' which according to Paul de Man is involved in irreconcilable uncertainty (or moments of Aporia) and an act performed with the awareness that all texts are ultimately unreadable.

For Deconstructors, the boundaries between a given text and that larger text we call language are always shifting. It was this larger text that Derrida was referring to in *Of Grammatology* when he made his famous statement ‘there is nothing outside the text.’ In making this statement, Derrida refused to categorically distinguish world and text, simultaneously asserting that every human (worldly) product can be viewed as a text and that every text reflects and shapes the world we perceive. It is through language that we express ourselves and understand the world; the acts that constitute the ‘real world’ are both inseparable from the discourses out of which they arise and as open to interpretation as any work of literature. If no language or discourse existed, neither would tradition. (Bedford, 80)

Although ‘Deconstruction’ as a tool, has revolutionized the ways of interpretations, it is not free from its limitations. Traditional thinkers would say that ‘Deconstruction’ is valid only in the theoretical level because a reader may share a context of understanding with the writer and try to assign meaning to what the text says accordingly. The traditional objection to ‘Deconstruction’ is that it is a form of criticism which, rather than valuing what the text says, emphasizes a text’s difficulties in saying that. But Deconstruction has succeeded in standing against all sorts of allegations. Because what began as a theory during 1960s and 1970s, has over time developed into a method adopted by critics taking a wide range of approaches to literature-ethnic, Feminist, New-historicist, Marxist-in addition to critics outside the literary studies who are mostly involved in Race Theory or Postcolonial studies. Edward Said, who is said to have inaugurated Post Colonial Criticism, is just one of many who have imported the notions of ‘Deconstruction’ from the literary to the non-literary arena. In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said deconstructed the East/ West, Orient/ Occident opposites and the stereotypes it entailed.

SAQ:

1. What idea do you get of Derrida’s ‘Deconstruction’ from your reading of this section? (100 words)

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2. Do you consider 'Deconstruction' as a valid method of critiquing established notions in Literary Studies.? (60 words)

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4.5 KEY CONCEPTS IN 'DECONSTRUCTION'

We cannot claim to have understood the word 'Deconstruction' without referring to the various other concepts attached to it. 'Deconstruction' is the result of multiplicity of concepts which together sum up a definition of 'Deconstruction' although it is very difficult to define 'Deconstruction' in one sentence. However, one noticeable thing is that Derrida deliberately introduces new terms, displacing the old on the grounds that they may become the central concepts of a new theory or system on the disbelief that old terms cannot explain the new concepts of the present.

Logocentrism:

Logocentrism, a term coined and used by Derrida in his book *Of Grammatology* denotes the position that words, writings, ideas, systems of thought are fixed and are governed by some authority and external forces whose meaning they tend to convey. These outside sources may consist of something like the objects of the real 'world out there' which is beyond language and referred to by words. Common assumption about Logocentrism is that 'signs' refer to referents and words make an ascertainable, decipherable meaning present to the reader or hearer as words contain and convey some 'presence' or 'presences' from the outside world. According to Derrida, this Logocentric assumption of how words and thinking operate, has been the foundation of the whole history of Western Metaphysics and has dominated Western thought and linguistics since the time of Plato.

Différance:

A neological term used by Derrida to refer to the production of differences and the endless deferral of linguistic meaning or any signifying system

understood as the system of differences. It is central term commonly used by Derrida in his *Of Grammatology*. The French 'La Difference', the counterpart of English 'Difference' in a sense, makes Derrida's comment on Writing and Difference clear to us. The difference in spelling is only written as it can only be read not heard. While being in use, the change in the spelling, signifies and combines the Saussurean ideas of difference with the sense of a difference produced henceforth as well as an eternal delay or deferral. Derrida here accepts Saussurean ideas of language as a system of differences and then extends its principles to its ultimate consequence-that meaning is only produced through the relation among 'signifiers' not through the 'signified'. Consequently, the 'signified' is thus constantly deferred and delayed through a differential network.

The Supplement:

Supplementarity is another term coined and used by Derrida to describe a unique function of any signifying structures. Focusing on the contradictions inherent in the concept of the Supplement, Derrida says that the word itself is illusive. It may either mean something added to complete a thing or something added to an already 'complete in itself' thing.

Metaphysics of Presence:

Remembering Levi Strauss's notion of a 'floating signifier' in a signifying structure, Derrida shows how that same 'signifier', having an access of symbolic value, fills the lack on the part of the 'signified', but which can do so only because it exceeds the total signification of that structure and thus representing the overabundance of the 'signifier' in relation to the 'signified'.

Aporia:

Aporia is a term found in Greek Rhetoric and has been traditionally being used as a figure of speech in which the speaker or character deliberates on an ambiguous question. Being one of the most famous examples of an aporic situation, Hamlet's soliloquy 'To be or not to be, that is the question' puts forward Hamlet's struggle to derive a conclusion about how he should act.

This word came to signify various other connotations in the hands of the Deconstructive critics. With the help of this word they tried to indicate certain points where we face not simply a choice of reading but a plurality of undecidable meanings. Consequently, the gap or lacuna opens up between what a text wishes to say and what it is constrained to say. The deconstructive critics start to find out aporias, or moments of self contradictions where the text begins to undermine its own presuppositions.

SAQ:

1. Try to find out the connections amongst the key concepts of 'Deconstruction'? (80 words)

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2. Do you feel that the three concepts help in explaining 'Deconstruction'? If yes, How? (60+40 words)

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4.6 SUMMING UP

The greatest success of 'Deconstruction' in the domains of aesthetics is the assertion that no text can ever be considered as complete in itself or as communicating a fixed meaning over time. It also dismissed the claim of the author's producing or controlling meaning or interpretation and that of the critic's offering a definitive meaning of the author's supposed intentions. In one sense, 'Deconstruction' had a tremendous influence on the entire field of literary criticism of the last three decades, by blurring the division between fiction and theory, literature and philosophy, reading and writing and the critic and the reader. Together with the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, Derrida's 'Deconstruction' launched a new category of writing- reading of Lacan reading Freud, of Derrida re-reading Plato and Rousseau or Barthes reading Balzac. The developments in the field of literary theory and criticism in the last decades of the twentieth century is partly a rejection of and partly a reaction to 'Deconstruction'. In fact, it enabled the people to see that the

order of the 'world out there' is not something given, but something that is chosen to be 'constructed' through language. 'Deconstruction' provided a new angle from which that structure of Western society is sought to be analyzed.

But what ever you have read in units 4 and 5 is never supposed to be complete in itself. Because, the vast world of 'Structuralism' and 'Post-structuralism' can never be narrowed down like this. However, my attempt at simplifying the things for you in these units is a concern with your own level of understanding. However, you will do really well, if you can get hold of the books referred and read them of your own and try to see for yourself the world of theory and how it has enriched the various processes of interpretation. For your better understanding of theory, I should recommend you to read *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*.

4.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 5

Roland Barthes

Contents:

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introducing the Theorist
- 5.3 Reading “The Death of the Author”
- 5.4 Key Concepts
- 5.5 Theoretical Assumptions
- 5.6 Summing up
- 5.7 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 OBJECTIVES

You should look upon Barthes’ critical concerns as helping to widen the task of criticism. That in itself is an attractive proposition because you will see how literary critical activity begins to embrace what is conventionally ‘non-literary’. We begin by introducing Barthes as a theorist who makes his propositions with unconventional candour - for instance, that the ‘truth’ has nothing to do with criticism! Hence, you should be able to do certain things by the end of the unit—

- *describe* the critical position occupied by Barthes
- *explain* his theoretical perspective
- *summarise* the concepts he proposes

5.2 INTRODUCING THE CRITIC

Structuralism gained wide attention in the 1950s, initially in France and then in other countries, on account of “the application of a Lévi-Straussian notion of myth to contemporary French culture. Inspired by Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes infused a Saussurean view of *langue* and signification with a Marxist (and Brechtian) awareness of class ideology in order to anatomize the daily preoccupations of his fellow-citizens, and published the resulting eminently readable essays in French magazines.” (Derek Attridge)

The above extract taken from *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, is meant to help you infer the importance of Roland Barthes as a cultural critic as well as a promoter of structuralism. Attridge proceeds with his account: “Barthes, who adopted linguistic concepts and terminology not only from Saussure but also from Peirce, Hjelmslev, Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, and Benveniste, was perhaps the most influential promoter of the linguistic model in the wider cultural field, with notable contributions to literary theory and criticism”.

SAQ:

What kind of approaches are typical in the study of culture ? (70 words)

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Barthes’ interests were wide-ranging: in the early 1960s he was involved with structuralist concerns, while his *S/Z* was pertinent to post-structuralism in the 1970s. Among his major works stand the memorable *Writing Degree Zero* (1953, trans.1968), *Mythologies* (1957), *S/Z* (1970, trans. 1975), *Empire of Signs* (1970, trans.1982), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973, trans.1976), *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975, trans.1977).

You might be able to understand Barthes’ critical concerns better if you turn to what he wrote in *Critical Essays* (1964): structuralism is an *activity* - not a school or movement - that reconstructs an “ ‘object’ in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning . . .of this object”. This object, which he calls a “simulacrum”, an “imitation” becomes now intelligible because its functions which had been invisible in its ‘natural’ state are now realized.

His essay, ‘What is Criticism?’ which appeared in *Critical Essays*, explains some of the critical concerns in structuralist terms. He says, “All criticism must include in its discourse . . . an implicit reflection on itself: every criticism is a criticism of the work *and* a criticism of itself. In other words, criticism is not at all a table of results or a body of judgments; it is essentially an activity, i.e., a series of intellectual acts profoundly committed to the historical and subjective existence . . . of the man who performs them.” Barthes goes on

to situate critical language: “Every novelist, every poet . . . is presumed to speak of objects and phenomena, even if they are imaginary, exterior and anterior to language: the world exists and the writer speaks: that is literature. The object of criticism is very different; the object of criticism is not “the world” but a discourse, the discourse of someone else: criticism is discourse upon a discourse; it is a second language, or a *meta-language* (as the logicians would say), which operates on a first language (or *language object*). It follows that the critical language must deal with two kinds of relations: the relation of the critical language to the language of the author studied, and the relation of this language object to the world. It is the “friction” of these two languages which defines criticism and perhaps gives it a great resemblance to another mental activity, logic, which is also based on the distinction between language object and metalanguage.

For if criticism is only a metalanguage, this means that its task is not at all to discover “truths”, but only “validities”.”

For Barthes critical activity is a ‘formal’ one: it is “an essentially formal activity, not in the esthetic but in the logical sense of the term. We might say that for criticism, the only way of avoiding “good conscience” or “bad faith” is to take as a moral goal not the decipherment of the work’s meaning but the reconstruction of the rules and constraints of that meaning’s elaboration: provided we admit at once that a literary work is a very special semantic system, whose goal is to put “meaning” in the world, but not “a meaning” . . . literature is indeed only a *language*, i.e., a system of signs: its being is not in its message but in this “system” . . . and thereby the critic is not responsible for reconstructing the work’s message but only its system, just as the linguist is not responsible for deciphering the sentence’s meaning but for establishing the formal structure which permits this meaning to be permitted.”

SAQ:

1. What is the structuralist conception of language ? What is implied in calling criticism a ‘metalanguage’? (50 words + 50 words)

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2. How would you understand the difference between putting “a meaning”, and putting “meaning”, in the world? (60 words)

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Barthes’ S/Z:

“In *S/Z*, first published in 1970, . . .Barthes deconstructs (without using the word) a short story by Balzac. *Sarrasine* is a classic realist text concerning a castrato singer and a fortune. The narrative runs on a series of enigmas (What is the source of the fortune? Who is the little old man? Who is La Zambinella? What is the connection between all three?) Even in summarizing the story in this way it is necessary to “lie”: there are not “three” but two, since the little old “man” is “La” Zambinella. Barthes breaks the text into fragments of varying lengths for analysis, and adds a number of “divagations”, pieces of more generalized commentary and exploration, to show *Sarrasine* as a “limit-text”, a text which uses the modes of classic realism in ways which constitute a series of “transgressions” of classic realism itself. The sense of plenitude, of a full understanding of a coherent text which is the normal result of reading the realist narrative, cannot here be achieved. It is not only that castration cannot be named in a text of this period. The text is compelled to transgress the conventional antithesis between the genders whenever it uses a pronoun to speak of the castrato. The story concerns the scandal of castration and the death of desire which follows its revelation; it concerns the scandalous origin of wealth; and it demonstrates the collapse of language, of antithesis (difference) as a source of meaning, which is involved in the disclosure of these scandals.

Each of these elements of the text provides a point of entry into it, none privileged, and these approaches constitute the degree of polyphony, the “parsimonious plural” of the readable (*lisible*) text.

The classic realist text moves inevitably and irreversibly to an end, to the conclusion of an ordered series of events, to the disclosure of what has been concealed. But even in the realist text certain modes of signification within the discourse —the symbolic, the codes of reference and the *semes*—evade the constraints of the narrative sequence. To the extent that these are “reversible,” free-floating nad of indeterminate authority, the text is plural. In the writable (*scriptible*) , wholly plural text all statements are of indeterminate origin, no single discourse is privileged, and no consistent and coherent plot constrains the free play of the discourses. The totally writable, plural text does not exist. At the opposite extreme, the readable text is barely plural. The readable text is

merchandise to be consumed, while the plural text requires the production of meanings through the identification of its polyphony. Deconstruction in order to reconstruct the text as a newly intelligible, plural object is the work of criticism.”

- Catherine Belsey, “Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text” (1985)

5.3 READING “THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR”

Roland Barthes is a particularly exciting personality within French structuralism. If we wish to perceive this critical movement in terms of a group, then we must turn to 1966, when the eighth issue of the journal, *Communications*, was published. The issue was wholly devoted to the structural analysis of narrative and contained an introduction (“Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives”) by Barthes, in addition to seven essays by Gerard Genette, A.-J. Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, and Claude Brémont, besides others. Barthes was introduced to modern linguistics by Greimas, after the Second World War Barthes’ structuralism belongs to the 1960s when he moved to the L’Ecole des Hautes Études.

Through his association with other structuralists in the 1960s (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault), Barthes was persuaded to develop a science of cultural signs which would unify contemporary research in diverse fields like anthropology, psychoanalysis, sociology, and stylistics all of which recognised the primacy of language. The ‘Introduction’ (named above) and the *Elements of Semiology* (1964) are the examples of this endeavour.

The essay here dates from 1968 and is seen as belonging to his poststructuralist phase. At one level, the ‘death of the author’ can be seen also in structuralism, where the individual utterance (*parole*) is made possible through the extra-personal system (*langue*). Contemporary theory challenges many of traditional New Critical practices for even while New Criticism spoke of the text as a ‘verbal icon’ (construction in words), the text was still tied to the author by being a “verbal enactment” of what the author perceived in the world. Saussurean structuralism was a radical undermining of humanist and romantic arguments upholding intentionality and creativity.

In the context of the earlier “Introduction to the Structuralist Analysis of Narratives”, Barthes raises the problem of the subject in relation to viewing the author not as a psychological subject but as a grammatical one. Post-

Saussurean theory looks at how subjectivity is made possible in language because it is language which allows the speaker to refer to herself or himself as “I” (the subject of a sentence). “Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’” . Subjectivity is constructed linguistically and discursively. It is displaced across a variety of discourses in which the concrete individual participates. What we are looking at here is a de-centring of the individual consciousness. Meaning, therefore, as well as knowledge or action, cannot be said to issue from the individual consciousness.

Barthes distinguished between the realist text (‘readerly text’) as of the nineteenth century such as the works of Balzac, or Dickens, or Tolstoy. This kind of text was thought to be ‘transparent’ in that its meaning was accessible to the reader and the text was thought to be the writer’s own individual expression. The reader, in this case, was like a consumer, passive and powerless. The experimental texts such as those of twentieth-century modernism (of Russian futurism, or Anglo-Saxon modernism) requires of the reader to be ‘active’, a participant in the establishment of the meaning of the text. In the present essay, Barthes pushes post-Saussurean arguments to their limit by “provocatively announcing the demise of authors and celebrating the productivity of readers, who set in motion the semiosis of texts.”

Why this issue crops up is involved with Barthes’ notion of writing: “writing is the destruction of every voice, every point of origin.” This is familiar in relation to Lacan’s idea of the Symbolic order. Writing is like entering the Symbolic order, where the ‘subject’ will be constructed. In that sense, it amounts to erasing of the original ‘voice’ which is the site of origin. Barthes refers to this as “Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing”. Writing begins where narrative is an end in itself. As he elaborates on what is writing (once the notion of Authorship is removed)- it can no longer be seen as the act of recording, or of notation, of representing, or depiction. It is a ‘performative’ *act*. Seen thus, it is “a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression)”. It “traces a field without origin - or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself”. Around 1960, Barthes wrote a series of seminal articles on writers

brought to the fore a notion of literature which forwarded the idea that writing (unlike speech) has not 'context' and thus the author is 'untraceable'.

As he says of the author-figure in this essay: the 'author' is a creation of modern society, of empiricism, the "prestige of the individual", of "the 'human person' ". The author is always present to us as the *past* of the book. But Barthes contrasts this with "the modern scriptor" who is "born simultaneously with the text".

What of the text when there is no author behind it? It is "eternally *here and now*". It is not a recording; it does not have a 'before'. It is "not a line of words" with a meaning to be deciphered (as in readings of scriptures), a singular meaning descending from a divine centre. It is "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash." Perhaps you can appreciate Barthes' own stylistic vigour here in the sentence, "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture". Barthes gives us two examples: one, from a novel by Gustave Flaubert (*Bouvard and Pécuchet*), and two, from the case of De Quincey. The true structuralist, Barthes explains "the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no half: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred." You should not mix this up with something like the reverse of imitation where life copies art. Here is the linguistic model at work, where 'reality' is itself mediated only through linguistic construction.

The transformation brought in by the new conception of writing, and the 'author', leads to other changes - the demolition of traditional criticism. The "reign of the Author" was, not surprisingly, the reign of the critic. Again, not surprisingly, old criticism is undermined by the removal of the author. Writing does not need to be deciphered, it needs to be "disentangled". What criticism must now take account of is "the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation". Instead of the author, the figure now present before us is the reader. What or who is reader (in terms of the text)? "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity

lies not in its origin but in its destination.” Destination means the reader since writing is meant to posit a reader. The reader is not personal: “this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.”

Barthes upholds the new focus on the reader who will make meaning, many meanings, possible. As the reader is given proper attention it spells the ‘death’ of the author. The critic, or criticism in other words, must henceforth turn to the reader. Barthes’ argument has the support of earlier writers and poets who had questioned the centrality of the author: the surrealists, Mallarmé, Valéry, and Proust. Linguistics had shown enunciation to be an “empty process”. So what did it portend for meaning? The reader thus is the site of meaning or meanings.

SAQ:

Would you agree that Barthes is giving an argument for the plurality of meaning? (50 words)

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5.4 KEY CONCEPTS

readerly/writerly:

In Barthes’ conception, the reader is free to enter the text from any direction. The removal of the author, as we have already seen above, was already implicit in structuralism. This was so because structuralism treats the ‘parole’, the individual utterance, as the result of the ‘langue’, an impersonal system. Barthes takes this a little further: readers do not pay heed to the signified but open and close the text’s signifying process with freedom. They do not follow the ‘intention’ of the author but can take their pleasure of the text following the defiles of the signifier as it slips past the grasp of the signified. This is restricted by the classic realist text.

Check Your Progress:

1. Elaborate Barthes' preoccupation with the role of the reader. Does he include the critic as reader?
2. Explain Barthes' grounds for denying centrality to the author.
3. Recount Roland Barthes' contributions as a cultural critic.
4. Explain clearly the distinction between the 'readerly' and the 'writerly' texts. What is the status of Barthes' own writings?
5. Show Barthes' arguments for his dissatisfaction with the 'classic realist' text. Why does he call it the 'readerly' text?

plaisir/jouissance:

In his *Le Plaisir du texte* published in 1973 (later translated into English as *The Pleasure of the Text*) Roland Barthes proposed a new approach to the Text which can be termed as the 'erotics of reading'. As a further development of the ideas of *readerly* and *writerly* encountered in *S/Z*, Barthes projects *plaisir* and *jouissance* (often translated into English as *pleasure* and *bliss* respectively) as two interconnected and opposing types of sensation experienced by the reader. Through the idea of *plaisir* Barthes brings back the question of reading experience to the forefront of critical attention and deals with the issue of reader's gratification through the reading experience. For Barthes, the textual *Jouissance* is a kind of orgasmic experience where the reader can never come to a proper judgement of the text. It is because, at the moment of the textual bliss, the reader is so enrapt that objectivity and necessary distance for a judgement becomes impossible.

The text of pleasure offers the traditional joys of the classic novel – intelligence, irony, delicacy, euphoria, mastery and security. The text of pleasure offers confirmation of the reader's knowledge, beliefs and expectations; the text of bliss brings loss, rupture and discomfort. The text of pleasure 'comes from culture and does not break with it'; the text of bliss 'unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions.' The text of pleasure brings contentment, the text of bliss a disturbing rupture. The text of pleasure confirms our comfortable relation with language as something stable and limited; the text of bliss 'brings to a crisis [the reader's] relation with language.'

[Adapted from *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, scholars, Terms*. ed. Irena R. Makaryk, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993]

5.5 THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

We can use here the explanations provided by Catherine Belsey. As we have seen above, the dethroning of the author is tantamount to the dethroning of authority. This is an idea important to modern literary theory. If you recall that for Saussure language is a system of signs, with no positive terms, then to say that a literary form 'reflects' the world gives us no further insight. To use Belsey's words, "If by 'the world' we understand the world we experience, the world differentiated by language, then the claim that realism reflects the world means that realism reflects the world constructed in language. This is a tautology. If texts link concepts through a system of signs which signify by means of their relationship to each other rather than to entities in the world, and if literature is a signifying practice, all it can reflect is the order inscribed in particular discourses, not the nature of the world. Thus, what is intelligible as realism is the conventional and therefore familiar, 'recognizable' articulation and distribution of concepts. It is intelligible as 'realistic' precisely because it reproduces what we already seem to know."

This should be a good enough explanation for Barthes' contempt for the 'readerly' text. As Belsey further explains the weakness of our normal ideas when we read literary texts: "the subjectivity of a specially perceptive author is no guarantee of the authority of a specific perception of the world. If thought is not independent of the differences inscribed in language, then subjectivity itself is inconceivable outside language." These lines help to explain the weakness inherent in the concept of the god-like, controlling authority of the author and the ideological roots of the so-called 'objective' realistic text. What is called 'classic realism' was the dominant literary form of the nineteenth century. To quite a large extent it has also persisted till the twentieth century. Classic realism is based on illusion. As you would have read above, it is dependent on 'enigma', it involves closure, and it presents

“a hierarchy of voices” through which is established the ‘truth’ of the story.

Barthes’ definition of the classic realist text is the readable - ‘lisible’ - text. It is complicit in the ideology of capitalism. Semiology, or semiotics, in France was first of all concerned with showing that what often passes for ‘truth’ is ideology. Barthes undertook just such an enterprise in his *Mythologies* in which he demonstrated how ideology is embedded in familiar images and myths of contemporary society. The realist text needed to be recognised as a ‘construct’ and thus open to analysis. The guarantee of meaning in these texts is located in the author. The ‘scriptible’ text, on the other hand, allows the guarantee of meaning in the reader.

Jonathan Culler on the author, the reader, and semiotics :

“A text can be read only in relation to other texts, and it is made possible by the codes which animate the discursive space of a culture. The work is a product not of a biographically defined individual about whom information could be accumulated, but of writing itself. To write a poem the author had to take on the character of poet, and it is that semiotic function of poet or writer rather than the biographical function of author which is relevant to discussion of the text.

Literary study experienced what Barthes called the ‘death of the author’ but almost simultaneously it discovered the reader, for in an account of the semiotics of literature someone like the reader is needed to serve as center. The reader becomes the name of the place where the various codes can be located: a virtual site. Semiotics attempts to make explicit the implicit knowledge which enables signs to have meaning, so it needs the reader not as a person but as a function: the repository of the codes which account for the intelligibility of the text. Because literary works do have meaning for readers, semiotics undertakes to describe the systems of convention responsible for those meanings.”

.....

“What happens in literary semiotics is but one version of a general situation which is gradually coming to be recognized as an inescapable feature of our ways of thinking about texts and signification. Semiotics is the instrument of this revelation because it is the logical culmination of what Jacques Derrida calls the ‘logocentrism’ of Western culture: the rationality which treats meanings as concepts or logical representations that it is the function of signs to express. We speak, for example, of various ways of saying the ‘the same thing’.”

-” In Pursuit of Signs”, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 1981

5.6 SUMMING UP

You have read about some important contributions by Roland Barthes to contemporary theory. Again, this alone will not do if you want to learn about his work in depth. The important ideas contained in his “From Work to Text” have not been taken up here. A most interesting work by him, *The Language of Fashion*, too, has been left out. You should follow up on all of these. Barthes’ range of critical enterprises is quite staggering; and exciting as well. What he writes on Brecht is filled with lively and stimulating ideas. Our course, here, unfortunately does not include so much. But surely you can find out all of this on your own.

5.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 6

Psychoanalysis - Jacques Lacan

Contents:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction (Historical Background)
- 6.3 Sigmund Freud
 - 6.3.1 The Theory and the Works
 - 6.3.2 Major Ideas
- 6.4 Jacques Lacan (post-Freud)
- 6.5 Reading “The Mirror Stage”
- 6.6 Key Concepts
- 6.7 Summing up
- 6.8 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 OBJECTIVES

A clear objective of this unit is to clarify some well-known concepts proposed by Jacques Lacan. Another objective here is to suggest to you how enriching psychoanalytical criticism has been in literary study. After working through this unit you should be able to–

- *summarise* some Lacanian concepts
- *proceed* to read more on the subject, and
- *explain* Lacan’s ideas.

6.2 INTRODUCTION (HISTORICAL BACKGROUND)

You have already obtained a summary account of the interrelations of literary and psychoanalytical critical views (in Unit 1, above).

Perhaps the most important idea involved with psychoanalytical approaches in conjunction with linguistic theories is that of the subject. As some have pointed out, “Western thought has for a long time assumed the necessity of a unified ‘subject’. To *know* anything presupposes a unified consciousness

which does the knowing.” In dealing with subjectivity psychoanalysis examines not only its constitution by various elements but also its role in perception. Lacan (1901 - 81) combines psychoanalytic ideas with the insights of linguistics to re-read Freud and thus arrive at a reconception of subjectivity. Subjectivity, in Lacan’s terms, is acquired and constructed in language. This means that consciousness is not the origin of meaning, or knowledge, but is de-centred. This has important implications for literary criticism especially for what it suggests about the author.

The literary ‘unconscious’ has been of great interest to psychoanalytical approaches. We can see this in Freud’s view of the literary work as symptomatic of the artistic consciousness as the text is cast in the same terms as the dream. In contrast, in Jungian psychoanalysis, - ‘archetypal criticism’ - the literary work is not analogous to the author’s or the reader’s psychology but is representative of the relationship between the personal and the collective unconscious, or the images, myths and symbols (the ‘archetypes’) of past cultures.

6. 3 SIGMUND FREUD (1856 – 1939)

The name of Freud is so far-flung and is, in fact, so much a part of modern thought that you might find it difficult to describe the scope of his work in a few lines. Certain aspects of his work have become so over-emphasised that we, at times, tend to overlook at how his ideas were his attempt to explore diverse aspects of social reality from the psychologist’s perspective. Together with Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, Freud has been placed (by Paul Ricoeur) in the critical tradition of the “hermeneutics of suspicion”. You can understand what this means by recalling the traditions of hermeneutics which meant the deciphering of hidden meanings in scriptures. Freudian interpretation leads us to regard a visible expression as the covering for something deeper! Freud lived and worked mostly in Vienna until exiled by the Nazis, to London. As a German Jew, this was not surprising.

6.3.1 THE THEORY AND THE WORKS

Freud’s most important contribution lies in his effort to map out the ‘unconscious’. In this regard, he looked upon dreams as the ‘royal road to

the unconscious'. As part of this whole exercise, Freud brought out related ideas about the importance of infantile sexuality, and the role played by repression in human subjectivity within the relations surrounding individual and group-life, and the power of the drives.

Since the aim of psychoanalysis was primarily therapeutic, to cure, it was necessary to forge the methods by which the patient would be enabled to come to grips with the repressed desires and then to transcend. In Freudian terms this meant the negotiation of the original desire to be the parent of one's sex so as to have the parent of the opposite sex. In keeping with this – the therapeutic - aspect of psychology, 'transference' of feelings of patients from original associations in their earlier past, to the analyst in the present, is an important concept. Freud distinguished between neurotic and psychotic patients with regard to repression among individuals and was later to feel that neurotic symptoms only could be dealt with in psychoanalysis.

Freud developed models of the psychic structure which take into account the various facets of human personality. Through these models (the dynamic, the economic, the topographical-structural and the developmental) Freud explored the ways in which the instincts functioned as against the sexual drives, how individual impulses conflicted with the compulsions of reality, the force of narcissistic instincts, the scope of libidinal energy, the problem of the death-wish, and the nature of our dreams. This list is not exhaustive so some of the lesser known areas of Freud's work are not mentioned here. For instance, Freud revised his conception of the theory of instincts, or the wish-fulfilling role of dreams, on the basis of his experience with patients. He found it necessary to look at the inmixing of the sexual and the ego instincts. Dreams, he found, could not be seen as pure wish-fulfilment in the face of the fact that patients tended to re-live traumatic experiences. In this case, his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1919), records some of these revisions. His essays, "On Narcissism" (1914), and "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) deal with the subject of mourning-work based on his use of the economic (or energy) model.

Freud's concept of the 'unconscious' underwent modification in the middle of his career. This concept is generally more familiar to us as the region of origin of our dreams. We use the term, 'unconscious' as both noun (a realm unknown) or as adjective ("unconscious impulses"). Freud conceived of the Unconscious as a system with its own rules.

6.3.2 MAJOR IDEAS

Freud's Unconscious is related to his topographical model of the human psyche. It is a realm where various kinds of energies, forces, images and symbols are mixed up together. Freud's development of the Unconscious as a system described it as a site where dreams take shape through the mechanisms of dream-work such as condensation, displacement, representability, and symbolisation. The dream finally manifested is processed through the infantile wish, and the dream thoughts of the present as set in motion by the events of the day. From a conception of a chaotic realm, Freud's topographical model of the Unconscious gave way to a 'structural' model of the three-tiered Id-Ego-Superego. The Unconscious, rather than being seen as a system, now showed itself more as a quality in the sense that portions of the three psychic agencies (the Id, the Ego, the Superego) are unconscious.

The Id is the realm of repressed materials and representations of the drives; the Ego mediates between that which is outside, and the inside; the Superego supplies the moral equipment with which to decide ideals and values. In the 'topographical' model, the "ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world . . . The ego represents what is called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions" (Freud). In this conception, the Ego assumes great importance in terms of its function in the regulation of desire as both internal and external threats are sought to be dealt with. Freud sees this in connection with 'repression', another name for the mechanism of defense against any threat to the repressed impulse. The repressed impulse is tied to that which is expunged from conscious memory because it is unpleasant. What is repressed can continue to operate in the unconscious with its full "cathexis" or its investment of energy. This repressed impulse can seek indirect satisfaction thus producing neurotic symptoms.

Freud's conception of the 'Oedipus complex' represents the attempt to formulate the ambivalent feelings that a child normally harbours towards its parents: love and hatred. As has been pointed out, it contains both negative as well as positive functions and refers to the childhood realisation (occurring around the ages of four to five years) that one must give up the parent of the opposite sex as the sexual object choice. The "Oedipus complex is the nuclear complex of neuroses, and constitutes the essential part of their

content. It represents the peak of infantile sexuality, which, through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adults. Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis.” The idea of the Oedipus complex should be seen as part of Freud’s developmental concept of the mind. For Lacan the Oedipus complex represents a symbolic structure and marks the movement of the child from the imaginary to the symbolic.

Prior to the Oedipal phase (when sexual feelings attach themselves to images of parents) occurs the period of narcissism or self-love where the subject’s libido is attached to his/her own ego as object. The narcissistic state remains throughout life to some extent as the subject’s libido moves back and forth between self and objects in the world. The narcissistic libido thus is constantly changing into the object-libido (as in the case of the love-affair where the subject moves between self-indulgence and self-sacrifice). Freud was led to revising his notion of repression with showing that the “ego-instincts” are the main agents of repression. In later works such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud reconceived the operation of the instincts. He saw the two instincts, of self-preservation or “eros” (Greek for ‘love’), and of death or destruction or “thanatos” (Greek for ‘death’) as being in constant struggle and thus providing the context of our mental experience. (M.A.R.Habib)

Archetypal and psychoanalytical criticism:

Archetypal criticism works under the influence of figures like Carl Jung and Sir James Frazer. It is to be distinguished from Freudian criticism, - even more from Lacanian psychoanalytical approaches - in the sense that it concentrates on the ‘collective’ unconscious in whose inner recesses lie embedded archetypal images and patterns, myths and symbols. Since myths are accessible sources for these archetypes, this kind of criticism became largely focused on myth thus leading to its being called ‘mythopoeic’ criticism. A famous example of this critical approach is Maud Bodkin’s *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934).

In the field of the study of myth is included the work of Giambattista Vico, Ernst Cassirer, Susanne K.Langer. Northrop Frye saw the study of myth and poetry as giving the scope to put literary criticism on a scientific footing, among the social sciences.

6.4 JACQUES LACAN (POST-FREUD)

Freudian criticism was first practised by critics like Ernest Jones, Marie Bonaparte, and Edmund Wilson, till around the 1940s. After the Second World War another generation of critics came into prominence: Lionel Trilling, Frederick Crews, Norman Holland, Frederick Hoffman. A literary Freudianism, following on the heels of Lacan's seminars, came into circulation in the 1960s in France. This variety of 'French' Freudianism has since been in place around the world since the 1970s in the study of literature and culture. This particular strain is the product of Saussurean insights combining with Freudian concepts, i.e., semiotics and psychoanalysis. Lacan's work made this intellectual joining possible and he also claimed that Freud developed semiotic insights all through his work in psychoanalysis. The work of Charles Sanders Peirce and Saussure in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century had led to the emergence of 'signifiers' as the smallest constituent unit of meaning. "Signifiers are combined by particular cultures as meaningful ("significant") units according to the signifying practices already established as that society's system of culture." (Davis and Scheifer). Lacan points out that semiotics and psychoanalysis both have the potential to reorient established ways of understanding human experience.

The Western intellectual tradition takes after the Cartesian (from Descartes) idea of the "substantial self who does *all* of the understanding". This means that all of us have the capacity to be independent observers of the world, standing separate from it. A text would make sense once the author's 'aims' can be recovered and properly understood. This is because knowledge is taken to be the result of inquiry where aims and intentions are consciously formulated. This will apply both in the production of texts and in understanding them. The text can convey the author's aims and the reader can actually receive them. This message is conveyed through its 'form' shaped around its representations of characters, settings, images, etc. which form the substance of the text.

Lacan's method differs here: it opposes "any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito* [substantial ego]". For Lacan, interpretation must start from the idea that the text does not have a fixed message which can be recovered or examined empirically while reading. The text, rather, is to be seen as an unending play of signifiers, the 'play' being differential and semiotic.

The text is a network of signifiers. It is not a “substance”. It is not a fixed, continuous form. The signifier is higher in priority to the signified.

Lacan’s career as a psychoanalyst was marked by controversy. His work became known in British universities in 1977 when two of his works were published, *Écrits: A Selection* (trans. by Alan Sheridan) and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. He began a series of public, fortnightly seminars in 1953 which were to continue over 26 years. Many of these have been reconstructed from notes and now appear in mostly condensed form in the *Écrits*. The work of the early Lacan is not to be taken as representing the entire body of his thought because Lacan developed his concepts over the span of his career. About 1963, after Lacan had to shift to the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) on account of the controversial professional moves he had made (along with other colleagues), he began to develop his own theory as distinct from the interpretations of Freud that he had concentrated on in the earlier seminars.

Lacan was influenced by phenomenology in the first phase of his career. Phenomenology sees human consciousness as not being passively open to material phenomena but as constructing or ‘intending’ such phenomena. Heidegger, follower of Husserl (who formulated the philosophy of phenomenology), developed these ideas further to argue that our understanding is related to our specific situations, i.e., “we always perceive the world from a specific situation and our most fundamental desire is to transcend or surpass that situation”. (S.Homer) This is what he refers to as “ex-sistence” or our outward projection onto the world and the future. Jean-Paul Sartre carried over these ideas into France proposing that self-consciousness consisted of “nothingness”, as he also distinguished between self-consciousness and the ego. Combined with the Freudian definition of the ego which is grounded in the mind’s rational operations and mediates between unconscious passions, and external reality, Lacan went over to formulating the relationship between subject and ego (in the mirror stage). The ideas of “ex-sistence” and “nothingness” (from Sartre) recur throughout his work, not as phenomenological concepts but in the psychoanalytic register. “He took the unconscious not as a container, but rather as something ex-sistent - outside itself - that is connected to a subject who is a lack of being”. (Jacques-Alain Miller)

Sartre's "nothingness":

Sartre's concept of consciousness can be explained as consciousness for-itself. Consciousness gives meaning to whatever it chooses. Thus it involves pure spontaneity, or pure freedom, or pure nothingness. For Sartre, consciousness is 'beyond freedom'. The human being, from this perspective, is absurd being doomed to find stable meaning in life. (Hubert Dreyfus).

To the question of how human beings develop self-awareness and the idea of autonomy, traditional psychology supplied the answer that this came about with the infant's growing awareness of its own physical body. Henri Wallon, the psychologist, contested this idea and pointed to the importance of the mirror reflection with which human awareness of autonomy and distinctiveness advances. Lacan takes this important idea of mirroring as being integral to the construction of self and the development of self-consciousness. You should note here that an important stage in this argument, as the theorists recognised, was to do with the distinction between self and environment that makes self-consciousness possible. In this, perhaps, as suggested elsewhere, Lacan borrowed from ethology, or the study of animal behaviour, from the work of Roger Caillois.

Yet another influence comes from Alexandre Kojève who conducted weekly seminars between 1933 and 1939. These seminars had a profound impact on a generation of thinkers like Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Georges Bataille, and Lacan, who attended them. Till the 1960s when Hegelianism was finally displaced by structuralism and poststructuralism, it was a dominant mode of thinking. Kojève's seminars dealt with Hegel's philosophy especially with the 'Master/Slave' dialectic. Kojève used this dialectic to explore how human self-consciousness emerges.

Master/Slave dialectic:

This is the popular name, given to the process of development of self-hood in a subject, which Hegel sketches in "Lordship and Bondage". In this dialectical process, the Master is dependent on recognition from the Slave in order to be a subject. The same reciprocity works in the case of the Slave. So the Master's identity is affirmed by the Slave's recognition. The Slave, however, is not dependent on the Master for recognition because the source of his self-affirmation is his work. Thus, the Master is not "free" since his identity needs

recognition from the Slave. The paradox is that a positive turns into a negative. The Slave is “free” because he does not need to depend on the Master’s recognition of him as a Slave. It is the Master, rather, whose identity depends upon recognition from the Slave.

Applied to the concept of the development of human consciousness, the human subject needs to be recognised as such by another. The human subject not only acquires identity through knowing her-/him-self as such but must also be known as such by another. The Master and Slave needs not only self-recognition (as subject) but must also be recognised by the other. “The Master and Slave are locked within a struggle whereby one cannot do without the other but at the same time each is the other’s worst enemy. It is this dialectic, according to Lacan, that permeates the imaginary. Moreover, this dialectic introduces into the psychological account of mirroring . . . the element of *aggressivity* . . . it posits the relationship between self and other as fundamentally conflictual.” (S.Homer)

6.5 READING “THE MIRROR STAGE”

This is an important paper that Lacan presented early in his career, in 1949. However, its first presentation was at the conference in Marienbad in 1936 when it got interrupted. Lacan did not abandon his theorising on the subject - the formation of human self-consciousness - but developed his ideas for the nearly thirteen years till the final publication of the paper. Informed critics therefore recognise its importance in the context of Lacan’s work. It represents his aim to distinguish between the ego and the subject.

The infant, from about the age of six months, can already (unlike the chimpanzee) “recognize as such his own image in a mirror.” You should note that it is not merely a *mirror*-reflection that Lacan is referring to but reflection *as* in a mirror. Lacan describes -”This act . . . immediately rebounds . . .” - how the child behaves following the discovery of the mirror-reflection. There is an indulgence in the new-found sense of power that the child feels and wants to be repeated: “he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates — the child’s own body, and the persons and things, around him.” It leads to a “jubilant assumption” by the child of the reflected image. It is a contrast to the general condition of helplessness of the child: “This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling

dependence. . .” (“speculum” = mirror) The “ancient term *imago*” is in Latin, meaning likeness, or copy, a picture, or mask, or apparition. Lacan shows that the child is yet to assume a full sense of self; in the mirror image it still experiences an illusory unity of itself with its surroundings.

The sense of “I” thus now takes place in “a primordial form”, quite literally, like an object separate from others. The word “primordial” also carries the meaning of ‘premature’. The mirror stage occurs before the child acquires the sense of self. From this first sense of ‘separateness’ - the “Ideal-I”- comes other senses of self and other.

The mirror image provides the child with a sense of wholeness. Otherwise the child feels its body as fragmented. From this mirror image comes the expectation of mastery of the body, in contrast to the actual feeling of fragmentation. The important thing is that the child identifies with the image.

“The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation — and which manufactures for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic — and, lastly, to the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development.”

For the child, the image is her-/him- self. Without this identification which also generates anticipation of mastery, the child would not get to the stage of perceiving him-/her-self as a whole being. But simultaneously, there is also an alienation as the image is confused with the self.

From this ideal “I” is born the agency of the ego -”the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual”. The ‘fiction’ is ‘irreducible’ and will therefore continue; it is the ‘fiction’ of the ego’s unity which will continue even as social factors determine the child’s mind. The actual feelings - “the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him” - are in contrast with what the mirror image provides a mirage that “anticipates . . . the maturation of his power”. The child sees this power as a gestalt (a pattern of totality) symbolizing “the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination”. Thus “the illusion of unity and enduring identity that occurs in the mirror phase also anticipates the life-long alienation of the ego, not only from the objects that surround it, objects of its desire, but also from itself”. (Habib)

The ego, for Lacan, arises from this moment of alienation and identification with one's own image. The organising and constituting properties of the image shape the form of the ego. The ego emerges through the effect of images. In short, it is an imaginary function. Lacan does not equate the ego with the self. Rather, the ego is based on a fictional image of wholeness and mastery and it maintains this illusion of coherence and mastery.

Lacan views the "function of the mirror-stage as a particular case of the function of the *imago*". We have already looked at the meaning of the word, 'imago'. Besides the meanings we have already looked at above, Freud also used it to refer to the impression that parental strictures had on the mind of the child. Lacan seems to mean that the child assumes an image of itself thus establishing a relation with reality: the mirror-stage functions as a function of the imago, "which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality". Again, Lacan qualifies this - "In man, however, this relation to nature is altered by a certain dehiscence at the heart of the organism, a primordial Discord betrayed by the signs of uneasiness and motor unco-ordination of the neo-natal months". "Dehiscence" means gaping, or bursting open. It brings in the sense of the child's apprehension of unity breaking up. We can say here that this sense lasts through life.

In the passage on the drama of the mirror stage, Lacan points to how the discrete experiences (temporally discrete) of the child are projected, through the idealisation of mirroring, onto the form of space where totality and lastingness appear possible. Space is the crucial element which relates to images and thus to fantasies of imagined unity. From the child's actual experience of 'insufficiency' (of fragmentation, that is) in contrast to the image of unity, which image of unified identity the child assumes, there is a movement based on the anticipation of entry into the symbolic order. This makes for alienation as the subject is now established as its own rival. This identity is only a spatialized projection of the child's fragmented sense of self into a fictive unity. In other words, "the primary conflict between identification with, and primordial rivalry with, the other's image, begins a dialectical process that links the ego to more complex social situations" (Benvenuto and Kennedy).

The formation of the "I" is to be seen in the symbols of fortresses or a stadium with an inner arena or an enclosure, to which the 'floundering' subject (the 'I' that has entered the alienating and constraining symbolic

order) wishes to return. The metaphors of fortification represent not only the formation of the “I” but also operations of neurosis. Such metaphors represent not only “the defences of the ego” but also their alienating and neurosis-generating nature.

“The moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the *imago* of the counterpart and the drama of primordial jealousy . . . , the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations.” The end of the mirror stage is the moment when the child passes from the satisfying complete image (the “I” in the mirror) to his entry into the social world.[Try to find out the meaning of ‘dialectic’ with the help of a good dictionary

“It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others, and turns the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation — the very normalization of this maturation being henceforth dependent, in man, on a cultural mediation as exemplified, in the case of the sexual object, by the Oedipus complex.” From the imaginary order, the child has passed into the symbolic: note that “even though” this moment is of “natural maturation”, this very maturation is culturally mediated (as in the case of the sexual object). Henceforth, knowledge will be culturally mediated - this seems to be suggested by Lacan. Knowledge will always depend on social elaboration, will never be immediate (or ‘pure’) preceding the formation of identity. Knowledge will be relational, mediated through social and educational, or ideological structures. The child will be “subject” confronting “objects” separate from his/her identity; the relations of “subject” to “object” will be that of desire (recalling Hegelian ideas of consciousness in which it is the desire of the subject for the object that shapes their mutual relation as one of separateness and demarcation).

Lacan proposes that the “function of *méconnaissance*” “characterizes the ego in all its structures”. The word, ‘*méconnaissance*’, stands for mis-reading, or a failure to recognise, or even perhaps the repudiation of an action. Lacan regards the ego as centred, not on the *perception-consciousness* system or “as organized by the “reality principle”; the ego, according to Lacan, is not what Cartesian philosophy or Enlightenment

thinking conceived it to be —rational, unified, and coherent agent — but as failing to achieve unity, failing to achieve self-understanding. Lacan seems to see the moment of “the formations of the *I*” as containing “the most extensive definition of neurosis”.

Subjectivity in Lacanian theory :

We try here to sum up how Lacan understands ‘subjectivity’ so that you can grasp the concept in full:

Post-Saussurean linguistic theory challenges the older idea that the origin of meaning and choice lie in subjectivity.

People gain the possibility of subjectivity through language (which allows, as argued by Emile Benveniste, us to say, “I” as the subject of a sentence).

We cannot conceive of an “I” without a concept of a non-”I” (or, “you”).

From Saussure we have the idea: there are no positive terms in language, only differences. Thus, “I” designates the subject of a specific utterance only.

Thus, language assumes primacy over subjectivity.

In Lacan’s theory, subjectivity is not given, but acquired. For Lacan, the infant begins as an “hommelette” (“a little man and also like a broken egg spreading without hindrance in all directions”). So, the child at first has no sense of identity. It does not see itself as a composed unit, separate and distinct from the ‘other’. In the mirror stage it ‘recognizes’ itself as a unity, distinct from the world external to it. The ‘recognition’ relates to an identification with an “imaginary” self. This “imaginary” is an imaged one; it is independent and unified. It is also imaginary because it is ‘out there’, visible as a unit only in the world to be seen in the mirror. The ‘recognition’ is a misrecognition.

Only when the child enters language does it become a subject, capable of speech. Only by entering the symbolic order of the signifying systems of culture (of which, language is the supreme example), by submitting to this order, can the child participate in the society in which it is born.

The child must differentiate and to speak of itself as “I”, distinct from “you”. With the identification of itself with the “I”, comes the basis of subjectivity.

“Subjects are subjects of particular forms of knowledge, which may construct mutually incompatible subject-positions. ‘Identity’, subjectivity, is thus a matrix of subject-positions, which may be inconsistent, or even in contradiction with one another.” [Catherine Belsey]

6.6 KEY CONCEPTS

Imaginary, symbolic order, real

lack of being; objet a

Other/other

What you have read above relates to Lacan's idea that subjectivity is constructed in language. This leads to several implications including the idea that sexuality is constructed in language as the matrix. Sexuality, thus, is not purely or simply physical. It is always experienced as a meaning. The argument also emerges that language is not abstract but is grounded in the 'Other' which has its sensuous side as well. Where language leaves nothing outside it, the Oedipus complex also is re-read in Lacanian terms to mean that the child is not required to mean the desire for a physical father or mother figure but instead a primordial realm of apparent plenitude and fullness. This is the pre-childhood order before the entry into language which is the 'Imaginary'. This is the realm of self as undifferentiated from the other, the infant unseparated from its mother, male undifferentiated from female, since the dividing categories of language have not yet asserted their rule. When the world of language is entered, with its laws and institutions, this Imaginary state of fullness and plenitude is broken. The unity of self and other is disrupted as the 'father'-figure appears and as the child gains in its role as subject. ('Mother' and 'father' do not mean literally the parents but parent-like figures of culture, society, emotional bonding, etc.) The 'Real' lies beyond the Imaginary and the Symbolic, beyond what is nameable or represented through language or culture.

For Lacan, the symbolic order is the 'Other'. The unconscious is "the discourse of the Other". The 'other', on the other hand, is the imaginary other that we treat as whole or unified egos, the reflections of ourselves which give us the sense of being complete and whole beings. This is the other visible from the mirror stage who the child supposes will satisfy its desire. The child also sees itself as the object of desire for the other. The 'Other', the symbolic order, is the discourse that we are born into and must learn to speak in order to articulate our own desire. The desires and wishes of others (as of our parents') flow into us through language. Thus desire is always shaped by language. We can express our desire only through the language available to us just as we even learn that language through others.

Through language desire comes into being in the same way as that there is no unconscious without language. The unconscious (and the desire it carries) is in relation to the 'Other', the symbolic order — it is the discourse of the Other. The subject of the unconscious, the psychoanalytic subject, comes into existence in relation to the Other, through others.

Lacan (like Freud) sees desire as “the essence of man”. He distinguishes between ‘need’ and ‘desire’. Desire, unlike basic needs that can be satisfied, goes beyond either ‘libido’ or wish in Freud. Desire describes a relation to *lack*; subtracting ‘need’ from ‘demand’, we get desire. Desire and lack are inseparable; “desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love”. It is the irreducible ‘beyond’ of demand that constitutes desire. Desire shows a ‘lack’ in the subject and the Other (the symbolic order). Like the subject, the Other is also characterised by ‘lack’. The Other’s lack is not in the sense of a specific object but as lack itself. Desire does not relate to an object. Rather, desire relates to something that is missing; it involves a constant search for an object that is missing. This is expressed by Lacan as “objet a”; it is not an object we have lost but a sense that we, as subjects, lack or are missing something in our lives. The “objet petit a” emerges through the gap that opens up between the subject and the Other, between the desire of the child and the desire of the mother. (S.Homer)

The Unconscious is structured like a language:

For Lacan, it is language that translates sensory image as structure. Thus it is the rules of the signifier that govern the unconscious.

What is the subject’s relation to language? That “the unconscious is structured like a language” is probably one of Lacan’s most famous statements. How is the unconscious to be known? What forms it? From the Lacanian point of view, the unconscious emerges from the entry into the Symbolic order which pre-exists the subject. Lacan points to the ‘drama’ of the subject’s relation with language. The entry into the Symbolic order causes a split in the subject just as it brings into existence the unconscious itself. The ‘split’ can be seen thus : “the process of insertion into the signifying chain causes the split into the *conscious* subject of the statement, ‘signified’ in it, and the subject of the enunciation which ‘falls beneath’ it and is thus *unconscious*.” (Celia Britton)

The unconscious is to be seen (or to be found) only through language or speech. Thus similar pattern of relationships are to be seen between unconscious

elements, between signifiers, and other linguistic forms. The unconscious, from Lacan's point of view, is not individual one (as Freud refers to it); neither is it a *collective* one (as Carl Jung described it). In Lacan's theory the unconscious is the effect of a trans-individual symbolic order on the subject. From one perspective, the unconscious, according to Lacan, is itself language since it is language that makes up the unconscious. For Lacan, we must remember, language is not simply verbal speech or a written text but any signifying system characterised by differential relations between its signifying elements. Since the unconscious is a signifying process involving coding and decoding, and since it comes into existence in the symbolic order in the gap between signifier and signified, we can say that the unconscious is structured like a language. Thus the unconscious is something that signifies and therefore needs deciphering.

6.7 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have tried to help you understand how Lacan re-read Freud. To appreciate this, we have given you a brief introduction to some of Freud's ideas. Your own reading of related and primary material will build on this preliminary knowledge. Lacan's ideas have supplied new foundations for studies of culture and cultural formations. What is now called "cultural studies" owes much to the Lacanian privileging of the signifier over the signified. This proposition is clearly argued in his essay, "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious". Ideas taken from "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", referring to the conflictual relationship of subject and other, the susceptibility of the subject to the power of the *imago*, the inherent sense of identification and alienation in human subjectivity, all of these ideas have been considered to be productive in the study of literary texts and cultural artefacts.

Reading Lacan is a most arduous, and mystifying experience. For us, in India, the difficulty is compounded by the fact that Lacan's works are in translation. As described by S.Homer, the writing in Lacan's *Ecrits*, for example, is "dense, convoluted, elliptical and seemingly impenetrable". In "The Insistence of the Letter", Lacan even declares that it is his purpose to be difficult to understand! We can infer diverse reasons for this impenetrability. But a good suggestion which you might find it expedient to

follow is to read Lacan's essays like poetry. The surface texture of the writing is rich and complex but as the writing seeps in you will surely find some "anchoring points" bobbing up to the surface for you to make out a pattern. The sense or the meaning follows thereafter.

6.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 7

Feminism

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7.1 OBJECTIVES

By reading this unit on Feminism the students will be able to–

- *Trace* the evolution of the Feminist Movement in modern times
- *Distinguish* the difference between various trends and theories of Feminism.
- *Recognize* the role of Feminism in introducing 'female' perspective in the interpretation of literary texts.

7.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Feminism, also called ‘feminist movement’ or ‘Women’s Liberation Movement’, is a social movement that seeks equal rights for women, giving them equal status with men and freedom to decide their own careers and life patterns. It comprises a number of movements, theories and philosophies that are concerned with issues of gender, and that campaign for women’s rights and interests, besides advocating equality for women.

Though the term feminism is relatively modern, yet the inequities against which the feminists protest – legal, economic, and social restrictions on the basic rights of women - have existed throughout history and in all civilizations. In Europe, a concrete account of the concern for women’s rights dates from the period of the Enlightenment. The period’s emergent ideas concerning women’s rights were fully set forth in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in England in 1792, which challenged the idea that women exist only to please men and proposed that women receive the same opportunities as men in education, work, and politics. In the later periods, this work had a great influence in changing the traditional roles of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers.

In addition, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1960s inspired women to try to obtain better conditions for themselves through campaigns of mass agitation and social criticism. A milestone in the rise of modern feminism was Simone de Beauvoir’s book *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949; *The Second Sex*), which raised feminist consciousness by appealing to the idea that liberation for women was liberation for men too. Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) is also considered as a precursor in feminist thinking. Woolf is what Mary Eagleton calls her, “the founding mother of contemporary (feminist) debate”.

Stop to consider:

The French author and philosopher **Simone de Beauvoir** (1908-1986) is hailed as the feminist icon of the twentieth-century. She wrote novels— monographs on philosophy, politics, and social issues; essays, biographies, and an autobiography. She is now best known for her metaphysical novels, including *She Came to Stay* and *The Mandarins*, and for her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, a detailed analysis of women’s oppression and a foundational tract of

contemporary feminism. It sets out a feminist existentialism which prescribes a moral revolution. As an existentialist, de Beauvoir accepts Jean-Paul Sartre's precept that *existence precedes essence*; hence "one is not born a woman, but becomes one". Her analysis focuses on the concept of the Other, that is, the social construction of Woman as the quintessential Other that Beauvoir identifies as fundamental to women's oppression. She argues that women have historically been considered deviant and abnormal

SAQ:

1. How would you like to define feminism? (60 words)

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2. Why, do you think, women have to fight for fundamental rights which they should enjoy naturally? (60 words)

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Generally, the history of feminism is divided into **three waves**. The first wave was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the second was in the 1960s and 1970s and the third extends from the 1990s to the present. This classification is a useful historical summary; but it should be remembered that outside these waves there were also innumerable feminist activities, significant or otherwise.

7.2.1 FIRST-WAVE FEMINISM

First-wave feminism refers to the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth century feminist movements in the United Kingdom and the United States, that were concerned, though not exclusively, with gaining equal rights for women, particularly the right of suffrage. In Britain the Suffragettes campaigned for the women's vote and in 1918 the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed granting the vote to women over the age of

30 who owned houses. In 1928 this was extended to all women over eighteen. In the United States first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote in all states.

7.2.2 SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

Second-wave feminism began with the resurgence of feminist activity in the late 1960s and 1970s, broadening the area of focus to family, sexuality and work. Second-wave encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized as well as reflective of a sexist structure of power. Further, this wave of feminists saw cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked. Carol Hanisch's slogan "The Personal is Political," became synonymous with the second wave. Thus, if first-wave feminism focused on rights such as suffrage, second-wave feminism was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination.

7.2.3 THIRD-WAVE FEMINISM

As a response to the perceived failures of the second wave and also as a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave, third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s. Also known as Post-feminism, the third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to much of the third wave's ideology. Feminist leaders rooted in the second wave like Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston, and many other black feminists, sought to negotiate a space within feminist thought for consideration of race-related subjectivities.

7.3 FEMINIST THEORY AND LITERARY CRITICISM

Feminist Literary Theory has evolved as a component of the women's movement and it has brought about a revolution in literary studies. Its wide

range is evident from the fact that it flourishes in combination, and not in isolation, with every other critical approach from formalism to semiotics, and can be effectively applied to the literary period of every period and genre. This new approach has profoundly altered several critical assumptions. It offers a new perspective on literature and emphasizes the need for a search of new paradigms. Since antiquity, it has been taken for granted that the reader, writer, and critic of literature is male. Feminist criticism has shown that women readers and critics bring different perceptions and expectations to their literary experiences. It insists that women have also told important stories of culture.

According to Sushila Singh (*Feminism, Theory, Criticism, Analysis*), Feminist criticism operates in three ways: —

- (1) It unfolds the literary representations of sexual difference.
- (2) It brings out the ways that literary genres have been shaped by masculine or feminine values.
- (3) It shows the exclusion of the female voice from the institutions of literature, criticism and theory.

In fact, feminist criticism establishes gender as a fundamental category of literary analysis. Nevertheless, feminists can be pluralistic in their choice of literary methods and theories with advantage. They appropriate any approach if it serves their political ends. The term ‘appropriation’ in the sense of ‘creative transformation’ becomes a key word in this context for feminist critics.

Stop to consider:

Though the feminists are resistant to the values set forth by the patriarchy, yet it is interesting to see how they have been influenced by male writers and thinkers from time to time. Toril Moi takes rather a diplomatic stand in articulating that “all ideas, including feminist ones, are...contaminated by patriarchal ideology”(“Feminist Literary Criticism”)

Therefore, it must be accepted that Mary Wollstonecraft got her inspiration from the male dominated ideas of the French revolution. Simone de Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* under the influence of Sartre’s phallogocentric categories. Similarly, J.S. Mill’s efforts to analyze women’s oppression cannot be ignored simply because he was a male liberal. In this specific context, it becomes important

that whether with appropriation or specific use of available material, feminist impact can be produced. Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray have put the philosophy of Jaques Derrida to brilliant feminist use, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have recreated the literary theory of Harold Bloom.

However, several feminist critics have written on male writers revealing their fundamental sexism. Kate Millett in her revolutionary work exposes the sexist bias of writers like Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, D. H. Lawrence, etc. Mary Ellmann discusses the sexism of male literary critics and Penny Boumelha analyzes the sexual ideology in the novels of Thomas Hardy.

Check your progress:

1. How one wave of feminism is different from the other?
2. What is appropriation?
3. How are feminism, feminist criticism and feminist literary criticism related?

SAQ:

1. How would you explain the emergence of a feminist literary theory? (60 words)

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2. What do you understand by ‘pluralistic approach’? (50 words)

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Elaine Showalter, the American literary critic and feminist, describes the phased development of feminist theory in three phases viz: feminist critique (in which the feminist reader examines the ideologies behind literary phenomena), gynocriticism (in which the “woman is producer of textual meaning” including “the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career [and] literary history”) and gender theory (in which

the “ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system” are explored”).

7.4 MAIN TRENDS OF FEMINISM

7.4.1 ANGLO-AMERICAN FEMINISM

Anglo-American Feminism refers to the feminist theory that developed during the 1960s in both the United States and Britain as a result of social change. Significantly, in both countries, sociopolitical concerns, more than academic subjects, organized the early feminist anthologies.

Elaine Showalter’s landmark work, *A Literature of their Own* (1977), constructs a history of British women novelists’ literary subculture in three phases, designed as feminine (1840-80), feminist (1880-1920), and female (continuing since 1920, with a new phase beginning in 1960). Juliet Mitchell’s *Women: The Longest Revolution* (1966) examines the treatment of women’s oppression in socialist theory. Another major work was *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963 by Betty Friedan, an American. She attacked deadening domesticity—the conditioning of women to accept passive roles and depend on male dominance. In 1966 Friedan and other feminists founded the National Organization for Women. Shulamith Firestone’s *The dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) combines de Beauvoir’s critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis and historical materialism with analysis of such cultural themes as romance.

Again, Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) consists of “equal parts of literary and cultural criticism” verging toward political theory. Even more controversial than her cultural criticism is her literary criticism where she targets dominating literary figures like D.H.Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, etc. For her radical analysis, Millett has been attacked in both popular and academic reviews and has been reviled as ad feminam. Again, like Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar detect historical stages of a female literary tradition, but they ground these in male comparisons and frequently make their points through metaphors and puns, as seen in their titles - *The Madwoman in the Attic*, (1979); *No Man’s Land* (1987-89), etc.

7.4.2 FRENCH FEMINISM

Beyond the Anglo-American feminism (or 'Anglophone sphere' as some prefers to call it) is also a large and influential body of francophone writing which is known as 'French feminism.' Though it was Simone de Beauvoir, who infused a lot of seminal ideas to feminism, yet, the phrase 'French Feminism' usually refers to a branch of feminist thinkers in France from the 1970s to the 1990s and includes the works of feminists like Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. French feminism, compared to Anglophone feminism, is distinguished by an approach which is at once more philosophical and more literary. If Anglo-American feminism is empirical, pragmatic and progressive, French feminism is skeptical, idealistic and radical.

French feminists approach feminism with the concept of *écriture féminine* (which translates as female, or feminine, writing). Helene Cixous argues that writing and philosophy are *phallogentric* and along with other French feminists such as Luce Irigaray emphasize "writing from the body" as a subversive exercise. The work of the feminist psychoanalyst and philosopher, Julia Kristeva, has influenced feminist theory in general and feminist literary criticism in particular.

According to Luce Irigaray, we cannot simply step outside of phallogocentrism so as suddenly to write and think in ways completely free of the rules of patriarchy, for language and discourse are themselves inscribed with those rules. Instead, we have to work like a virus from within patriarchal discourses to infect and radically change them, thus "leaving open the possibility of a different language", (*This Sex which is not One*, p.80). Not surprisingly, then, the discourses of philosophy and psychoanalysis have become prime hosts for Irigaray's work. She proposes to 'disrupt' the philosophical discourse and constitute a discourse on discourse. In posing this challenge, Irigaray hopes to expose the ways in which patriarchal discourses are politically determined and disrupt altogether the power structures they hold in place. With this goal in mind, Irigaray has sought to disrupt the discourses of Sigmund Freud and Plato (*Speculum of the Other Woman*), Jacques Lacan and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (*This Sex which is not One*), Martin Heidegger (*L'Oubli*), Friedrich Nietzsche (*Amante Marine*), Baruch Spinoza and Emmanuel Levinas (*Ethique*), to name a few.

The French-Bulgarian linguist and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva's consideration of femininity under patriarchy is somewhat different. Her consideration of femininity as marginality offers a position and not a definition. She refuses to define femininity. In Kristevan terms, it is simply that "which is marginalized by patriarchal symbolic order." This consideration of femininity in relational perspective is as shifting as the various forms of patriarchy itself. Therefore, she is able to argue further that men can also be constructed as marginalized to the symbolic order. one more significant fact About Kristeva is that unlike Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, worries about the absolute rejection or acceptance of motherhood.

SAQ:

1. What are the differences between Anglo-American feminism and French feminism? (50 words)

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2. What is *écriture féminine*? (50 words)

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3. How does Luce Irigaray propose to disrupt the patriarchal discourse? (60 words)

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7.4.3 THIRD-WORLD FEMINISM

Throughout much of its history, most of the leaders of feminist social and political movements, as well as many feminist theorists, have been predominantly middle-class white women from western Europe and North America. However, at least since Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech to US Feminists, women of other races have proposed alternative feminisms. This

trend accelerated in the 1960s with the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the collapse of European colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia.

The spokesmen of 'third- world feminism', which is also referred to as 'postcolonial feminism', argue that oppression relating to the colonial experience, particularly racial, class, and ethnic oppression, has marginalized women in postcolonial societies. They challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. Postcolonial feminists object to portrayals of women of non-Western societies as passive and voiceless victims and the portrayal of Western women as modern, educated and empowered.

7.4.4 SOCIALIST AND MARXIST FEMINISMS

Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labor. Socialist feminists see women as being held down as a result of their unequal standing in both the workplace and the domestic sphere. Significantly, socialist feminists concentrate their energies not just on an individual basis, but on broad change that affects society as a whole.

7.4.5 POST-STRUCTURAL AND POSTMODERN FEMINISM

Post- structural and postmodern feminism are approaches to feminist theory that incorporate postmodern and post-structuralist theory. The largest departure of this trend of feminism from other branches of feminism, is the argument that gender is constructed through language. The most notable proponent of this argument is Judith Butler. In her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, she draws on and criticizes the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. Butler criticizes the distinction drawn by previous feminisms between biological sex and socially constructed gender. She says that this does not allow for a sufficient criticism of essentialism. In *A Cyborg Manifesto* Donna Haraway criticizes traditional notions of feminism, particularly its emphasis on identity, rather than affinity.

7.4.6 BLACK FEMINISM

One of the key challenges to the supposedly Eurocentric and essentialist nature of some feminism has come from black feminists who have challenged white women's ability, and indeed their right, to speak for black women. A key black feminist theorist whose work has underlined this problem of feminism and racial difference is bell hooks, who in her book *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) writes about the history of black women in the United States and their relationship to feminism.

7.4.7 MATERIALIST FEMINISMS

Although feminists and socialists have engaged in continuous conversations since the nineteenth-century, those cross-currents within literary theory that might be designated "materialist feminisms" have their origins in the late 1960s with various attempts to synthesize feminist politics with Marxist analyses. Early work on this projected alliance directed itself, not to questions of literary criticism and theory, but to the problem of bringing feminist questions of gender and sexuality into some form of strategic dialogue with class analysis. In keeping with subsequent developments within the women's movement, the materialist feminist problematic has extended to questions of race, nationality or ethnicity, lesbianism and sexuality, cultural identity, including religion; and the very definition of power. Conversations and disagreements among English-language writers framing a materialist feminist analysis in the United States and the United Kingdom sometimes acknowledge the influence of French feminists such as Christine Delphy and Monique Wittig but have yet to engage fully with the critiques of Marxist theory being constructed by feminists working in other international location.

7.5 READING HELENE CIXOUS' "THE LAUGH OF THE MEDUSA"

French feminist critic Helene Cixous' essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) is an exhortation towards all women to start writing themselves in order to pose a threat to the patriarchal hegemony. Like much of her theory, the argument that Cixous develops in the essay relies heavily on Freudian psychoanalysis and Greek mythology in attempts to topple the narrative

myths that dominate western culture. Medusa, as we know, is one of the Gorgons, the epitome of evil power, of destruction and manipulation. In her essay Cixous deconstructs the myth of Medusa as a female monster and tries to project her portrait after she is reincarnated as a kind woman attributed with laughter and creative thrust.

Cixous believes that in order to escape the discourse of mastery women must begin to write through the body. To Cixous, our sexuality and the language in which we communicate are inextricably linked. To free one means freedom for the other. Unless women keep this inherent link intact, their goal of winning freedom will not be achieved. To write from one's body is to flee reality, to escape hierarchical bonds and thereby come closer to what Cixous calls *joissance*, which can be defined as a virtually metaphysical fulfillment of desire that goes far beyond satisfaction. It is a fusion of the erotic, the mystical, and the political. Thus, through writing women can reclaim their rights over their own body form which they have been deprived all along; for women have been taught to look at her body as an embarrassment:

“By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and locations of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.”(p.350)

The essay can be literally called a ‘clarion call’ to wage war against male chauvinism as it is strewn with phrases like “arrow”, “war”, “legion”, “empire”, “sovereign”, “new insurgent” and so on. The writer undertakes to break a new ground demolishing the age-old patriarchal edifice—her aim is to “to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable...” (p.347)

Cixous is one among the French theorists who believe that language, particularly Western language, with all its components is ‘male-constituted’ and ‘male-dominated.’ Through her concept of *écriture féminine* Cixous puts an effort to undo the logocentric ideology and “self-congratulatory” phallogentric language system. In “The Laugh of the Medusa” Cixous emphasizes that *écriture féminine* has its source in the mother during that stage of mother-child relation in which the male centered language is not yet an intervener. Cixous first metaphorizes the mother as figural product of

language and then she defetishizes the mother so as to remove her from the patriarchal structures of the family.

When Helene Cixous says that ‘writing is of the body’, and that ‘a woman does not write like a man, because she speaks with the body’, it appears that she is taking sexual dimorphism—the structural difference between male and female genitals—as the source of that gendering of language and style which feminist modes of criticism try to define. By persuading a woman to write with her body, Cixous convinces her to articulate her psychological femininity, so that ‘the immense resource of her unconscious will spring forth’ and ‘the inexhaustible feminine imaginary will unfold’. The only part of the body which seems to be involved regularly in such exercises, however, are the female genitals, which are much disparaged in a Freudian psychology that regard women as castrated men suffering from penis-envy.

The main thrust of the essay is that Cixous proposes to deconstruct the traditional contrast between the ‘feminine’ and the ‘phallogocentrism’; while feminine stands as a giver, mother, emotional, connected to the body, phallogocentrism is self-admiring, self-stimulating and self-congratulatory. However, she assures that the new woman is vibrant and militant and therefore capable of creating a subversive literature that explodes with volcanic force. This force, Cixous foresees, is going to write a new history, which is “beyond man’s imagination”. In this new era it would be possible to explore the “dark continent” for in actuality “the dark continent is neither dark nor unexplorable”, only we are made to think in that manner.

Cixous lashes attack on the capitalist publishing houses that are callously indifferent to the cause of autonomy of female voice for they are apprehensive that this would probably bring out a revolution in the cultural and literary history of mankind. She dissuades the women not to make a retreat from the field once they have started their battle:

“Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man, not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not *yourself*. Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses don’t like the true texts of women—female sexed texts. That kind scares them” (p.348)

Cixous concludes the essay with the same visionary and revolutionary note with which she started. She calls for an unprecedented solidarity among women shunning all their differences, “in one another we will never be lacking.” (p.361). Reading the essay we find that Cixous’ whole theoretical project is an effort to undo the logocentric ideology; to proclaim women as the source of life, power and energy. It proposes to hail the advent of a new feminine language that ceaselessly subverts the patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes with phallogentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women. Cixous’ vision of feminine/female writing as a way of reestablishing a spontaneous relationship to the physical *jouissance* of the female body can be read positively.

However, critics like Toril Moi suggests that we can read Cixous as a utopian feminist and some of the contradictory aspects of her texts may be interpreted as structured by the conflicts between contradictory patriarchal ideology and utopian thought. Moi is of the view that Cixous’ insistence on the homogenizing space of the imaginary also constitutes a flight from the dominant reality. Critics have come heavily upon Cixous for the absence of any specific analysis of the material factors preventing women from writing that constitutes a major weakness of Cixous’ utopia. Within Cixous’ poetic mythology, “writing is posited as an absolute activity of which all women qua women automatically partake.” This vision is very stirring but it says nothing about the actual inequities, deprivations and violations that women as social beings rather than as mythological archetypes constantly suffer.

Thus in “The Laugh of the Medusa” Cixous expands the concept of feminine writing by claiming its proximity to voice. Cixous uses her poetic genius and academic savvy to create a text that is brilliantly effective in many ways. First, she succeeds in giving the reader a concept of feminine writing but convinces us that in actually defining of the term, we destroy its beauty. She also manages to give us an example of what this text might be like in her illusive and circular style, but still writes academically enough to be included in most major surveys of rhetoric, literary criticism, and feminist theory.

Who is Medusa?

Medusa is the most famous of the four Gorgons (female monsters) of Greek mythology. Homer spoke of a single Gorgon—a monster of the underworld. The later Greek poet Hesiod increased the number of Gorgons to three—Stheno (the

Mighty), Euryale (the Far Springer), and Medusa (the Queen)—and made them the daughters of the sea god Phorcys and of his sister-wife Ceto. Medusa was the only one of the three who was mortal; hence, Perseus was able to kill her by cutting off her head. From the blood that ran from her neck sprang Chrysaor and Pegasus, her two offspring by Poseidon. Medusa’s severed head had the power of turning all who looked upon it into stone.

Stop to Consider:

Cixous was born in Oran, Algeria in 1937, which was a colony of France, and was raised in a German-Jewish household. Cixous has taught at many different universities throughout France including the University of Bordeaux (1962), the Sorbonne (1965-67), and Nanterre (1967).

In the 1970’s Cixous became involved in exploring the relationship between sexuality and writing, the same kinds of work being done by theorists like Kristeva, Barthes, Derrida, and Irigaray (Shiach). In this time period she composed such influential works as “Sortie,” “The Laugh of the Medusa,” and “Coming to Writing.”

Since the authoring of these texts in the seventies, Cixous has become even more mysterious and complex, but has somewhat lessened her radical ideology for a more inclusive exploration of collective identities. She is currently an English literature professor at the University of Paris VIII-Vincennes where she has established a center for women’s studies and is a co-founder of the structuralist journal *Poetique*.

SAQ:

Why does Cixous put so much importance on the mother? (50 words)

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7.6 ADDITIONAL CONCEPTS- TERMS/ GLOSSARY

Androcentrism: It is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing male human beings or the masculine point of view at the center of one’s view of the world and its culture and history. The term androcentrism has been introduced as an analytic concept by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the scientific debate. Perkins Gilman gave a profound description of androcentric

practices in society and the resulting problems in her investigation on *The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture*, published in 1911. Androcentrism can be understood as a societal fixation on masculinity. According to Perkins Gilman masculine patterns of life and masculine mindsets claim universality while female ones are considered as deviance.

Androgyny: A conjoining of masculinity and femininity. For some critics, for example, Elaine Showalter, an interest in androgyny is viewed as a deviation from the crucial emphasis on the specificity of women, their needs and achievements. For others, (for example, Toril Moi) the notion of androgyny is progressive, suggesting the deconstruction of fixed concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Gaze and feminist theory: The concept of 'gaze' was first introduced by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and it is actually pointed towards male gaze that manoeuvres the narrativisation and presentation of female characters in a particular text. The defining characteristic of the male gaze is that the audience is forced to regard the action and characters of a text through the perspective of a heterosexual man; the camera lingers on the curves of the female body, and events which occur to women are presented largely in the context of a man's reaction to these events. The male gaze denies women agency, relegating them to the status of objects. Mulvey's essay was one of the first to articulate the idea that sexism can exist not only in the content of a text, but in the way that text is presented, and in its implications about its expected audience. This concept is extended in the framework of feminist theory, where it can deal with how men look at women, how women look at themselves and other women, and the effects surrounding this

Gynocriticism: Introduced by Elaine Showalter in her essay 'Toward a Feminist Poetics' (1979) to describe what she finds the most necessary form of feminist criticism: namely, the study of women's writing; the relating of that writing to female experience; and the development of critical theories and methodologies appropriate to women.

Jouissance: A term popular in French feminism to express a sense of pleasure, abandonment, orgasmic overflowing. But it also contains the meaning of the enjoyment of rights and property. Betsy Wing, the translator of Cixous and Clement understands the term as having simultaneously sexual,

political and economic overtones. The same multiple meanings are present in Julia Kristeva's use of the term.

Phallogentrism: A system which affirms the phallus as the principal signifier, the symbol of power. In terms of sexual difference phallogentrism seems to lead to defining masculinity as the norm and femininity as deviant.

Queer theory: It is a field of Gender Studies that emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of gay and lesbian studies and feminist studies. Heavily influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, as well as by Jacques Derrida and other deconstructionists, queer theory builds both upon feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self and upon gay/lesbian studies' close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities. Whereas gay/lesbian studies focuses its inquiries into "natural" and "unnatural" behavior with respect to homosexual behavior, queer theory expands its focus to encompass any kind of sexual activity or identity that falls into normative and deviant categories.

Subjectivity: Subjectivity attempts to capture ongoing debates and activities and to foster a discourse on subjectivity which goes beyond traditional dichotomies. The concept of subjectivity in feminist literary interpretation is a third wave phenomenon. Subjectivity serves as locus of social change with many feminist leaders. These leaders explore questions of identity mediating between artist/writer and art work and viewers of the art work. This group of feminists incorporates issues of disability and queer theory, and consider issues of Feminisms and race within the context of post-coloniality in order to contest dominant discourses.

7.7 FEMINIST READING OF *FASTING, FEASTING*

Among the contemporary Indo-Anglian writers Anita Desai's is one of the most frequently mentioned name both in India and abroad. Her concern for the feminist cause is also unquestionable. Reading *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) as a feminist text will further establish this concern; however, it must be remembered that her fame as a feminist writer has already been established through the publication of her novels like *Cry, the Peacock*, *Where shall We Go This Summer?*, *Fire on the Mountain*, etc. which are some fine examples in her oeuvre that foregrounds the gender question.

Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* is a novel that captures the lives of three main female characters, Uma, Anamika and Aruna and shows as to what life brings them as rewards for being what they are, that is, women. Their reward is deprivation. So far as Uma's life is concerned, she is trapped in the stifling life that her parents decide for her. From her very childhood 'home' for Uma means a prison, from where she seeks refuge in school. But her happy days of going to school suddenly came to an end as she was summoned to baby sit her new-born brother, the only 'son' in the family. When Uma protests and says that Ayah can look after the baby, her mother sternly says, "You know we can't leave the baby to the servant" for he needs "proper attention". Uma again tries to point out that it was Ayah who brought up her and Aruna, her sister, her mother emphatically repeats the unalterable "Proper attention".

As Uma grows up to a young lady, she somehow fails to fulfill the criteria of an eligible bride; once she is duped after the engagement and another time she has to come back home after a deceitful marriage. Since then all the doors of escaping from home are shut and Uma becomes a burden, an eyesore, for her parents. Thus in her early life Uma remains a baby sitter while in her later life she remains an unpaid servant to her parents. If Uma's is unattractive, dull and gawky, her cousin Anamika is an epitome of perfection. She is not only beautiful but also brilliant, graceful, obedient and accomplished. Yet her life too ends in the inescapable trap set by misogynic prejudice. Though Anamika obtains a scholarship to Oxford, her parents hastily marries her off to a snob who is even much older than her. After marriage Anamika's life becomes a traumatic experience as she has to bear the unspeakable atrocities from her husband and mother-in-law. And finally they set her ablaze and burn her to death.

Thus both Uma's and Anamika's lives bear proof to what de Beauvoir utters as a feminist maxim, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman". In contrast to Uma and Anamika, Uma's younger sister Aruna is 'fortunate' enough to secure a married life with "the wisest ... the handsomest, the richest, the most exciting of the suitors who presented themselves" (p.101). Aruna's marriage to Arvind, her flat in Juhu, facing the beach is just like a dream come true; ironically, she is too entrapped in that insulated dream life

to ignore the life outside it and the reality beyond it. Thus through the stories of Uma, Anamika and Aruna, Anita Desai portrays the life of women which is by and large self-negating and unpromising. No doubt, there are some moments in Uma's life when she gathers courage to revolt, but the iron hands of her parents make her conform to what they choose for her life.

So far as the minor female characters in the novel are concerned, for example, Mira Masi, Mamma, Mrs. Verma and Anamika's mother, they seem to be happy and contented living within the framework of patriarchy. Patriarchal values are so much imbibed, fossilized and internalized in these women that they do not hesitate to rule their female wards from the vantage point of patriarchal values. If Uma is stopped from going to school, Anamika is stopped from going to Oxford. On the other hand, Uma's only brother Arun is given the 'best education' and is sent to the U.S.A. for further education almost forcefully. Interestingly, the mothers play very important roles in accomplishing these maneuverings.

Stop to consider:

While making a feminist reading of a particular text, one can look into areas like the reconstruction of female identity- whether a woman is aware of her own self; position of the women characters in the given context—whether marginal or central, her response to the repressing ideologies/values of her surrounding culture—whether rebellious or conforming; various aspects associated with female experience—motherhood, sexuality, etc.; the language used by the female author or for that matter the female characters, and so on and so forth.

7.8 SUMMING UP

Thus, what we have found from our reading of feminism is that its history is fraught with lots of unresolved debates and arguments. Feminism raises questions upon the legitimacy of patriarchal values; besides, it also tries to reinterpret the female history and reconstruct a new one. Feminism itself is a very vast area of research and studies; however, in this unit the students are given only a brief outline regarding its evolution and its role in changing the perspective of reading or interpreting a literary text.

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