M.A. PART-II

ENGLISH PAPER - V

LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM

Dr. Sanjay Deshmukh
Vice Chancellor,
University of Mumbai.

Dr. Ambuja Salgaonkar	**Dr. Dhaneswar Harichandan**
Incharge Director,	Incharge Study Material,
Institute of Distance and	Institute of Distance and
Open Learning,	Open Learning,
University of Mumbai.	University of Mumbai.

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PREFACE

This study material is prepared, keeping in focus the syllabus of M.A English Part II, Paper V of the University of Mumbai. However, it could also be used by learners who would like to have a general idea of literary criticism and theory.

Terms like Art, Formalism, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism and Feminism have been used in the study material with and without their first letter in upper case. This difference arises as we, the authors, feel that the initial capital letter would indicate the ideology and the terms without the capital letters replicate them as the theorists have used them in various texts. Certain units of this study material can be read as introductory notes to critical approaches and literary theories, while others provide overviews and analysis of selected literary/cultural theories.

We wish all the learners a fruitful reading experience in terms, concepts and theories generated by the thinkers, ranging from Aristotle to Toril Moi and Stanley Fish – covering an area from classical literary criticism to Postmodernism and beyond.

December, 2010   Authors

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Syllabus

M.A. Part- II

PAPER – V

Literary Theory and Criticism

Prescribed Texts:

A) Classical and Romantic Criticism

Aristotle – Poetics

William Wordsworth – Preface to The Lyrical Ballads

Matthew Arnold – Function of Criticism

Key Concepts in Classical Criticism

1. Concepts of order and discipline.
2. The importance of 'decorum'.
3. View of Reality.

Key Concepts in Romantic Criticism

1. The emphasis on Imagination
2. Experimentation with new forms and themes
3. View of reality

B) Formalism and Marxism

Victor Shklovsky – Art as Technique

Terry Eagleton – Marxism and Literary Criticism

Louis Althusser – Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses

Key Concepts in Formalism

1. Varieties of Formalism
2. Cultural background of American Formalism
3. Cultural background of Russian Formalism

Key Concepts in Marxism

1. The concepts of culture, language, literature and ideology
2. Cultural Theory
3. Literary Theory

C) Modernism and Postmodernism

Ortega Ye Gasset – The Death of the Novel

Ihab Hassan – The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Essays and Culture

Fredric Jameson – Postmodernism and Consumer Society.

Key Concepts in Modernism

1. The modernist concept of the relationship between the self and society.
2. Experimentation in forms and themes – its pervasiveness in the other art forms.
3. The value of "wholeness, harmony and radiance"

Key Concepts in Postmodernism

1. Incredulity towards all metanarratives
2. Revisioning the concepts of representation, subjectivity and official histories.
3. Text as a "tissue of quotations from various sites of culture"

D) Feminism, Postcolonialism and Reader Response

Toril Moi – Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory

Franz Fanon – Pitfalls of National Consciousness

Stanley Fish – Interpreting the Variorum

Key Concepts in Feminism

1. Femininity as linguistic 'construct'
2. Central theory or playful pluralism, feminist critique and gynocriticism
3. Queer theory – problematising "compulsory heterosexuality"

Key Concepts in Postcolonialism

1. Strategies used in postcolonial discourse to subvert the value system of the colonizer which was paraded as universal.
2. Narrating nations (H. Bhabha) and reacting to 'historical catalepsy' (A. Memmi)
3. Moving from a re-active to a pro-active position.

Key Concepts in Reader Response

1. Concepts of horizon of expectation, interpretative communities.
2. The 'performance' of the reader in the construction of the meaning of the text.'
3. Multiplicity of meanings due to life-to-text interactions.

Recommended Reading:

Plato. Republic, Books II & X

Alexander Pope. Essay on Criticism

S.T. Coleridge. Biographia Literaria – Chapter XIII on Fancy and Imagination

Walter Pater. "An Essay on Style" in Appreciations.

A.C. Bradley. Poetry for Poetry's Sake.

Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox" (from The Well-Wrought Urn, London: Dennis Dobson, 1960)

T.S. Eliot. Tradition and the Individual Talent.

R. Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics" "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles" (both in Lodge, 1988)

J. Culler, Structuralist Poetics, (Chap.I) London: Routledges and Kegan Paul, 1975.

S. Freud, "Creative Writing and Day-dreaming" (in Lodge, 1972)

G. Lukacs, "The Ideology of Modernism" (in Lodge, 1972)

Gerard Genette. Structuralism and Literary Criticism.

Roland Barthes. The Death of the Author.

Jacques Derrida. Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences.

Aijaz Ahmed. Orientalism Revisited.

M. Bakhtin. "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" (in Lodge, 1988)

J. Kristeva, "The Ethics of Linguistics" (in Lodge, 1988)

M. Foucault, "What is an Author?" (in Lodge, 1988)

Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory" (in Lodge, 1988)

J. Mitchell, "Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis" (in Lodge, 1988)

C. MacCabe, "Language, Linguistics and the Study of Literature" (in Lodge, 1988)

IV

F. Jameson, "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate" (in Lodge, 1988)

T. Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism" (in Lodge, 1988)

R.C. Holub. Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction, London: Methun, 1984.

Stephen Greenblatt. Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture, New York: Routledge, 1990.

H. Aran Veeser (ed.). The New Historicism, New York: Routledge, 1989.

John Brannigan. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, New York: St. Mortin's Press, 1998.

R.Holub, "Hermeneutics" and "Phenomenology" (both in The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Vol. ed. R. Selden, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

M. Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, (trans, A. Hofstadter), New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Devid Lodge, Modern Criticism and Theory, Pearson Longman, 2nd End., 2007.

Examination Pattern:
Theory paper of 100 marks.
Questions 1,2,3, and 4 will be of 25 marks each with three internal options. Combination of texts is possible.

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1

BASIC CONCEPTS OF CLASSICAL CRITICISM

Unit structure

1.0 Objectives

The basic aim of this unit is to familiarize the student with the key concepts of classical literary criticism. It will also try to elucidate certain important terms used in the critical writings of Greek classical writers like Plato and Aristotle.

1.1 Introduction

History of literature is almost as old as history of existence and literary criticism is as ancient as literature. In ancient Greece, scholars studying literature had developed literary criticism, a branch of study enabling better understanding and appreciation of literature. The word criticism itself is derived from the Greek root *krinei* that means 'to judge'. The Greek term originated around the 4th century and later in English Literature, the term criticism was applied to the study and analysis of literature. The term criticism developed in the 17th century Europe and it was further developed in the 20th century with more branches like literary theory, literary history and literary criticism evolving out of it.

Literary criticism has its origin in ancient Greece and Rome. Contemporary critics still draw heavily on Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus and Quintilian, to whose writings one can trace the beginnings of different approaches to literary criticism.

Plato was the first critic to contemplate the role of literature in society. For Plato, poets had no place in the perfect society. Aristotle, his disciple, did not have Plato's anxieties about the effects of literature on society. He was the first critic to analyse tragedy in its constituent elements. Horace, the first important Roman critic, suggests that poet should select a form suitable to his material. He says: "The secret of all good writing is sound judgment." Longinus, who wrote "On the Sublime" emphasizes the importance of stylistic mastery, grandeur of thought and powerful emotion as the elements of sublimity. Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* provides a close study of individual works of Greek and Roman poets.

Classical literary criticism takes its origin from classical philosophy. It was evolved mostly from the views of Plato and Aristotle, who made a sustained and systematic enquiry into the nature, elements and forms of art.

Plato and Aristotle were two Greek philosophers who had made some efforts in describing certain forms of poetry and in considering their functions. Plato was the first western philosopher to expound a theory of Art and he influenced many other thinkers of his era. In his famous work, *Republic*, Plato tries to define poetry and comments on its functions. He argues that poet should be banished from an ideal state on two grounds – metaphysical and ethical. He says that all art forms are fictional and hence they are untrue and they twist and distort truth. Plato comments in *Republic*:

> This was the conclusion at which I was seeking to arrive when I said that painting or drawing, and imitation in general are engaged upon productions which are removed from truth, and are also the companions and friends and associates of a principle within us which is equally removed from reason, and that they have no true or healthy aim. (35)

Plato also considers Art as an imitation and he also talks about the need of all arts to be guided by moral principles.

Aristotle, who developed his interest in Mathematics, Philosophy, Natural Science and Arts gives his ideas about art and literature largely in four works – *Ethics*, *Metaphysics, Rhetoric and Poetics.* Aristotle dismisses Plato's view that the poet ought to be a moral instructor and indicates that correctness in poetry is not the same thing as correctness in morals. His *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* in particular provide his concepts on literary forms, style, imitation and

other critical issues. His works are his lecture notes gathered by his students and hence they are not properly developed essays. Both Plato and Aristotle have given World Literature certain ideas and definitions about the nature of literature, function of literature and forms of literature.

1.2 Notion of Reality in Classical Criticism

In classical criticism, the notion of reality is closely associated with the term *Mimesis* – a term that also stands for imitation, representation or the act of resembling. Reality and the term *Mimesis* have been theorized extensively by Plato and Aristotle. Plato writes about reality in both *Ion* and *Republic*. In *Ion,* Plato states that poetry is the art of divine madness and hence it is not directly concerned with reality. He also maintains that writing and acting were not sufficient in conveying the truth. In his Book II of *The Republic*, Plato warns the readers that they should not seriously regard poetry as being capable of attaining truth. He maintains that what is real is rarely reproduced in Art. He develops this argument with the notion of three beds. Plato says that one bed exists as an idea made by God. It represents the ideal reality. The second bed is made by the carpenter which according to Plato is an imitation of God's idea. The second bed is a copy of reality, according to Plato. He says that the bed represented in an art form by an artist becomes a copy of a copy and hence twice removed from reality. Plato interprets art as a representation of twice removed truth. He maintains that artists, as imitators, only touch on a small part of things.

Plato also compares the truth value of the creations of craftsmen and poets. He argues that poets do not possess the knowledge of craftsmen and are mere imitators who copy images time and again for sheer happiness. Plato also says that poets never reach the truth the way the superior philosophers do.

Aristotle also has commented on reality and its imitation in art. He considers *mimesis* as the perfection and imitation of nature. He says that Art is not only imitation but it also uses mathematical ideas and symmetry to attain a degree of perfection. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle explains that poetry reflects and represents reality. However, Aristotle considers it important that there be a difference between real life and a work of art. He also maintains that this difference gives rise to *catharsis* or emotional cleansing. Yet, Aristotle maintains that the audience should be able to identify with the characters or events in the text and unless this identification happens, the text does not touch the audience. He says that *mimesis* is a form of simulated representation which aims to have some response from the audience. Thus, Aristotle places reality in

art between recognizable representation and aesthetic distance. To prove this point of reality in art, he compares the facts of literature with the facts of history. Aristotle indicates that history deals with specific facts that have happened whereas literature deals with events that could have taken place or ought to have taken place. He considers this kind of reality as ideal truth. Michael Davis, a translator and commentator of Aristotle explains that *mimesis* is an act of representing reality in a stylized manner.

Plato and Aristotle hold completely different notions of reality. Their respective notions of reality are conditioned by their assumptions about truth, knowledge and goodness. For Plato, Art imitates a world that is already far removed from authentic reality, truth. He argues that truth exists only in intellectual abstraction and it is more real than concrete objects. He also believes that universal essence – the idea or the form of a thing – is more real and hence more important than its physical substance. Plato's view is that the tangible world is an imperfect reflection of the universal world of forms. Further, he maintains that human observations based on these reflections are, therefore, highly suspect. He also observes that the result of any human effort, at the best, is an indistinct expression of truth. For Plato, knowledge of truth and knowledge of good are virtually inseparable. He advocates a rejection of the physical in favour of reason, in an abstract and intellectual mode. He argues that art is removed from any notion of real truth and it is a flawed copy of an already imperfect world. Hence, he believes that art, as an imitation, is irrelevant to what is real.

Aristotle approaches reality from a different premise. For him, the world exists in a diverse series of parts. He believes that these different parts are open to human observation and scrutiny. He thinks that knowledge of truth and good are rooted firmly in the observable universe. Aristotle also believes that the different parts of the universe require different discourses. In *Poetics*, Aristotle considers one method of enquiry which is applicable to tragedy. He says that tragedy attempts to imitate the complex world of human actions and yet tragedy itself is a part of larger world of human existence. He considers tragedy as a manifestation of a human desire to imitate because he believes that each person "learns his lessons through imitation and we observe that all men find pleasure in imitations." This formulation implies that the self referential function of tragedy gives it a place in Aristotle's notion of reality.

Plato conceives that an artist lacks any substantial knowledge of the subject that is imitated. He believes that an artist merely copies the surface, the appearance of a thing without the need for understanding of awareness of its substance. He observes in *The Republic* that the artist is "an imitator of images and is far removed from the truth." Aristotle on the other hand perceives the

process of imitation in a slightly different way. He describes imitation as a creative process of selection and transformation from one medium to another. He indicates that a literary artist attempts to imitate human action and not specific individuals. Poetry, he argues, can be described as human action given a new form by language.

Though both Plato and Aristotle use the word *mimesis* to describe art, the definition derived by each one is profoundly different. The process of imitation explained by each philosopher promotes the particular version of reality conceived by each one. A study of the notion of reality in classical criticism helps in tracing the central philosophical conflict regarding the usage and importance of imitation in art.

1.3 Notion of Decorum

The term, Decorum originates from Latin and it stands for 'proper', 'fit' or 'becoming'. Decorum was also a principle of classical rhetoric, poetry and theory of drama. The term is also applied to indicate appropriate social behaviour within set situations.

In classical rhetoric and poetic theory, Decorum indicates the appropriateness of style to subject. Aristotle in his *Poetics* and Horace in his *Ars Poetica* have discussed the importance of appropriate style in epic, tragedy and comedy. Horace for instance, explains the concept of decorum: "a comic subject is not susceptible of treatment in a tragic style and similarly the banquet of *Thyestes* cannot be fitly described in the strains of everyday life or in those that approach the tone of comedy. Let each of these styles be kept to the role properly allotted to it."

Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines Decorum as "a standard of appropriateness by which certain styles, characters, forms and actions in literary works are deemed suitable to one another within a hierarchical model of culture bound by class distinctions."

Derived from Horace's *Ars Poetica* and other works of classical criticism, Decorum became a major principle of Renaissance taste and of Neo-Classicism. It ranked and fixed various literary genres in 'high', 'middle' and 'low' stations, and expected the style, characters and actions in each to confirm to its assigned level. Thus, it was considered that tragedy or epic should be written in a high or grand style whereas a comedy should treat humble characters and events in a low or colloquial style. The mixture of high and low levels, as in Shakespeare, was seen as

indecorous, although it could be exploited for humorous effects as in mock-heroic works. However, the strict application of these principles of decorum was overturned by the advent of romanticism, although in a general sense, writers always link style to subject matter according to their purposes.

Latin orators divided style into: the grand style, the middle style and the low style. Certain types of vocabulary and diction were considered appropriate for each stylistic level. Medieval and Renaissance theorists often linked each style to a specific genre. For instance, they linked epic to high style, didactic literature to middle style and pastoral to plain style. However, stylistic diversity had been a hallmark for classical epic as seen in the inclusion of comic and erotic scenes in the epics of Virgil and Homer.

1.3.1 Decorum in Theatre

Decorum in the context of theatre refers to the appropriateness of certain actions or events on the stage. In classical theatre, certain subjects were deemed to be better left to narration. For instance, classical Greek Drama avoided a theatrical depiction of murder or bloodshed. Such scenes were left to narration by chorus or by certain characters. In Horace's *Ars Poetica*, the poet counsels playwrights to respect decorum by avoiding the portrayal on stage, of scenes that would shock the audience by their cruelty or unbelievable nature:

> But you will not bring on to the stage anything that ought properly to be taking place behind the scenes, and you will keep out of sight many episodes that are to be described later by the eloquent tongue of a narrator. Medea must not but not butcher her children in the presence of the audience, nor the monstrous Atreus cook his dish of human flesh within public view nor Procne be metamorphosed into a bird nor Cadmus into a snake. I shall turn in disgust from anything of this kind that you show me.

In Renaissance Italy, important debates on Decorum in theatre were set off by Speroni's play *Canace* which portrayed incest between a brother and sister. Similarly Giovanni Battista Giraldi challenged the notion of classical decorum in his play *Orbesche* which involved patricide and cruel scenes of vengeance. In 17th century France, the notion of decorum was a key component of French classicism in theatre.

1.4 Conclusion

Central to Horace's concept of poetry is the notion of literary decorum, the fitness and propriety of form and style of work to its content. Aristotle touches on the features of decorum but Horace makes it his guiding principle. He believes that every aspect of a poem must be in keeping with the nature of the work as a whole: the genre must be carefully chosen to fit the subject matter and the characters must be suitable for the genre while every feature of expression – style, tone and meter – must be in keeping. Horace also considers that no unnatural violence should be enacted on stage, although Aristotle thinks it permissible.

One can say that the concept of reality and the notion of decorum are central to the classical theories of literary criticism. The concept of reality explains the nature of poetic truth as revealed in Aristotle's *Poetics* and the notion of decorum has helped classical critics to comment on style.

1.5 Questions

1. Explain the idea of reality as perceived in classical literary criticism.

2. Discuss how Plato and Aristotle differ in their understanding of terms like *mimesis*, reality and decorum.

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2

ROMANTIC CRITICISM

Unit structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Notion of Poetic Diction in Romantic Criticism
2.3 Notion of Imagination
2.4 Conclusion
2.5 Questions

2.0 Objectives

The primary objective of this unit is to consider the key concepts of Romantic Criticism in detail. The chapter also tries to locate key figures in Romantic Criticism in the literary aesthetic and the philosophical backdrop of the time.

2.1 Introduction

Romanticism of the 19th century was a continental movement and English Romantic Revival can be considered as a part of European Romanticism. The distinction between the Romantic and the Classical was first explained by Schlegel. The writings of Rousseau and William Godwin also shaped the growth of English Romanticism. Concepts such as truth, nature, God and creativity were redefined in the Romantic Era. The domain of literary criticism too underwent changes so as to accommodate new approaches to art and literature.

Romantic Criticism was shaped by the experience of the French Revolution and hence one of its major concerns was how literature should relate to society. This question weighed heavily with William Wordsworth, whose "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" carry the first substantial statements of Romantic Critical principles. Wordsworth spoke about the language of poetry and he maintained that the language of poetry should be democratized. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, on the other hand, was widely read in contemporary German philosophy. His prose writings were conditioned by the writings of Emanuel Kant, Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling.

Coleridge was involved, in his *Biographia Literaria* to establish the principles of writing. He also made an attempt to define imagination and his interest in the power of imagination marked an important aspect of Romantic critical thinking. Reality, imagination, fancy and aesthetics were the key concepts put in circulation by Romantic Criticism.

English poets like William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge and P.B. Shelley gave memorable expressions to the Romantic mindset developed by their German contemporaries. They underscored in their writings the primacy of feeling, love and pleasure, and imagination over reason. They were also convinced of the spiritual superiority of nature's organic forms over mechanical ingenuity; and of the ability of art to restore lost harmony between the individual and nature.

Romantic Criticism, especially that of Wordsworth, made certain proclamations about the nature and function of poetry. Wordsworth's famous statement of poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings posited a different view of poetry than was accepted at that time. Wordsworth shifted the centre of attention from the work as a reflection or imitation of reality to the artist. For the first time, poetry was considered an expressive rather than mimetic art. Additionally, music replaced painting as the art form considered most like poetry. In addition to the significance of poet's personality in poetry, romantic critics formulated a few aesthetic theories. Wordsworth's notion of poetic language in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" and Coleridge's idea of meter in *Biographia Literaria* are good examples of such theories. However, Coleridge's critical theory differed widely from that of Wordsworth in that they were heavily grounded in theology. Further, Coleridge was more systematic and analytical in his critical writings.

2.2 Notion of Poetic Diction in Romantic Criticism

Poetic diction has been an idea of great debate in English Literature since the time of Chaucer. Spenser had proposed the use of archaism instead of Latinism in English poetry. During the Neo-Classical era the passion for decorum conditioned the notion of poetic diction. Romantic writers made a breakaway from these notions of poetic diction. Wordsworth writes in Essay on "Epitaphs" that the conventional classical clichés should give way for experiments in poetic language. He states, his aim is "to ascertain how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation; that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a poet may rationally endeavour to impart". This statement justifies an experiment in new poetic diction. He proposes that the poetic

diction be modeled on spoken language and not previous literary productions. Wordsworth also demands that poetic diction be grounded on primitive, passionate and natural utterance, that which is most spontaneous, the product of emotion. Wordsworth thinks that the problem of poetic diction is one of urban artificiality, which produces hackneyed verbal conventions of late neo-classicism. He also holds the view that poetic diction should be true to nature. He affirms in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" that the language of many good poems does not differ from that of prose: "a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good prose. We will go further. It may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition."

The difference between poetry and prose, Wordsworth holds, is that prose works with concepts and poetry with emotion. However, he maintains that there is no difference in their language.

Coleridge, in *Biographia Literaria,* restates the main romantic views on poetry. He holds the view that the defect of the poetry of the Neo-Classical Era is that it fails to translate poetic thoughts into language. However, Coleridge's attitude to poetic diction is not the same as Wordsworth's. He does not accept Wordsworth's primitivistic assumptions of language. He does not share Wordsworth's faith in the virtues of the language of the rustics. He points out that the language of poetry is a selection from natural language. Language, for Coleridge, does not spring immediately from nature in the way Wordsworth would have it: it is the product of the whole society in which the role of learning is fundamental.

Coleridge also believes that meter is the proper form of poetry. He says that meter intensifies the attention of the reader to every element in the poem, as well as to the whole. Meter, he says, "tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect it produces by the continual excitement of surprise, and by the quick reciprocation of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited which are too slight indeed to be any one moment, objects of distinct consciousness, yet become considerable in their aggregate influence."

Wordsworth feels that rendering rustic language into poetry has several advantages. He says that the simplicity of rustic speech is highly emotional and passionate. Further, he feels that in the situation of emotional excitement, the rustic emotions are natural. He also argues that being in constant touch with Nature the language of the rustics possess depth and nobility that can be the real source of poetry. Wordsworth strongly feels that the words commonly used by every member of every profession must find a place in poetry. Coleridge on the other hand observes that

language chosen from common speech and then purified might cease to be genuine rustic speech. He also feels that rustic language with its limited vocabulary may prove inadequate for a wide range of poetic expressions.

2.3 Notion of Imagination

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge have commended extensively on imagination. They have also tried their own respective ways to define imagination. During 17th and 18th centuries, the term imagination was used for non creative settlement of impressions in memory while fancy was associated with wit. William Taylor in 1813 defined fancy as a dynamic faculty, as a power of combining an evoking sensation. He considered imagination as a lower static faculty. Wordsworth criticized these definitions in his "Preface" and he opposed Taylor's sensationalist definition of imagination. However, he considered fancy as being creative though in a limited way:

> Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited and evanescent…

Wordsworth argues that fancy depends upon the accidents of things, the playful and the amusing. He says that finding a witty pun could serve as a typical operation of fancy. Imagination, however, is a higher faculty: it does not deal with fortuitous affinities, but with essential relationships between objects, their underlying unity. He says that this unity cannot be perceived by discursive reasoning, but rather by feeling; imagination as a subjective refashioning of appearance: "the Imagination draws all things to one….it makes things animate or inanimate, beings with their attributes, subjects with their accessories, take one colour and serve to one effect."

Emanuel Kant considers imagination as a distinctive mental operation through which thought and experience may be united. He also distinguishes two uses of imagination: the first in ordinary thought and perception, the second in aesthetic experience. According to Kant, an experience embodies two elements: the intuition presented to the senses and the concept contributed by the understanding. He says that these elements are synthesized by an act of the imagination that constitutes them as single experience. Here imagination remains bound by the concepts of

understanding, that is to say that how one sees the world depends upon one's disposition to form beliefs about it. Kant also says that in aesthetic experience however imagination is free from concepts and engages in a kind of free play. Kant's invocation of imagination as the synthesizing force holds a key position in Coleridge's theory of imagination as revealed in *Biographia Literaria*. Kant also seems to differentiate creating imagination from sense perceptions. Coleridge too makes the same distinction.

Wordsworth considers imagination as a faculty that belongs to a higher order of creation. He believes that imagination is a necessary quality that unifies nature. In his great ode, "Intimations of Immortality", he compares a child to a running brook and lambs playing on a field. This comparison indicates that the child participates in the unity of nature in the same way as the brook and the lambs, while the narrator is estranged from the scene and can only approach it as the subject of poetry.

Coleridge does not agree with Wordsworth's definition of Imagination. He draws a sharp distinction between Imagination and Fancy, which according to Wordsworth has some common characteristics: to aggravate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy.

Wordsworth's definition of Imagination was found insufficient by Coleridge on another account too. Wordsworth links Imagination to gratification and not to values. However, a moral view of Imagination is implied in his poems. Coleridge, on the other hand, develops a different theory of Imagination. In Chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria,* he distinguishes Imagination and Fancy. Further, he develops a difference between primary Imagination (sensory understanding and secondary Imagination) creative Imagination. Coleridge explains:

> The imagination then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal art of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary, I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all

> events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.
>
> Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with but fixities and definities. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space, and blended with, and modified, by the empirical phenomenon of the will which we express by the word choice. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

Coleridge's practical suggestion is that "the poet should paint to the imagination, not to the fancy." The distinction between primary and secondary imagination is largely Kantian. Coleridge considers fancy as a limited parallel of secondary imagination. Coleridge also opposes Wordsworth's near-equivalence between Imagination and Fancy and he indicates that Fancy merely combines. Wordsworth's fancy is Coleridge's wit, which is a pure play of the intellect, of ideas, without the passion of poetry. Coleridge's notion of primary Imagination is similar to Kant's notion of Understanding while secondary or poetic Imagination is nearer to Kant's idea of Reason.

According to Coleridge's theory of Imagination, the secondary Imagination converts the perceptual products of primary Imagination into symbols of idea. Like Schelling, Coleridge believes that art makes conscious or rather explicit, what is unconscious in nature. According to Coleridge, the work of the poet must join accurate observation with the modifying power of Imagination.

In modern times the theories of Imagination proposed by Wordsworth and Coleridge are considered to be narrow and restricted as they were made ad-hoc to suit the special kind of poetry they were writing. However, Coleridge's theory of imagination is more reflexive than that of Wordsworth.

2.4 Conclusion

Wordsworth, in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", links poetry to lively sensibility, enthusiasm, tenderness and sympathy. For him, poetry is not a matter of rules and reputation. He locates spontaneity, emotions and tranquility at the heart of creativity.

Coleridge, on the other hand, introduces a methodical way of understanding creativity. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge modifies certain statements of Wordsworth about poetry. He understands poetry as a more complex, mental and emotional process. Coleridge says:

> A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its *imediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is determined by a proposing to itself such delight from the *whole* as it is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*. (Nagarajan: 88)

Coleridge's notion of Imagination as the shaping power which fuses, melts and recombines the elements of perception, is central to romantic criticism. His idea of poetic language and his evaluation of poetic meter too are very significant. Herbert Read in *Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Essays* makes an estimate of Coleridge as a critic:

> He (Coleridge) made criticism into a science, and using his own experience and those of his fellow poets as materials for research, revealed to the world for the first time some part of the mystery of genius and of the universal and eternal significance of art. (P. 122)

2.5 Questions

1. Discuss how Wordsworth and Coleridge perceive poetic diction?

2. Explain how romantic critics place imagination at the heart of the creative process.

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3

POETICS – Aristotle

Unit structure

3.0 Objectives

The basic objective of this chapter is to familiarize the students with Aristotle's ideas of poetry, tragedy, epic and imitation. This chapter also will explain the terms like *catharsis* and *mimesis* which are central to Aristotle's notion of poetics.

3.1 Introduction

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was an eminent Greek philosopher. He was also devoted to many branches of knowledge like mathematics, political philosophy, natural science and the Arts. His writings run into many volumes and he had established his own academy of learning. He is also known as a tutor of Alexander the great, who almost conquered a part of North Western India. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle addresses many problems that Plato had raised, about the function and nature of poetry. His other famous works include *Ethics*, *Metaphysics* and *Rhetoric*. *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* contain the bulk of literary criticism of Aristotle and both were his lecture notes. *Poetic*s raises many important critical issues constantly debated by scholars. Since *Poetics* is read in translation, there is a wide disagreement among the scholars about the meaning and implication of the terms used in the work. *Poetics* also made terms like *mimesis, catharsis, hamartia* and *hubris* popular in literary criticism.

Poetics contains 26 chapters, which deal with different forms of poetry, nature of poetry, poetic truth and tragedy.

3.2 Structure of *Poetics*

The structural division of poetics can be as follows:

Chapters 1-3: deal with poetry as imitation, poetry as a medium and the object and manner of representation.

Chapters 4-5: trace the historical origin of poetry. They also introduce the distinction between epic and tragedy.

Chapter 6: Definition of tragedy

Chapters 7,8,10 and11: They are about plot and tragedy – types of plot and the requirements of plot.

Chapters 9 and25: They deal with historic truth and poetic truth

Chapter 12: Elements of a tragedy

Chapter 13: Reversal of fortune in tragedy

Chapter 14: Pity and fear along with the notion of *catharsis*

Chapter 15: Character in tragedy and the notion of tragic hero

Chapters 16, 17 and 18: Devices used in tragedy such as reversal and recognition

Chapters 19, 28, 21, 22: They deal with diction language, thought and style

Chapters 23, 24 and 26: Distinction between epic and tragedy

Poetics can also be divided according to the following concepts:

1. Theory of Imitation, as an improvement upon Plato's theory

2. Definition of tragedy

3. Plot and character

4. Historic truth and poetic truth

5. The notion of catharsis

6. Concept of tragic hero

7. Distinction between epic and tragedy

3.3 *Poetics*: An Overview

Aristotle's *Poetics* defines different kinds of poetry; it explains the structure of a good poem and considers poetry as a form of imitation. He defines poetry as a "medium of imitation" that tries to represent life through character, emotion and action. Further, he classifies poetry into broad categories such as epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poem and some kinds of music.

Aristotle says that tragedy evolves from the efforts of a poet to present men as nobler or better than they are in real life. Comedy, on the other hand, represents a lower life and reveals human beings to be worse than they are. Epic poetry, according to Aristotle, imitates noble men like in tragedy but has only one meter unlike tragedy (which is written in a variety of meters) and is narrative in form.

Aristotle lays out six elements of tragedy: plot (*mythos*), character (*ethos*), thought (*dianoia*), diction (*lexis*), melody (*melos*) and spectacle (*opsis*). He argues that plot is a soul of tragedy because action is of highest significance in a drama. Aristotle says that all other elements are subsidiary. Further, he maintains that a plot must have a beginning, middle and end; it must have universal significance and should maintain unities of theme and purpose.

Plot, according to Aristotle, must contain elements of astonishment, reversal (*peripetia*), recognition (*anagnorisis*), and suffering (*pathos*). Reversal is an ironic turn or change by which the main action of the story changes its course. Recognition, he says, is the change from ignorance to knowledge usually involving people who understand one another's true identities. Suffering is a destructive or painful action which is often the result of reversal or recognition. Aristotle says that these three elements cascade to create *catharsis* which is the evocation of fear and pity in the audience – pity for the tragic hero's life, and the fear that the tragic hero's fate might be universal.

Aristotle says that poets should keep in mind four significant points in approaching characterization. First, the hero must be good and hence should manifest moral purpose in his speech. Second, the hero should have propriety or manly valour. Thirdly, the hero must be true to life. Finally, the hero must be consistent.

Aristotle observes that tragedy and epic fall into the same categories: simple, complex (propelled by reversal and recognition), ethical (moral) or pathetic (passion). However, Aristotle maintains that there are few differences between tragedy and epic. First, an

epic does not employ song or spectacle or achieve its cathartic effect. Second, epic cannot be presented or read in a single sitting, whereas tragedy is usually for a single viewing. Finally, he observes that the heroic rhythm of epic poetry is hexameter where tragedy uses other forms of meter to achieve varied rhythms of different characters and speeches.

Aristotle also lays out his theory of *mimesis* in *Poetics*. He says that the poet must imitate things as they are, things as they are thought to be or things as they ought to be. He observes that the poet also imitates in action and in language. He says that errors creep in when the poet imitates incorrectly or when the poet accidentally makes an error (a factual error, for instance). However, Aristotle does not believe that factual errors spoil the entire work. He says that the errors that compromise the unity of a given work are more serious.

Aristotle concludes by addressing the question whether epic or tragedy is a higher form. Contrary to the opinions of the critics of his time who used to argue that tragedy was for an inferior audience and epic was for a cultivated audience, Aristotle opines that tragedy is a superior form. He argues that tragedy is superior to epic because it has all the elements of epic along with spectacle and music to provide an indulgent pleasure for the audience.

3.4 Aristotle's Views on Tragedy

The centre piece of Aristotle's *Poetics* is his examination of tragedy. Aristotle defines tragedy, explains its constituent parts and compares it with epic. He writes:

> Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper *catharsis* of these emotions.

Aristotle indicates that the medium of tragedy is drama and not narrative. He says that tragedy "shows" rather than "tells". According to him tragedy is higher and more philosophical than history because history simply relates what has happened while tragedy dramatizes what may happen, "what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity." He says that history deals with the particular and tragedy with the universal. Real events that

have happened may be due to accident or coincidence and they may not be a part of a clear cause-effect chain. Therefore, they have little relevance for others. Tragedy, on the other hand, is rooted in the fundamental order of the universe and it creates a cause and effect chain that clearly reveals what *may* happen at any time or place because that is the way the world operates. Tragedy therefore arouses not only pity but also fear, because the audience can place themselves within this cause and effect chain.

Aristotle considers plot as the first principle and the most important feature of tragedy. He defines plot as the "arrangement of incidents". He implies that plot is not just the story but the way incidents are presented to the audience. According to him, the outcome of the tragedy depends on a tightly constructed cause and effect chain of actions. He also considers that plot to be more important than the character and personality of the protagonist. Aristotle also considers the ideal structure of a good plot. He says that the plot must be a whole with a beginning, middle and end. The beginning is described as the starting point of the cause and effect chain. The middle is caused by earlier incidents and itself becomes the cause of incidents that follow it. The end must be caused by the preceding events and should resolve the problems created during the first two stages.

Aristotle also says that the plot must be complete, having unity of action. By this, Aristotle implies that the plot must be structurally self contained, with the incidents bound together by internal necessity. According to him, the worst kinds of plots are episodic in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence.

Aristotle observes that the plot of a tragedy should be of certain magnitude, both quantitatively (length) and qualitatively (seriousness). He argues that the plot should not be too brief and the more incidents that the playwright can bring together in an organic unity, the greater the artistic value and richness of the play.

Aristotle says that the plot may be either simple or complex although the complex plot is better. According to him simple plot have only a change of fortune (*catastrophe*) whereas complex plots have both reversal (*peripetia*) and recognition and (*anagnorisis*) connected with the *catastrophe*. Both *peripetia* and *anagnorisis* turn upon surprise. Aristotle explains that a *peripatia* occurs when a character produces an effect opposite to that which he intended to produce. *Anagnorisis* is defined as a journey from ignorance to knowledge producing love or hate between the persons destined for good or bad fortune.

Aristotle is of the view that the plot must be of certain magnitude: neither too large nor too small. He also speaks about the unity of plot. For him, the unity consists in the structural union of the parts which are so arranged that, if one part is removed or displaced, the whole will be spoilt. He maintains that complex plots can be identified as the ones which have reversal and recognition as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Further, he says that fear and pity must be aroused in a tragedy by spectacular means but it is better if they result from the inner structure of the play.

Aristotle also theorizes on the character in a tragedy. He indicates that the character must be good. He also implies that character must be appropriate, the right type, i.e. a man should be brave and a woman should not necessarily be brave but neither she should be unscrupulously clever. Aristotle, further, insists that character must be consistent and he says that the poet should aim at either the necessary or the probable so that the character will be credible. He says that the poet should not only preserve the type of character but also ennoble it.

Another segment of Aristotle's view on tragedy is on thought. Aristotle maintains that thought consists of every effect that has to be produced by speech, proof, refutation, excitation of the feelings or suggestion of importance. For him, thought is one of the causes of action and it covers mind's activities from reasoning, perception and formulation of emotion. He further states that thought is expressed in speeches in a tragedy and is therefore closely linked to diction.

Diction is one of the elements in Aristotle's perception of tragedy. Diction covers language and its use: the way command, request, prayer, statement or question is expressed. Aristotle evokes the study of rhetoric in the context of diction and proposes analysis of words, sentence, letter, syllable, inflection and phrase. Further, he examines metaphors such as the metaphors of light and darkness in *Oedipus Tyrranus*. He also examines lyric poetry as it is seen in choral odes.

Aristotle indicates that song and spectacle are the elements concerned with the production of the play. Though they are essential parts of tragedy, the concern of the poet is less for them compared to his concern for plot, character and thought. Aristotle considers chorus as a device that upholds both song and spectacle. He also maintains that the chorus should be regarded as one of the actors and even of greater importance as the chorus has a unifying function in a tragedy.

3.5 Aristotle's Views on Imitation (*Mimesis*)

Aristotle uses the word *mimesis* in its various connotations such as re-enactment, impersonation or representation. In *Poetics*, Aristotle indicates that *mimesis* or the act of imitation itself is a source of pleasure. Further, he classifies different types of poetry according to their respective modes of imitation. He says that certain art forms imitate by means of language alone, either in prose or verse. When this imitation is in verse it may combine different meters to create a rhythm. Aristotle considers writers like Homer and Empedocles as the best exponents of imitation in meter. He considers three differences that distinguish artistic imitation – the medium, the object and the manner. He differentiates this kind of imitation from the imitation in dramatic poetry. Aristotle says that in dithyrambic and nomic poetry, the modes of imitation such as rhythm, tune and meter are all employed in combination, and in tragedy, "now one means is employed, now another". (p-3) This, according to Aristotle, is the chief difference in the art forms with respect to the medium of imitation.

Aristotle also speaks about the objects of imitation in *Poetics.* He says that men in action are the real objects of imitation and he classifies imitation into two with respect to the categories of men:

> Since the objects of imitation are men in action, and these men must be either of a higher or a lower type (for moral character mainly answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being the distinguishing marks of moral differences), it follows that we must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. It is the same in painting. Polygnots depicted men as nobler than they are, Pauson as less noble, Dionysius drew them true to life. (p-3)

Aristotle speaks about a third difference, the manner in which these objects may be imitated. He explains his views on the style of imitation:

> For the medium being the same, and the objects the same, the poet may imitate by narration – in which case he can either take another personality as

> Homer does, or speak in his own
> person, unchanged – or he may present
> all his characters as living and moving
> before us. (p-4)

Aristotle also traces the origin of poetry in the mankind's interest in imitation. He says that the instinct of imitation is implanted deeply in man from childhood and the basic difference in man and other animals is that he is the most imitative of living creatures. Aristotle defends *mimesis* by stating that man learns his earliest lessons through imitation and that it offers a universal pleasure. He also maintains that much of the pleasure in imitation depends on the minute fidelity. He explains the cause of pleasure in imitation:

> The cause of this again is, that to learn
> gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to
> philosophers but to men in general
> whose capacity, however, of learning is
> more limited. (p-6)

Aristotle also defines tragedy and comedy as two different forms of imitation. Tragedy is considered as an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain length. Comedy is defined as an imitation of ordinary men in action.

Though Aristotle uses the basic notion of imitation as in Plato, he disagrees with Plato on certain features of imitation. Plato had mentioned that poetic imitation was a deviation from truth. Aristotle, in contrast, thinks that imitation is a recreation of something that is better than reality. In his *Poetics,* he says:

> Epic poetry and Tragedy, as also
> Comedy, Dithyrambic poetry, and most
> flute playing and lyre playing are all,
> viewed as a whole; modes of imitation.
> (p-1)

Aristotle does not discuss all types of art in his *Poetics*. He speaks only of Epic poetry, tragedy, comedy and dithyrambic poetry and music along with their respective mimetic nature. He equates poetry with music while Plato had equated poetry with thinking. Aristotle is of the opinion that poetry and music have a deeper significance than painting which is concerned with what has actually happened and what may happen; not as in painting which cannot go deep into reality. He says that the poet should imitate men who are better than they are in natural life and thus a poet should transform from being an imitator to be a maker. In this context, the term imitation is like 'creation'. Aristotle says that a

poet deals with human thoughts and passions as they always are. He also opines that the poet should observe human beings very closely and should try and imitate the passions of humanity rather than an individual.

Aristotle is also of the view that poetry becomes an idealized representation of life and centuries later Hegel had considered art as the sensuous representation of the ideal. Idealization is one of the constituents of Aristotle's notion of *mimesis*. Aristotle's theory of *mimesis* is best reflected in his thought on drama. He defines drama as an imitation of action and tragedy as falling from a higher to a lower state.

Aristotle considers that the principle of imitation unites poetry with other fine arts and is a common basis of all the fine arts. He says that poet selects and orders his material and recreates reality. According to him, poet brings order out of chaos by removing irrational or accidental and by focusing on the lasting and the significant.

Aristotle also talks about the nature of imitation seen in poetry in contrast with how it figures in history. He says that history tells us what has happened; poetry what may happen. For him poetry tends to express the universal; history the particular. In this way he argues for the superiority of poetry over history. He also maintains that poet shares the interest in the universe with the philosopher. Aristotle explains the word 'universal' – how a person of a certain nature or type will, on particular occasion, speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity. Elsewhere, Aristotle says art imitates nature. By the word nature, he does not mean the outer world of created things but the creative force, the productive principle of the universe. He believes that the poet imitates the creative process of nature though the objects of imitation are men in action. However, he maintains that the action may be external or internal, as for instance, the action within the soul caused by all that befalls a man. Thus, Aristotle brings human experiences, emotions and passions within the scope of poetic imitation. According to his theory, moral qualities, characteristics, the permanent temper of the mind and the temporary emotions are all action and so objects of poetic imitation.

Aristotle's theory of imitation is also his refutation of Plato's charges on poetry. While Plato has mentioned that poetry is an imitation of shadow of shadows and hence thrice removed from the truth, Aristotle tells us that Art imitates not the mere appearance of things, but the ideal reality embodied in the very object of the world. Aristotle says that poetry reproduces the original not as it is, but as it appears to the senses. He also says that the poet does not copy the external world but creates according to his idea of it. Thus even

an ugly object well imitated becomes a source of pleasure. He observes in the *Poetics* that the sources of pleasure include:

> Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity; such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and dead bodies. (p-6)

Michael Davies, a translator and commentator of Aristotle explains his views on Aristotle's theory of imitation:

> At first glance, *mimesis* seems to be a stylizing of reality in which the ordinary features of our world are brought into focus by a certain exaggeration, the relationship of the imitation to the object it imitates being something like the relationship of dancing to walking. Imitation always involves selecting something from the continuum of experience, thus giving boundaries to what really has no beginning or end. *Mimesis* involves a framing of reality that announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real. Thus the more "real" the imitation the more fraudulent it becomes (Davis-23)

Aristotle not only theorizes his notion of *mimesis* in *Poetics* but also refutes the charge of Plato that poetry has not truth value. He breathes a new life and soul into the concept of poetic imitation by aligning it with creative process.

3.6 Aristotle's Views on *Catharsis*

Catharsis is a Greek term which means purification, purging or cleansing. It is generally used in relation to drama that derives from strong feelings such as sorrow, pity and fear. Drama is considered as a medium for purging such emotions. Aristotle was the first philosopher to use the term *catharsis* to refer to the emotional effects of a tragedy.

One of the most difficult concepts introduced in *Poetics* is *catharsis*. Scholars are still debating the actual meaning of *catharsis* in Aristotle's text though it is most often defined as a purging of the emotions that happens when one watches a tragedy. The psychological process involved in this purging is not clear in

Poetics. However Aristotle's concept of *catharsis* is widely understood in relation to a larger concern with the psychological and social purpose of literature.

There are various interpretations available of the term *catharsis* and the term has outgrown the purgation theory which is too much occupied with the psychology of the audience. However, Aristotle was not writing a treatise on psychology but on the art of poetry. Aristotle relates catharsis not really to the emotion of the spectators but to the incidents which form the plot of a tragedy. Hence, *catharsis* can be considered more as clarification than purgation. Aristotle suggests that the pleasure in tragedy, paradoxically, springs from incidents that evoke pity and fear. These incidents include events such as a man blinding himself or a mother killing her children as seen in *Oedipus* and *Medea* respectively. In this context, *catharsis* refers to the tragic variety of pleasure. Imitation does not produce pleasure in general, but only the pleasure that comes from learning, and so also the particular pleasure of tragedy. Learning in tragedy comes from discovering the relation between the action and the universal elements embodied in it. The poet might take his material from history or tradition; but he orders it in terms of probability and necessity. In this process he rises from the particular to the general and so he is more universal. Tragedy, thus, enhances understanding and leaves the spectators face to face with the universal law. Thus, according to this interpretation, *catharsis* means classification of the essential and universal significance of the incidents depicted, leading to an enhanced understanding of the universal law which governs human life and destiny. Such an understanding leads to the pleasure of tragedy. In this sense, *catharsis* is neither a medical nor a moral term, but an intellectual term. The term refers to the incidents depicted in the tragedy and the way in which the poet reveals their universal significance.

According to Aristotle, the basic tragic emotions are pity and fear which are essentially painful. He implies that if tragedy is to give pleasure, pity and fear must be eliminated. He indicates that fear is aroused when we see someone suffering and we think that similar fate might befall us. Pity is a feeling of pain caused by the sight of undeserved suffering of others. The spectators see that it is the tragic error or *hamartia* of the hero which results in suffering and so he learns something about the universal relation between character and destiny.

One can say that Aristotle's concept of *catharsis* is mainly intellectual. It is neither purely didactic nor fully theoretical though it may have some theological elements. Aristotle's *catharsis* is not just a moral doctrine that compels a tragic poet to show that bad

men come to bad ends. It is part of his commentary on the function of tragedy and the functions of the different parts of tragedy.

3.7 Conclusion

Aristotle concludes *Poetics* with the observation that though epic has a high stature, the appeal of tragedy is greater as the action in tragedy is demonstrated and not narrated. He also says that tragedy possesses all the elements that the epic has while Epic has only four constituents – plot, character, thought and diction. Aristotle indicates that tragedy has spectacle and song as additional elements, which contribute to greater pleasure. He also argues that tragedy affects the spectator emotionally and strongly, being shorter in length.

Though *Poetics* is largely considered as Aristotle's views on imitation, tragedy and epic, it inaugurates analytical criticism and comparative criticism. Aristotle opens up analytical criticism by studying drama in terms of its constituent parts. By comparing the formal and aesthetic features of epic and tragedy, he also opens up the possibilities in comparative criticism. Further, Aristotle counters effectively Plato's charges on poetry. However *Poetics* is not just an intellectual debate with Plato. David Daiches observes how Aristotle elevates the place of *Poetics* in the history of criticism by touching upon issues like imitation, imagination and emotions:

> One can fairly maintain that a whole view of the *value* of imaginative literature is implicit in Aristotle's discussion of the relation between poetry and history and the nature of literary probability. But he is not content with answering Plato's contention that art is but an imitation of an imitation, thrice removed from truth; he wishes also to answer specifically Plato's notion that art corrupts by nourishing the passions. His reply to this charge is simple and remarkable. Far from nourishing the passions, he asserts, it gives them harmless or even useful purgation. By exciting pity and fear in us, tragedy enables us to leave the theater "in calm of mind, all passion spent". (Daiches, p-39)

3.8 Questions

1. Discuss Aristotle's views on tragedy as revealed in *Poetics*.

2. Explain how Aristotle argues that plot is the most integral element in a tragedy.

3. Consider Aristotle's views on imitation or poetry as a mimetic art.

4. What according to Aristotle is the function of *catharsis* in tragedy? Discuss

3.9 Key Terms

Mimesis, Catharsis, Plot, Tragedy, Epic, Peripetia, Anagnorisis, Catastrophe

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4

"THE PREFACE TO THE LYRICAL BALLADS" – William Wordsworth

Unit structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 "The Preface:" An Overview
4.3 Wordsworth's Idea of Poetic Diction
4.4 Wordsworth's Idea of a Poet
4.5 Conclusion
4.6 Questions
4.7 Key Terms

4.0 Objectives

This chapter aims to elucidate Wordsworth's theory of poetry as revealed in his critical essay, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads." It also tries to explain Wordsworth's notions such as poetic diction, function of poetry and his definition of poetry.

4.1 Introduction

William Wordsworth has his reputation rooted in his identity as an outstanding poet of the early 19th century. His poems such as the "Prelude," "Lines Written above Tintern Abbey," "Solitary Reaper," "Michael" and "Simon Lee" have earned him a significant place in the history of English poetry. Though his fame rests largely on his poetic works, he has left behind him a few essays and commentaries on literature. Wordsworth's body of literary criticism consists of "Advertisements to the Lyrical Ballads" (1798), "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" (1800) and "Appendix on Poetic Diction" (1802). "The Preface" was constantly revised by Wordsworth for the subsequent editions of Lyrical Ballads. For the 1815 edition, he wrote a new preface and this volume also had "An Essay Supplementary to the Preface." The 1802 preface is generally taken as the standard text. Wordsworth's critical works also include his Notes to *The Thorn and Other Poems* as well as critical remarks of great significance scattered in his correspondences.

As a thinker, Wordsworth is identified as a spokesperson of Romanticism, emotions and spontaneity. As a critic, he considers criticism as a creative process. His critical essays discuss at length imagination, emotion and originality. He has also spoken about the true function of poetry, nature and gifts of a poet, language of poetry and the themes of poetry.

Wordsworth wrote "The Preface" in 1800 and then he started adding more details to it. Finally, he published a better version of "The Preface" in 1802 which gave detailed accounts of the nature, qualifications and functions of the poet. To this edition, he also added an appendix on poetic diction, devoted to an analysis of poetic diction and its history. Wordsworth observes that the objective of writing "The Preface" was not to give an elaborate account of his theory of poetry but rather an effort to explain the new kind of poetry that he was writing.

4.2 "The Preface:" An Overview

Wordsworth begins his preface to the 1802 edition of *The Lyrical Ballads* by referring to the 1798 edition of his poems. He points out that the first edition of *The Lyrical Ballads* was an experiment in metrical arrangement and a selection of real language of men in a state of clear sensation. He also underlines pleasure and the quantity of pleasure which are central to poetry. He considers the basic effect of the poems included in the collection to the common pleasure. He also expresses his happiness that many people have been pleased by these poems. Further, he indicates that his friends have been very anxious for the success of his poems and that they share a belief that these poems are written keeping in mind certain permanent interest of mankind. He also admits that he was persuaded to write a preface in defense of his poetry. However, he expresses his apprehension in trying to reason it out with the readers, the merits of his poems. He is also apprehensive of the large space that the preface would consume in a collection. Though he feels that a preface about language and taste in literature would be somewhat misplaced, he thinks that it is necessary to explain in a few words of introduction, his poems which are materially different from the traditional poetry of the age.

Further, Wordsworth indicates that poetic languages of different eras of literature have generated different expectations from the readers. To illustrate this point, he explains how metrical language has been changing in the ages such as that of Catullus, Terrance Lucretius, Shakespeare, Fletcher, Donne, Cowley or Pope. He also observes that writers of the previous era have been accused of using gaudiness, inane phraseology by the modern writers. He indicates that the readers of *The Lyrical Ballads* will also

encounter some strangeness and awkwardness. Wordsworth tries to justify his decision to write "The Preface" by spelling out the purposes. He says that it is necessary to explain to his readers the pattern and design of the *The Lyrical Ballads*. He explains how common life and ordinary language along with the tinge of imagination have been the highlights of *The Lyrical Ballads*:

> The principal object, then, proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. (p -164)

Further, Wordsworth explains the material used in his poetry. He says that humble and rustic life is generally chosen as the subject because in such a life essential passions of heart come out without any restraint. He also argues that in rustic life elementary feelings co-exist with simplicity and consequently, they can be easily comprehended by the poet. Wordsworth also maintains that the passions of rustic men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent form of nature. He also believes that the language of the rustic people, which is purified of the rational causes of dislike, is the proper medium for poetry. He says that this kind of language is free from the influence of social vanity and it conveys their feelings in simple expressions. Wordsworth proposes the use of such rustic language by the poets for better expressions:

> Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies, habits of

> expression, in order to furnish food for
> fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their
> own creation. (p -165)

Wordsworth makes a claim that the poems included in *The Lyrical Ballads* are free from false refinement and arbitrary innovation. He also says that each one of them has a worthy purpose. He indicates that they are good poems as they have spontaneity, emotions and organic sensibility:

> For all good poetry is the spontaneous
> overflow of powerful feelings: and
> though this be true, poems to which any
> value can be attached were never
> produced on any variety of subjects by a
> man who, being possessed of more
> than usual organic sensibility, had also
> thought long and deeply. (p - 165)

Wordsworth explains poetic process as an act in which feelings are modified and directed by the thoughts. He considers thoughts as the representatives of past feelings and when they are evoked in the present, feeling and thought become representatives to each other. He indicates that when a poet describes objects or utter sentiments which are modified simultaneously by the feelings and thoughts, they lead the reader to some degree of enlightenment.

Further, Wordsworth distinguishes his poems from the poems of the day by explaining that in his poems, feelings give importance to the action and not the response to the situation of the feeling.

Wordsworth tries to explain the function of a poet, especially in a time when the powers of mind are blunted by urbanization and standardization of occupation. He says that poets like Shakespeare and Milton are sidelined by frantic novels and sickly German tragedies. He argues that a good poet should be able to resist this deluge of idle stories by becoming a man of greater power, who articulates inherent and indestructible qualities of human mind. Subsequently, Wordsworth talks about the style of the poems included in *The Lyrical Ballads*. He claims that readers will rarely find abstractions as personifications do not make a part of natural language. He says:

> My purpose was to imitate and, as far as
> is possible, to adopt the very language
> of   men;   and   assuredly   such
> personifications do not make any natural
> or regular part of that language. (p -167)

Wordsworth indicates that the poetic language he employs rejects figures of speech that are merely used as mechanical devices of style. He says that he likes to use such a style where in he can keep the readers in the company of flesh and blood.

Wordsworth indicates that he would like to bring his language near to the language of men. He suggests that a poet should write without falsehood and deception. For him, good style is not the use of artificial expressions that are foolishly repeated by bad poets.

Wordsworth also comments on the critics of his time and says that some of them take great delight in working into the meters and laws of composition and think they have made a notable discovery. He says that such critics establish a canon of criticism which is often rejected by the reader. He examines a short composition of Thomas Gray which begins with the line, 'In vain to me the smiling mornings shine'

Wordsworth argues that Gray has deliberately attempted to widen the gap between prose and poetry in this work with excessive use of inversion and artificial figures of speech.

Wordsworth is of the opinion that the language of prose may be well adapted to poetry. He states:

> It may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we find bonds of connection sufficiently strict to typify the affinity betwixt metrical and prose composition? (p -169)

Wordsworth continues to argue that both poetry and prose are spoken by and spoken to the same organs and hence they are identical. He says that the same human blood circulates through poetry and prose.

Wordsworth recommends a selection of language really spoken by men which is kept away from vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life. He says that if poet's subject is judiciously chosen, it will lead naturally to passions of ordinary language.

Further, Wordsworth takes up the function of a poet. He tries to address the questions – what is a poet? to whom does he address himself? what language is to be expected of him? Wordsworth considers poet as a common man with a special sensibility and insight into human nature. He says:

> He is a man speaking to men: a man it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. (p - 171)

Wordsworth also maintains that a poet should have the ability to conjure up in himself passions which are at times far from the ones produced by real events. He also indicates that a good poet brings his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes. The poet could even confound and identify his feelings with that of his characters.

Wordsworth says that a poet possesses the great faculty of sharing the passion with others. He indicates that a poet imitates passions, though not in a mechanical way. He argues that the poet modifies language for the particular purpose of giving pleasure. He says that the poet employs the principle of selection in selecting the language so as to elevate nature. He also maintains that a poem can surpass the original as it can give more pleasure than the original.

Further, Wordsworth distinguishes poetry from philosophy and history. He says that poetry is the most philosophic of all writing as its objective is truth. He implies that poetic truth is carried alive into heart by passion. He explains how a poet is superior to Biographer and Historian:

> Poetry is the image of man and nature. The obstacles which stand in the way of the fidelity of the Biographer and Historian, and of their consequent utility, are incalculably greater than those

which are to be encountered by the Poet
who comprehends the dignity of his art.
(p - 173)

Wordsworth is of the opinion that a poet writes freely and according to him, the poet has only one restriction, that is, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to human beings. He indicates that the poet communicates with human beings not as a lawyer, a physician, an astronomer or a natural philosopher, but as a man. He maintains that apart from the duty of giving pleasure, nothing comes between a poet and his object but in the case of the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand blocks.

However, Wordsworth reminds that the necessity of producing pleasure should not be considered as degradation of poetry. He says that pleasure is associated with beauty and love and hence, pleasure can never be degradation. He argues:

It is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love; further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathise with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. (p - 173)

Wordsworth explains the differences between a poet and a man of science in terms of their respective sensibilities and world views. He says that for a man of science, knowledge itself is pleasure whereas the poet considers the objects that surround him as essentially interactive so that they produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure. For him, poet is a man who has certain convictions, intuitions and deductions. Further, Wordsworth maintains that a poet considers man and nature to be adapted to each other. He also says that mind of man is the mirror of interest in the properties of nature. Wordsworth indicates that the man of science and poet seek truth. While a scientist seeks truth as a remote detached benefactor, the poet sings a song about the presence of truth as our friend. Wordsworth explains how poetry is a higher domain of knowledge:

> Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, 'that he looks before and after.' He is the rock of defense for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. (pp. 174-175)

Wordsworth argues that poet has a sensibility that brings together the passion and knowledge, and he says that these factors also bring vast humanity together. Further, he says that poet's sensibility is so inclusive that his thoughts are everywhere. Hence, he says:

> Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge – it is as immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of men of science should ever create any material revolution direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. (p-175)

Wordsworth also indicates that poets, at times, speak through their characters, yet he believes that a poet should have certain necessary qualities. He differentiates a poet from other people:

> The sum of what was said is, that the poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. (p - 176)

According to Wordsworth, a poet does not write for poets alone and hence, he must come down to the level of common man in his use of language. Wordsworth says that poetic language is a real language of men, i.e., a selection from the real language of

men. He indicates that a good poet should move away from the standard notion of poetic diction to write in a language that stands for pleasure and passion. He also argues that it is not necessary that the poem should exist in metrical language, as only a small part of the pleasure given by poetry depends on meter. Further, he declares that poems written upon humble subjects can adopt simple style. Wordsworth also condemns the artificial use of meter. He illustrates this point by showing that the meter of old ballads is very artless. He points out that certain parts of works like *Clarissa Harlowe* or *The Gamester* are distressful in their second reading. He suggests that the poets should try to connect meter in general with the pleasure of reading.

Wordsworth is of the opinion that pleasure derived from similitude is generally considered a primary principle of art. Hence, meter in poetry is generally recommended. He argues that since passions originate in ordinary life, the accuracy of meter should not be imposed upon poetic expressions.

Further, Wordsworth tries to explain his theory of poetry by relating it to feeling, tranquility and contemplation. He says:

> I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of re-action, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.
> (p - 180)

Wordsworth explains that the subjects for his poetry are taken from common life and he maintains that these subjects have a bearing on his language. He indicates that the language in his poetry closely resembles nature and hence, his poetry triumphs over parody and imitations. To illustrate this, he compares a stanza from Dr. Johnson with a stanza from "Babes in the Wood." Wordsworth argues that the words and phrases in his poem resemble conversational language and yet they evoke certain feelings in the reader. Dr. Johnson's stanza, in contrast, though connected to a familiar idea, has artificial language as it deliberately strives for a meter and rhyme scheme.

Wordsworth is also of the opinion that a reader is the best judge of a poem. He also condemns the mode of criticism that denies critic's own feelings and that interferes with his pleasure.

Wordsworth concludes "The Preface" by stating that genuine poetry is well adapted to generate interest in mankind permanently. He says such poetry is important in its multiplicity and quality of moral relations.

Appendix on Poetic Language

Wordsworth has added a note on poetic language to "The Preface to The Lyrical Ballads." This note largely explains the need to invent a new poetic language which is free of exaggerated figures of speech. He indicates that, in the past, distorted poetic language had received attention and admiration. He believes that such a language deviates from good sense and nature. He is also of the opinion that the earliest poets had used ordinary language and it was only the later corruption that made the poetic language a slave of meter. According to him, if poetic language moves away from common language, poet will also be removed from common life. He argues that, in the name of refinement, many poets have abused language with "a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics and enigmas."(pp – 186-187)

Wordsworth compares certain lines from Thomas Gray, Mathew Prior and Alexander Pope to show how these poets have used language in an abstruse and often in a difficult way. He compares certain lines from Dr Johnson starting with: "Turn on the prudent. And they needless eyes…" with Cowper's verse, from "Alexander Selkirk." Wordsworth argues that Dr Johnson's verse is a bad paraphrase of passages from Old and New Testament in meter. Cowper, he says, represents the curious mixture of strange abuse of language and violent expressions. However, he feels that Cowper's verse is more enjoyable, as it has imagination and sentiment.

Wordsworth concludes the appendix with the observation that meter and inane phraseology, if overused, will be of little value.

4.3 Wordsworth's Idea of Poetic Diction

Wordsworth states clearly that the language of poetry must be a selection of language really used by man. He also insists that poetic language must suit the subject matter of poetry, which is the humble rustic life and their intercourse with aspects of nature. He says that such a language has to be free from all the artificiality, pretence and vanity of urban life. He implies that rustic language could be easily rendered poetic by purifying and modifying it, by removing all that is painful and disgusting in the coarse life of the rustics.

Wordsworth also identifies several advantages of rustic language when it is used in poetry. Firstly, he says that the simplicity of rustic speech is highly emotional, passionate and deep-seated. Secondly, he indicates that rustic language can effectively capture emotional excitement such as love, separation, marriage, death etc to which the rustic's emotions are unrestrained and natural. Thirdly, Wordsworth argues that the emotions of the rustics come directly from their hearts and hence, their language is genuine. He indicates that in rustic language, that is, in simple words, great truths and philosophy are compressed. Fourthly, Wordsworth states that being in constant touch with nature, the language of the rustics possesses a depth and nobility which are the real sources of poetry. He also says that since the aim of poetry is to arouse the feelings of sympathy and love for the subjects and characters, the natural speech of the rustics becomes the most appropriate means of communication. Further, Wordsworth points out that since poetry tries to universalize the particular aspects of life and truth, the language used in it too needs to be universal, that is, language spoken by the common people.

Wordsworth's opinion that words commonly used in day-to-day conversation should find place in poetry is a difficult task to achieve. Even in his poems, Wordsworth has succeeded in using such a language only in a few short lyrics.

One can say that Wordsworth's theory of poetic language is more of a reaction against the pseudo-classical theory of poetic diction, which was developed in the Neo-classical age. 18th century critics had advocated that the language of poetry has to be different from the language of prose in terms of its decorum and style. Wordsworth, in contrast, believes that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition. He condemns the poetic language of the School of Pope as a masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics and enigmas. He recommends a simplified, demotic use of language in poetry. He also suggests that figures, metaphors, similes and other embellishments should not be used unnecessarily as their forced use will create an artificial poetic diction. He also argues that in a state of emotional excitement, men naturally use a metaphorical language to express themselves, emphatically. He says that earliest poets have used metaphors and images that resulted naturally from powerful emotions. Wordsworth points out that later poets started using a figurative language which was not a result of genuine passion. He condemns the use of stereotyped and mechanical phraseology in poetry. As he believes that poet is a man speaking to men, he must not use a language that is artificial and pseudo-classical.

Wordsworth's theory of poetic language has immense value in literary criticism, as it has a corrective function. It tries to correct the artificial, inane and unnatural phraseology of the later days of Neo-classicism. However, this theory is not free of contradictions and limitations. Firstly, Wordsworth does not state clearly what he means by language. Secondly, it is not clear in the theory whether he talks about language in terms of vocabulary and syntax or language in terms of imagery and figures of speech. Coleridge has pointed out certain limitations in Wordsworth's theory of poetic language. In his *Biographia Literaria,* Coleridge points out that if the language is selected and purified, it will no longer be the rustic language. Coleridge also points out that every individual's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activities of his faculties and quickness of his feelings. Hence, he says, Wordsworth's use of the word 'real' in the context of language is debatable.

4.4 Wordsworth's Idea of a Poet

Wordsworth indicates that in order to perform his function of producing excitement along with an overbalance of pleasure, the poet has to possess certain qualities. He indicates that poet is a man gifted with lively sensibility, enthusiasm and tenderness. His reactions to external nature must be powerful than those of ordinary human beings because he is blessed with an acute sensitivity and a greater imagination. Wordsworth says that a poet is affected by absent things as if they are present. For Wordsworth, poet is an individual who is able to recollect and recreate the pictures of the past. Wordsworth also talks about the comprehensive nature of the poet's soul which enables him to partake of other's emotional experiences by identifying himself with them emotionally. He also implies that a poet possesses a rare zest for life. Further, he indicates that a poet is a man who has thought "long and deep."

In "The Preface to The Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth says that the basic function of a poet is to render his ideas in a style that is easy to grasp. For him, a poet is a man speaking to men and his aim is to establish a communion with readers. Hence, he believes that a true poet is devoid of any pedantry.

Wordsworth's concept of poet includes his ideas of poet's social function, poet's qualifications and his individualism. He underlines the basic romantic notion that a poet is bestowed with higher faculties such as imagination and sympathy for humanity.

Wordsworth spells out the social function of a poet by insisting that the basic duty of a poet is to communicate. He maintains that a poet writes not only for his own pleasure but to

communicate his thoughts and emotions to the readers. He indicates that a poet doesn't write for poets alone but for men and hence, he must use the language of real men in poetry. Wordsworth emphasizes on the humanitarian concern of the poet by explaining that a poet is concerned with the connection between what is the greatest and what is most lowly. By doing so, Wordsworth tries to democratize the image of a poet.

Wordsworth also talks about the requirements of being a poet. Firstly, he has to have a lively sensibility, that is, the ability to react strongly to external impressions. According to him, poet has an uncommon sensibility that distinguishes him from the common run of mankind. Secondly, poet according to Wordsworth, has greater imagination and hence, he can feel or react emotionally to events which he has not directly experienced. Thirdly, Wordsworth says, poet has greater knowledge of human nature and thus, he understands the nature of passions which he has not directly experienced. Poet understands accurately the nature of human passions and emotions. Fourthly, Wordsworth argues that a poet has a more comprehensive soul. With this statement, he implies that poet shares emotional experiences of others and can identify himself emotionally with others. Fifth quality of a poet, according to Wordsworth, is his greater zest for life. Wordsworth says that poet has greater enthusiasm and he rejoices in the working of life in others and in nature. Sixthly, Wordsworth maintains that a poet is a man who has thought long and deep. He says that the poet does not create on the spur of the moment but contemplates in tranquility till the passions are triggered, so that the creation begins. For Wordsworth, the process of reflection is way of purifying the sensations of the poet of all that is painful, and therefore, what the poet creates carries with it "an overbalance of pleasure." Wordsworth adds that this process is also a way of universalizing the personal experience of the poet. Finally, Wordsworth considers sincerity as a hallmark of a poet. He argues that a poet's sincerity can be seen in the care he takes to revise and perfect his communication.

4.5 Conclusion

Wordsworth conceives of poetic experience as an active response of the mind to personal perception and experience. He implies that poet is not a mere observer but a creative artist who transfigures his experience into art, when emotionally moved. He also argues that the poet is more capable than an average human being of seeing similarity in differences. For him, poet is an individual who has the ability to conjure up passions in himself and to express them in simple yet passionate language.

4.6 Questions

1. Explain Wordsworth's views on poetic language as revealed in "The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads."

2. What, according to Wordsworth, are the functions and special faculties of a poet?

4.7. Key Terms

Imagination, Poetic Language, Rustic Language, Nature

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5

"THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM" –
Matthew Arnold

Unit structure

5.0 Objectives

5.1 Matthew Arnold

5.2 "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time:" An Overview

5.3 Conclusion

5.4 Questions

5.5 Key Terms

5.0 Objectives

The basic objective of this unit is to elucidate Matthew Arnold's essay, "The Function of Criticism". This unit also aims to elaborate Arnold's key principles on literature and society.

5.1 Matthew Arnold

Mathew Arnold is considered as one of the most significant writers of the late Victorian period in England. He established his reputation as a poet with his poems such as "The Scholar-Gypsy" and "Dover Beach". Arnold is also considered as an outstanding prose writer as his prose writings asserted his influence on literature. His writings on the role of literary criticism in society highlight the classical ideals and advocate the adoption of universal aesthetic standards.

Arnold's significant prose works include "On Translating Homer," "Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible," *Essays in Criticism* and *Culture and Anarchy*. In his highly regarded *Essays in Criticism* (1865), Arnold elaborates on his desire to establish universal standards of taste and judgement. He also underscores in this work, his interest to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.

5.2 "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time:" An Overview

"The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" is largely made of ideas that Arnold discusses in his "Study of Poetry." Arnold indicates that the true function of criticism is "to see the object as it really is". He also observes that in order to recognize the greatness of a literary work, one has to look beyond the social ideas and influences that cast shadows and opinions. Further, he indicates that two powers must converge to create a great piece of literature: the power of man and the power of moment.

Matthew Arnold also discusses in this essay the difficulties that critics face in the modern world. He argues that the British critics face more difficulties because the British culture is so rooted in hegemonic values and hence cannot transcend these values to see the object as it really is. He also says that the society will question the modern critics on their value and for the use of criticism as a means of protecting their own ingrained opinion. He says: "People are particularly indisposed even to comprehend that without this free disinterested treatment of things, truth and the highest culture are out of the question."

Arnold indicates that people are so much into their own practical lives that it becomes the only available paradigm to understand and evaluate everything. In "The Function of Criticism" he also says that criticism should be a dissemination of ideas, a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. He implies that while evaluating a work, critic's objectivity is more important than psychological, historical and social background of the work.

Further, Arnold indicates that in his quest for the best, a critic should not confine himself to the literature of his own country, but should draw substantially on foreign literature and ideas because the propagation of ideas should be an objective endeavour.

In this essay, Arnold suggests that the function of criticism at the present time is to make itself inherently valuable in itself, whether its values spring from bringing joy to the writer or whether the values spring from making sure that the best ideas reach society. In this regard, Arnold seems to be echoing Aristotle's view of poetry, as he explains that the very highest function of human kind is exercising its creative power.

Throughout the essay, Arnold links criticism with creative power and asserts that writing criticism may actually produce in its practitioner a sense of creative joy. He also likens the emotional

state of writing criticism with the emotional state of creative writing. By doing so, he undermines the typical censure of criticism that it serves no purpose.

Arnold observes that great writing springs out of an epoch of great ideas and these epochs are manifested when great ideas reach the masses. The only way to ensure that this process takes place is for the critic to disinterestedly recognize greatness in writing and impart this greatness to the common man so that he will be stirred by new ideas. Arnold implies that the reason that periods of great creativity and periods of dormant creativity seem to come in spurts can be traced just as much to the critic who recognizes the greatness and brings it to the public attention rather than solely to the creator of the great work. One can say that Arnold, rather than merely laying out a blue print for criticism, has made an attempt to prove that criticism has several vital functions and hence, should be regarded as an art form that is as high and significant as any form of creativity.

Arnold argues that the literature of many European nations has been used for the purpose of criticism. However, he asserts that England has failed to produce and encourage any significant amount of critical writing. He says that this dearth in critical writing comes partly from the attitudes of writers like Wordsworth. Wordsworth asserts that writing criticism is a waste of time for author and reader. He argues that time would be better spent in writing original pieces. Wordsworth also argues that there is great harm that can be done by critical writing, whereas little or no harm can be done through original pieces of literature. Arnold refutes these statements made by Wordsworth. He argues that it is very unlikely for a man who would be an excellent writer of criticism to satisfy himself by writing bad pieces of original writing: "It is almost too much to expect a poor human nature, that a man capable of producing some effect in one line of literature, should, for the greater good of society, voluntarily doom himself to impotence and obscurity in another". Arnold holds that there is as great a value in criticism as in original creative writing. He also points out that paradoxical nature of Wordsworth's hostility towards criticism by stating that Wordsworth himself was a great critic.

Further, Arnold argues that critical writing is as important as great literature in its exercise of free creative activity. He says: "It is undeniable, also, that men may have the sense of exercising this free creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature or art." Arnold also states that some people are better endowed as writers of criticism and hence to insist that they only write works of literature would simply frustrate their creative power. Arnold also believes that criticism is a way of understanding life and the world. He also states that since the modern world is so

complex, it requires a great deal of critical effort to create a substantial work of literature. Thus, Arnold traces criticism right in the heart of creativity.

Arnold considers criticism as a necessity because he thinks that creative power works with certain materials, and for the author these materials are ideas; "the best ideas on every matter which literature touches, current at the time." However, authors do not actually discover these ideas; rather they synthesize them into works of art. Therefore, if these ideas are not readily known to the author, then he has nothing to write about it. In this context, Arnold talks about the power of the man and the power of the moment. What Arnold suggests is that the author needs to live in a society where true ideas are openly discussed and debated; a society where thought is cherished and passed on, as it was in ancient Greece or Renaissance England. If this is not the case, Arnold says that the author's time would be better spent in preparing ideas for others through a critical effort.

5.3 Conclusion

Arnold's definition of criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world", encompasses the scope of creativity too. He indicates that criticism propagates best literature and it also enables a creative writer to know his life and world better by bringing to him substantial ideas about both.

5.4 Questions

1. Explain Matthew Arnold's views on the function of criticism
2. Explain how Arnold considers criticism as the soul of creativity.

5.5 Key Terms

Criticism, Power of Man, Power of Moment

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6

FORMALISM

Unit structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.3 Cultural Background of Russian Formalism
6.4 Cultural Background of American Formalism
6.5 Conclusion

6.0 Objectives

The basic objective of this unit is to familiarize the students with the types of Formalism and the key concepts in Formalism. The chapter also aims to trace the development of Formalism as a critical thought.

6.1 Introduction

Formalism or Russian Formalism is a type of literary theory and analysis which originated in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1920s. In the beginning, the term 'Formalism' was used in a derogatory sense because the Russian formalists had excluded the subject matter and social values in their attempt to focus on the formal patterns and technical devices of literature. Later, the term gained a neutral designation.

Boris Eichenbaum, Victor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson were the leading representatives of Formalism. This critical movement was suppressed under Stalinist regime in the Soviet in the early 1930s and consequently, the centre of the formalist study shifted to Czechoslovakia.

Russian Formalism developed as two distinct movements: the OPOJAZ – (Society for the Study of Poetic Language) in St. Petersburg and the Linguistic Circle in Moscow.

Russian formalists proposed a scientific method for studying poetic language, to the exclusion of traditional psychological and historical approaches.

Formalism opposed symbolism and impressionistic studies. Formalists insisted on keeping the relationship between art and life apart. Further, it suggests a study focusing on the literary facts and literature over metaphysical commitments of literary criticism.

One central argument in Formalism is that aesthetic effects are produced by literary devices. Formalists also maintain that what makes literature is its difference from other facts. They also attacked the mystical posturing of poets. Further, they defined 'literary' as a special use of language. Formalists consider literature as special use of language and they argue that the literariness of poetic language becomes distinct when poets deviate from and distort 'practical' language.

6.2 Types of Formalism

Formalism as a critical practice has evolved in many phases. Formalists have aligned themselves in different schools of thoughts and practices. One can consider the main types of formalism in an attempt to understand the different pronouncements of the movement.

I. Mechanistic Formalism:
In this branch of Formalism, a literary work is considered as a machine. It implies that art is a sum of the literary and artistic devices that the artist manipulates to craft his work. This approach disconnects a literary artifact from its author, reader and historical background. A clear illustration of Mechanistic Formalism is Victor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" in which he argues that literary and linguistic devices make up the "artfulness" of literature.

Mechanistic Formalism also discriminates between art and non art. Yet another contribution of mechanistic formalists is the distinction between story and plot, or '*fabula*' and '*sjuzhet*'. They argue that story (*fabula*), is a chronological sequence of events, whereas plot (*sjuzhet*), can unfold in non-chronological manner.

II Organic Formalism:
This branch of Formalism considers an artifact as a biological organism. It proposes the theory that like in a biological organism, the parts are hierarchically integrated in an art form. Vladimir Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" is a classic study in Organic Formalism. Peter Steiner explains the methodology of organic formalists: "They utilized the similarity between organic bodies and literary phenomena in two different ways: as it applied to individual works and to literary genres" (p-19)

The analogy between biology and literary theory proposed in Organic Formalism provided the frame of reference for genre studies. Steiner explains the model: "Just as each individual

organism shares certain features with other organisms of its type, and species that resemble each other belong to the same genus, the individual work is similar to other works of its form and homologous literary forms belong to the same genre" (p-19).

Organic formalists shifted their focus from an isolated technique to a hierarchically structured whole. By doing so, they could overcome the main shortfalls of the mechanists.

III Systemic Formalism:

This branch of Formalism accounted for the diachronic dimension of forms. It was also known as "Systemo-functional" Formalism. The major proponent of Systemic Formalism was Yuri Tynyanov. Steiner explains the basic tenet of Tynyanov's Systemic Formalism: "In light of his concept of literary evolution as a struggle among competing elements, the method of parody, "the dialectic play of devices", becomes an important vehicle of change."(p-21)

Systemic Formalism implies that since literature constitutes part of the overall cultural system, the literary dialectic participates in cultural evolution. It also upholds the view that the communicative domain enriches literature with new constructive principles.

IV Linguistic Formalism:

Linguistic Formalism places poetic language at the centre of its inquiry and it downplays the figures of author and reader. Leo Jakubiniski and Roman Jakobson were the major exponents of this branch of Formalism. Nicholas Warner explicates the interests of Linguistic Formalism: "Jakobson makes it clear that he rejects completely any notion of emotion as the touchstone of literature. For Jakobson, the emotional qualities of a literary work are secondary to and dependent on purely, verbal, linguistic facts" (p-71)

Linguistic formalists distinguish between practical and poetic language. They maintain that practical language is used in day-to-day communication to convey information. Steiner explains Leo Jakubinisky's notion of poetic language: "the practical goal retreats into background and linguistic combinations acquire a value in themselves"

6.3 Cultural Background of Russian Formalism

Russian Formalism was represented by two groups of theorists – the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the OPOJAZ group. Though the connotation of the title is neutral today, Russian

formalists had come under the attack of the Marxist thinkers. The most important Russian formalists were Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Boris Thomashevsky, Yuri Tynyanov and Roman Jakobson. Once the Russian formalists came in for attack under Stalin's rule in the Soviet, they migrated to Czechoslovakia to establish the Prague Circle of theorists. Later, when Czechoslovakia became a target of the Nazi attack, they relocated themselves in the United States.

Russian Formalism developed during the years of the First World War and was, as Victor Erlich has put it, a "child of the revolutionary period….part and parcel of its peculiar intellectual atmosphere" (quoted by Bowlt:1972,1). However, Russian Formalism came under increasing pressure in the Soviet Union as a repressive attitude to literary theory developed there; and by 1930 it had been forced into exile.

Russian formalists claimed, contrary to symbolist assertions, that words and their connotations are not the most important ingredients of poetry. They replaced loose talk about inspiration and verbal magic with the study of the laws of literary production. They were also materialists and anti-traditionalists, who tried to reach some rapprochement with social and political concerns. At first their approach was somewhat mechanical, treating literature simply as an assembly of literary devices. Subsequently, they investigated the interrelatedness of parts, an "organic" approach. Finally, in 1928, Tynyanov and Jakobson recast literature as a system where every component had a constructive function, just as the social fabric was a 'system of systems'. But the short period of comparative tolerance of the early twenties changed as Stalinism tightened its grip, and the formalists were obliged to recant, turn to novel writing, or flee abroad. They realized that an aesthetic theory divorced from Socialism was a heresy in the Soviet Union.

From Russia, Formalism spread to Prague. However, Prague already had a structuralist objectivism derived from the 19th century writer, J. H. Herbart. When Jakobson arrived in Prague in 1919, he advocated a classification of artistic styles by formal qualities by employing a terminology drawn from figures of speech, especially metaphor and metonymy. 'Foregrounding' the manner in certain elements or features came to be emphasized or brought to the fore from the background of more normal usage, became the chief concern of Prague School of Formalism. Notably, the interests of Prague formalists included tone, metaphor, ambiguity, patterning and parallelism in poetry, and diction, character, plot and theme in prose works.

6.4 Cultural Background of American Formalism

Formalism was an important mode of academic literary study in the United States from the end of the Second World War up to the 1970s. The principles of American Formalism are embodied in the works of Rene Wellek and Austin Warren.

Rene Wellek was known as a Czech-American comparative literary critic and he was born in Vienna, speaking Czech and German. He studied literature in Prague and was an active member of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Later, he moved to the University College, London to teach in the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. After World War II, he lived in America and he taught at the University of Iowa, and later at Yale University. He took with him to the United States the principles and practices of Russian Formalism, though he was better known as one of the founders of the study of comparative literature. He collaborated with Austin Warren to produce a landmark text, *A Theory of Literature.*

Edward Austin Warren was born in Massachusetts and he graduated from Harvard University. He received a Ph.D. in 1926 from Princeton University. He taught at the University of Minnesota, Boston University and the University of Iowa. He befriended T.S. Eliot, Evelyn Underhill, Rene Wellek and Allen Tate during his stay at these universities. With Rene Wellek, he authored *A Theory of Literature.* Wellek contributed to this work the insights he acquired from his familiarities with Russian Formalism, Prague Linguistic Circle and Stylistics. Warren's contribution to this work originated from his knowledge of New Criticism and aesthetics. The work discusses an intrinsic approach to studying literature, discussing the use of devices such as euphoms, rhythm, meter, style, imagery, metaphor, symbols and myth. The study also has a section on literary genres and the study of literature in the graduate school.

6.5 Conclusion

Formalism holds the view that aesthetic effects are produced by literary devices and hence it focuses sharply on these devices. It brought to the fore the study of items like narrative, poetic language, plot, motif and style.

6.6 Key Terms

Formalism, poetic language, foregrounding, Organic Formalism, Linguistic Formalism, Systemic Formalism

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7

MARXISM AND LITERATURE

Unit structure

7.0 Objectives

The basic objective of this unit is to familiarize the learners with the basic concepts of Marxist literary criticism. It also aims to impart the learners with the knowledge of key terms used in Marxist literary criticism such as Ideology, Culture and Superstructure.

7.1 Introduction

Marxist thoughts have influenced scholarly developments in areas such as literary, cultural and political studies. Karl Marx, the founder of Marxist ideology views literary works as the products of work and writers are seen as practitioners who emphasize the role of class and ideology as they reflect, propagate and even challenge the prevailing social order. A Marxist critic considers literary texts as material products which are to be understood in broad historical terms. Such a critic would look at a literary work as a product of work and hence, of the realm of production and consumption (economics).

Marxism began with Karl Marx, the 19th Century German Philosopher best known for *Das Kapital* (1867), the seminal work of communist movement. Marx was also a literary critic, with his writings on Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe and William Shakespeare. In *The German Ideology* (1848), he discusses the relationship between arts and basic economic reality. Economics, he argues, provides the 'base' or infrastructure, of society from which a 'superstructure' consisting of law, politics, philosophy, religion and art emerges.

Later, Marxist leaders in Russia too revealed their interest in Literature. Vladimir Lenin was an avid reader of the classics and Russian Literature. His comrade, Leon Trotsky published *Literature and Revolution* (1924), which is still considered as a classic in Marxist Literary Criticism.

Of those critics active in the Soviet Union in the Stalin era were Mikhail Bakhtin and Georg Lukacs. Bakhtin considers literary texts in terms of discourses and dialogues. A novel written in a society in flux, for instance, might include an official, legitimate discourse, as well as one infiltrated by challenging comments. Lukacs, a Hungarian who converted to Marxism in 1919, appreciated pre-revolutionary realistic novels that broadly reflected cultural "totalities" and were populated with characters representing human "types" of the author's place and time.

Non-Soviet Marxists took advantages and insights generated by non-Marxist critical theories being developed in post World War II Europe. Lucien Goldmann combined structuralist principles with Marx's base-superstructure model in order to show how economics determines the mental structures of social groups, which are reflected in literary texts. The French Marxist, Louis Althusser drew on the ideas of psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and the Italian communist, Antonio Gramsci, who discussed the relationship between ideology and hegemony, the pervasive system of assumptions and values that shapes the perception of reality for people in a given culture. Althusser's followers include Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton. Macherey, in *A Theory of Literary production* (1966), develops Althusser's concept of the link between literature and ideology. Terry Eagleton proposes an elaborate theory about how history enters texts, which in turn may alter history.

The Frankfurt School:

The Frankfurt school of Marxist critics composed of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse went beyond the basic concerns of the vulgar Marxists. They gave a privileged position to art and literature and considered art as an expression that can resist the domination of a totalitarian state. They also argued that popular art colludes with the economic system that shapes it where as Modernism has the power to question. Their critical theory advocated an art that makes the downtrodden masses aware of their exploitation and helplessness. Unlike the Marxist critics of the 1930s, members of Frankfurt School appreciate discontinuity of plot, plotless narratives and aimless characters, citing that these devices can shake the audiences of capitalist economy.

7.2 Literature and Ideology

The question of ideology is central in Marxism. Marxist use of the term ideology is different from the use of the term by common people. In ordinary sense, ideology refers to a set of beliefs that people consciously hold – beliefs of which they are aware and which they can articulate. For instance, one can speak of the ideology of the free market, referring to a series of arguments that demands free enterprise against state intervention. In contrast, Marxist notion of ideology is not a set of beliefs or assumptions that we are aware of, but it is that makes us experience our life in a certain way and makes us believe that that way of seeing ourselves and the world is natural. Hans Bertens explains the Marxist notion of ideology:

> In Marxist usage, ideology is what causes us to misrepresent the world to ourselves. As for Marxism the basis of any society is its economic organization, which then gives rise to certain social relations – for instance, the class relations between capitalists and workers in nineteenth century Capitalist economies.
> (Hans Bertens: *Literary Theory: The Basics*, p-84)

Marxist critics argue that if we succumb to ideology, we live in an illusory world in what in Marxism has often been described as a state of 'false consciousness'.

Marxist critics hold the view that dominant ideology hides authentic realities from masses. Louis Althusser presents the thesis that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. This implies that ideology distorts one's view of his/her real conditions of existence. Althusser also links ideology with its social sources. For Althusser, ideology works through so called ideological State apparatuses, which are all subject to the ruling ideology. Althusser's notion of ideological state apparatuses include organized religion, the law, the political system, the educational system – in short; all the institutions through which human beings are socialized. Ideology, then, has a material existence in the sense that it is embodied in all sorts of material practices. Althusser mentions some of the practices that are part of

the material existence of an ideological
apparatus, be it only a small part of that
apparatus a small mass in a small
church, a funeral, a minor match at a
sports club, a school day, a political
party meeting, etc.
(Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and
Other Essays*, p-20)

Althusser implies that ideology is waiting for human beings
and that practically everything they do and everything they engage
in is pervaded by ideology. He explains:

Ideas have disappeared as such
(insofar as they are endowed with an
ideal or spiritual existence), to the
precise extent that it has emerged that
their existence is inscribed in the actions
of practices governed by rituals defined
in the last instance by an ideological
apparatus. It therefore appears that the
subject acts insofar as he is acted by
the following system…ideology existing
in a material ideological apparatus,
prescribing material practices governed
by a material ritual, which practices exist
in the material actions of a subject
acting in all consciousness according to
his belief.
(Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p-21)

Althusser led the way for explorations of the way ideology
works in literature. Colin McCabe and other British Marxist critics
showed how, for instance, the objective realism of the mid-
nineteenth-century English novel is not so objective at all. They
argued that Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and George Eliot's
Middlemarch (1872), which present their characters as essentially
free, even if not all of them make use of that freedom, 'hail' us just
like ideology hails us. Such novels invite their readers to become
part of a world that is essentially free and to make autonomous
decisions. Hans Bertens explains the ideological apparatus in such
novels:

In doing so they create a specific
subject position for their readers and
give them the illusion that they, too, are
free. Just like ideology, such novels give
their readers the idea that they are
complete: they make them believe that

they are free agents and in that way make them complicit in their own delusion. (Bertens, p-88)

7.3 Marxism and Literature

Basic Marxist perspective on literature is that it is a cultural superstructure which is determined by the socio-economic base. Marx himself was of the view that the developments in art and literature did not necessarily immediately reflect changes in the economic pattern and the relations between classes. The so-called 'vulgar Marxists' of the pre-war period looked at the direct cause-effect relationship between the socio-economic base and literature and held that the writer is directly conditioned by his/her social class. They were also concerned about writers' link with ideology. Further, they held the view that the social reality of the writer will always be a part of the text.

Marxist critics also address the question if literary texts can be considered as social evidence. They would ask the question – can Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* be considered as true pictures of Victorian England or ideologically distorted reflections? Georg Lukacs, for instance, considers panoramic novels of Honore de Balzac and Leo Tolstoy to be more socially relevant than the fragmentary avant-garde products. Lukacs argues that a socially committed writer would try to merge individual life stories with larger movements of history. In his essay, "Ideology of Modernism", he observes:

> Achilles and Werther, Oedipus and Tom Jones, Antigone and Anna Karenina: their individual existence…cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment. Their human significance, their specific individuality cannot be separated from their context in which they are created. (Lukacs: 1972, 476)

The British and American Marxist critics of the 1970 and 1980s were influenced by Althusser and his view that texts do not so easily allow us a view of an undistorted reality.

French critic, Pierre Macherey's views on literature match that of Althusser. For Macherey, literary works are pervaded by ideology. He says, in his work, *A Theory of Literary Production*, that in order to get beyond a text's ideological dimension, readers will have to begin with the cracks in its façade. He argues that in order

to expose a text's ideology, interpretation must paradoxically focus on what the text does not say, on what the text represses rather than expresses.

Marxist critics of the United Kingdom like Terry Eagleton and Terrence Hawkes analyze canonical texts in a way to make the texts turn against themselves. This practice anticipates post-structuralist approach.

7.3 Conclusion

In general, one can say that the Marxist critic's interest in ideology is the extension of his/her interest in the link between the ideology of the literary work and the real world. Such a critic explores the politics of the text – its ideological dimension. Marxist Criticism, thus, addresses at once the politics of a text and the politics of the world outside it.

7.5 Questions

1. Discuss the Marxist interpretation of Ideology.
2. Explain how Marxist critics explore the link between ideology and literature.

7.6 Key Terms

Ideology, society, base, superstructure,

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8

"ART AS TECHNIQUE" –
Victor Shklovsky

Unit structure

8.0 Objectives
8.1 Introduction
8.2 "Art as Technique:" An Overview
8.3 Questions
8.4 Key Terms

8.0 Objectives

The primary objective of this unit is to elucidate Victor Shklovsky's ideas of defamiliarization and poetic language. It also aims to explain his contribution to the development of Russian Formalism.

8.1 Introduction

Victor Shklovsky was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on 12th January, 1893. After finishing his graduation at the University of St. Petersburg, he established the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOJAZ). He was a member of the literary group, Serapion Brothers, along with Nickolai Tikhonov, Mikhail Slonimski and Konstantin Fedin. These writers insisted on the right to create literature that was independent of political ideology.

In 1925 Shklovsky, published *On the Theory of Prose* and in 1928, *The Technique of the Writer's Craft*. In these works, Shklovsky argued that literature is a collection of stylistic and formal devices that force the reader to view the world afresh by presenting the old ideas or mundane experiences in new, unusual ways.

Shkvlovsky is remembered for his concept of *Ostranenie* or defamiliarization in literature. He explains the 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")

In addition to literary criticism and biographies about such authors as Lawrence Sterne, Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Mayakovsky, Shklovsky wrote some semi-autobiographical works disguised as fiction.

Shklovsky's works pushed Russian Formalism toward analyzing literary activity as integral part of social practice, an idea that became important in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and the scholars of Prague School.

8.2 "Art as Technique:" An Overview

Formalism was a mode of critical enquiry which became fashionable in the early decades of 20th century in Russia and East European nations. As a literary movement, it attacked historical, sociological, philosophical and other intrinsic approaches to literature. Names like Victor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynyanov, Boris Eichenbaum, Mikhail Bakhtin, Roman Jacobson are some of the leading names in the movement.

Russian Formalism started as a linguistic enquiry into literary techniques under a group called the OPOJAZ which was a product of the Moscow Linguistic Circle. Eventually, during Stalin's rule, in Russia, Formalism was condemned and the formalists moved to East-European nations and the second phase of Formalism flourished under Prague Linguistic Circle. During the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia, the formalists had to migrate to the US and the third phase of Formalism flourished in America with the critics like Shklovsky, Jacobson and Rene Wellek migrating to the US.

The basic premise of Formalism is the belief that poetic language is different from the ordinary use of language. Formalists believe in a scientific study of textual dynamics such as the use of words, syntax, sounds and figures of speech. They also opposed vehemently symbolism and other subjective interpretation of literature. They also maintained the difference between art and life. Another belief central to Formalism is the concept of literary facts. Formalists believed that literary facts are given in the text and the

readers have to understand them through literary techniques. This implies that it is possible to arrive at an objective scientific understanding of the meaning through the literary techniques of a text.

Russian formalists advocated strongly for the exclusion of psychological and historical approaches to literature and instead they were interested in the artistic devices of imaginative writing. The focus of Formalism was on the form of the text rather than the metaphysical concerns of literary criticism. One of the chief arguments of Formalism is that aesthetic effect is a product of literary devices. They understand 'literary' as a special use of language. In effect, Formalism attacked the mystical posturing of poets and it considered literature as a special use of language. Formalists claim that literary language becomes distinct by distorting practical language. In the final phase of Formalism, critics like Bakhtin and Thomashevsky started exploring into other formal aspects of fiction like the narrative and motif. Bakhtin's concept of narratology was an extension of Formalism.

Victor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" is a seminal work in Russian Formalism. It is largely about the function of art and poetic language. Structurally, the essay is divided into two parts – the first part explains the theory of defamiliarization and the second part deals with poetic language.

The essay begins with Shklovsky's attack on Russian Symbolism. He analyses the statement of Russian symbolist, Alexander Potebnya that art is thinking in images. Shklovsky exposes the fallacy in this statement and explains that there are many art forms like music and architecture which do not have images. He says that art is essentially a technique, which helps one to recover the sensation of life. He argues that perception becomes habitual in life: they are largely automatic. He says that when perception becomes automatic, life becomes unconscious or mechanical. Human beings do not feel things and objects that they see because they develop an attitude called algebrization. Algebrization is explained as 'automatization' of perception. That is reducing the details to convenient letters or words. For instance the sentence:"the Swiss mountains are beautiful" is algebrized to 'tsmab' with each letter reminding one word of the sentence. This tendency, Shklovsky argues, creates the economy of perceptive effort.

Shklovsky indicates that the technique of art is to make objects unfamiliar, to make the forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception. He says:"art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important."

Shklovsky says that familiar objects are not significant and art removes objects from the automatism of perception so that one has to spend more time to understand them. He also gives a series of examples of this defamiliarization in literature. Shklovsky argues that many novels and poems have employed defamiliarization to stretch the time of perception. He gives an example of defamiliarization from Leo Tolstoy's novel *Shame.* He says that Tolstoy describe familiar objects as if he were seeing them for the first time, by not naming them deliberately. Shklovsky says that in *Shame* Tolstoy has defamiliarized the idea of flogging. He quotes from the novel.

> "To strip people who have broken the
> law, to hurl them to the floor, and to
> wrap on their bottoms with switches."

This description doesn't use the term flogging but the readers will have to spend more time to understand the description is about flogging. Shklovsky also talks about another novel of Tolstoy, *Kholstomer* which defamiliarizes the familiar world with a different perspective. The narrator in this novel thinks about private property and hears various names being called out. The narrator also sees a restricted world, that too just in front of him. The readers take time to realize that the narrator is a horse and hence the world seen in the novel becomes unfamiliar and difficult.

The second part of the essay is about poetic language. Shklovsky implies that poetic language is defamiliarized language. He says that poetic speech has artistic trademark which is defamiliarization of the language itself. He indicates that poetic language is difficult and roughened and it removes the automatism of perception. He says that in poetry, language deviates in its phonetic structure and syntax. Shklovsky says that poetic language produces a slowness of perception as for instance, the word 'sunne' is to be understood as 'sun' or the word 'Frye' is to be understood as 'fry'. He indicates that archaism, obscure style and conceits are used with the same objective. However, he reminds that if there are too many experiments in poetic language, the occasional use of simple language can also do the trick.

Shklovsky gives ample examples of defamiliarization in poetic language. He says that sexuality and love are defamiliarized in poetry from the days of Boccacio to the modern poets. He says that in Boccacio's *Decameron* one finds "catching nightingales" which has significant figurative implication for the sexual act. Shklovsky also maintains that erotic subjects are presented figuratively in metaphysical poetry. He says that Donne and the other metaphysical poets refer to sexual organs in terms of 'lock and key,' 'quilting tools' or "bow and arrow". According to

Shklovsky, such devices make poetic language strange and wonderful. They also lead the readers away from the recognition of objects.

Shklovsky refers to a fellow poet and critic Leo Jakubiniski who had brought in the idea of phonetic roughening, that is, using unfamiliar sounds in poetry. Shklovsky believes that language of poetry is a difficult roughened one. He calls that as impeded language which can be regularly seen in poems of Pushkin. He says that both rhythm and disordering of rhythm can create defamiliarization in poetic language.

Shklovsky extends the notion of defamiliarization to the study of fiction. He says that in fiction, story and plot are different. He says that some novelists defamiliarize the art of story-telling with the help of different narrative devices. He gives the example of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy,* a novel in which the narrative doesn't give any story about Tristram. Shklovsky reminds the readers that there are different story lines in the plot that emphasize the structure of the novel rather than the story. He says that Sterne, by violating the form, forces the readers to attend to it minutely. He also says that the readers become aware of the form of fiction once it is violated.

Shklovsky concludes the essay with a typical anti-romantic statement. He argues that sentiments cannot be the mainstay of art. He says that art is transemotional and it is unsympathetic. He also reminds that emotions in a work of art are the products of different points of view and that a point of view is also a technique.

Thus, Shklovsky in "Art as Technique" spells out the basic theoretical formulation of Formalism – that art is a technique. He also attacks historical and romantic traditions in literary criticism by suggesting intense formal analysis of literature, instead.

8.3 Questions

1. Discuss Victor Shklovsky's notion of defamiliarization.
2. Explain how Shklovsky shows that poetic language is different from prose in "Art as Technique".

8.4 Key Terms

Formalism, Poetic Language, Defamiliarization

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9

MARXISM AND LITERARY CRITICISM – Terry Eagleton

Unit structure

9.0 Objectives

9.1 Terry Eagleton

9.2 *Marxism and Literary Criticism*: An Overview

9.3 Conclusion

9.4 Questions

9.5 Key Terms

9.0 Objectives

The basic objective of this unit is to familiarize Terry Eagleton's views on Literary Criticism. It also aims to elucidate Eagleton's opinions of form, content, writer's commitment and literature as a social product

9.1 Terry Eagleton

Terry Eagleton is a British literary theorist widely regarded as Britain's most influential living literary critic. He obtained both his M.A. and Ph.D. from Trinity College, Cambridge and then became a fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. He began his academic life as a Victorianist and is still interested in the history and literature of the 19th century. His specialties are literary and cultural theories. He is also becoming rather more broadly involved in comparative literature. His books of literary criticism include *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976), *After Theory* (2003), *The Ideology of Aesthetic* (1990) and *The Illusions of Post Modernism* (1996).

9.2 M*arxism and Literary Criticism*: An Overview

Chapter 1: Literature and History

Marxist Criticism analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions, which produce it. It is a part of a larger body of

theoretical analysis, which aims to understand ideologies and plays a significant role in the transformation of human societies.

Eagleton explains that Marxist Criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature' concerned with how literary works are produced, distributed and exchanged in a particular society but aims to explain them more fully by paying attention to their forms, styles and meanings, which are considered as products of a particular history. Though there were many thinkers before Marx, who tried to account the literary works in terms of the history, which produced them, the originality of Marxist Criticism lies in its revolutionary understanding of history itself.

The seeds of this revolutionary understanding are indisputably found in Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology* (1848) and in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) in which Marx discusses the relationship between society and basic economic reality. Marx argues that the social relations between men are bound with a manner in which they produced their material life. The simplest Marxist model of society sees it as constituted by a 'base' comprising of the material means of production, distribution and exchange and a 'superstructure', which is the cultural world of ideas, art, religion, law and so on. The essential Marxist view is that the latter things are determined by the nature of the economic base. Terry Eagleton is of the view that art is part of the superstructure of society and society's ideology. So, to understand literature means understanding the total social process of which it is part. He maintains that to comprehend literary works, we have to first understand the complex, indirect relations between those works and the ideological worlds they inhabit – relations which emerge not just in themes, history but also in style, rhythm, image, quality and form. Eagleton elucidates this by explaining the Placido Gulf scene in Courad's *Nortromo*. He argues that the pessimistic vision represented by the scene cannot be simply analyzed in terms of psychological factors but on the basis of the ideological pessimism rampant due to the history of imperialistic capitalism throughout Courad's time.

In considering the relationship between 'base' and 'superstructure', Eagleton quotes Engels' letter to Joseph Bloch to state the fact that literature, being a part of the superstructure is not merely a passive reflection of the economic base but it continuously and consistently reacts back upon and influence the economic base. As Eagleton aptly says:

> "The materialist theory of history denies
> that art can *in itself* change the course
> of history; but it insists that art can be an
> active element in such change" (P – 9).

Like Engels, Marx too selects art to consider the complexity and indirectness of the base – superstructure relationship. Marx in his introduction to the *Grumdisse* states:

> "In the case of the arts, it is well known that certain periods of their flowering are out of all proportion to the general development of society, hence also to the material foundation, the skeletal structure as it were, of its organization" (p- 9).

Marx is of the view that there is an unequal relationship between the development of material production and artistic production. He brings the instance of the Greeks as clear evidence to prove that major art is produced in an economically undeveloped state of society. Marx explains this asymmetrical relationship by stating that each element in society's superstructure has its own pace of development, its own internal evolution, which cannot be relegated to mere expression of class struggle or the state of the economy. This discrepancy is aptly explained by Eagleton by taking the example of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Eagleton says that *The Waste Land* can be explicated as a poem, which is determined by ideological, political and economic factors (spiritual emptiness, First World War and imperialist Capitalism). But he contends that a complete understanding of *The Waste Land* would need to take into account the author's class position (Eliot's ambiguous relationship with English society), ideological forms and their relation to literary forms, spirituality (part Christian part Buddhist), philosophy (Fraser's anthropology), techniques of literary production (experimental, montage, juxtaposition, music-symphony) and aesthetic theory, which are directly relevant to the base / superstructure model. According to Terry Eagleton, what Marxist Criticism looks for is the unique blend of these elements, which we know as *The Waste Land* .

The question of ideology is central in understanding Marxism. In ordinary sense, ideology refers to a set of ideas that people consciously hold and believe in. But, in contrast, Marxist notion of ideology is not a set of beliefs / doctrines but it stands for the way we experience our lives in class-based society. It also signifies the values, ideas and images, which bind us to our social functions and prevent us from true knowledge of society as a whole. It makes us believe that the way of seeing ourselves and our world is natural. Marxists argue that if we surrender to ideology, we are living in an illusory world and this has often been described as 'false consciousness' in Marxism. So, Eagleton argues that if literature is considered as ideology in a certain artistic

form, then it would just be expressions of the ideologies of their time, a document of false consciousness. On the other hand, literature also challenges the ideology; it confronts and transcends the ideological limits of its time, providing us insight into the realities, which ideology actually hides from our view. Eagleton provides Althusser's subtle account of the relationship between literature and ideology to further his argument. Althusser explains the relationship by bringing in the difference between science and art. He argues that science gives us conceptual knowledge of a situation and art gives us the experience of that situation, which is equivalent to ideology. But, by doing this, art allows us to see the nature of that ideology and thereby the scientific understanding of the ideology. Althusser's colleague, Pierre Machery goes a step further to explain the relationship between ideology and literature. He claims that illusion (ideology) is the corpus on which the writer begins his work but he transforms it into something different. Literature gives ideology a shape and structure and is able to distance itself from it, thus, revealing to us the limits of that ideology. Thus, Machery claims that literature contributes to our escape from the ideological illusion.

Chapter II – Form and Content

Marxist Criticism has always been in opposition to all kinds of literary Formalism, which it believes, rob literature of historical significance and reduce it to an aesthetic diversion. Marx himself believed that literature should bring about a unity of form and content. Marx makes a comment on formalist writing in *Rheinische Zeitung:* "Form is of no value unless it is the form of its content" (p-20). Marxist Criticism sees form and content as dialectically related but affirms the dominance of content in determining the form. For instance, Hegel states:

> "Content is nothing but the transformation of form into content, and form is nothing but the transformation of content into form" (p- 21).

Fredric Jameson too has remarked in his *Marxism and Form* (1971) "Form itself is but the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure." (Eagleton, p-21)

Eagleton suggests that a significant development in literary form results from significant changes in ideology. The changes embody new ways of perceiving social reality and new relations between artist and audience. According to Leon Trotsky, literary form has a high degree of autonomy. It evolves partly in accordance with its own internal pressures and does not always

bend to every ideological view that shapes up. Form, for Trotsky, is always a complex unity of three elements: it is partly shaped by a relatively autonomous literary history of forms; it takes shape out of certain dominant ideological structures and it embodies a specific set of relations between the author and the audience. Eagleton asserts that it is this dialectical unity between these elements that Marxist Criticism is concerned with. It is in the work of Georg Lukacs that the problem of literary forms and their inherent ideologies have been most thoroughly dealt with. For Lukacs, a great artist is one who can recapture and recreate a harmonious complex totality of human life by combating the dualistic framework of a capitalistic society. Lukacs calls such art 'realism', which merges a complex set of relations between man and nature with what is typical about a significant phase of history. He further states that it is the historical content, which lays the basis for their formal achievement. He says the richness and depth of created characters depend upon the richness and depth of the total social process.

For the French Critic, Pierre Machery, literary work is tied to ideology. He says that in order to expose a text's ideology, we must focus on what the text does not say and not on what it says. He argues that it is in the silences, gaps etc that the presence of ideology can be felt. He further states that a literary work is incomplete and displays a conflict of meanings. The significance of a work lies not in the unity but in the difference between these meanings. Thus, literary work for Machery, is always 'de-centred' – no central essence to it, just a continuous conflict and discrepancy of meanings.

Chapter III – The Writer and Commitment

In the 1930s, state began to exercise direct control over literature and arts and a new hardline code was imposed, based on the writings of Lenin rather than those of Marx and Engels. Lenin had argued in 1905 that literature must become an instrument of the party: "Literature must become a cog and a screw of one single great democratic machine". His literary interests confined on the whole to an admiration of 'realism', to be specific, social realism. Trotsky agrees with Lenin when he insists on the need for social culture and when he recognizes that artistic form is the product of social content. But he differs when he ascribes a high degree of autonomy to literary work. Marx and Engels stress on necessary freedom of art from direct political determinism. Their attitude to the question of commitment of writer is best revealed in two famous letters written by Engels to novelists who had submitted their work to him for perusal. In his letter to Minna Kautsky (1885), Engels criticized her for an openly partisan attitude towards a political tendency and thereby the propagandist nature of her work. In a

second letter of 1888 to Margaret Harkness, he criticizes her work for failing to integrate any sense of the historical role and development in her depiction of the working class. Engels' two letters clearly suggest that overt political commitment in fiction is unnecessary as truly realist writing will itself dramatize the significant forces of social life.

The question of 'committed' literature remained unresolved because of confusion among the English Marxist critics. Much of English Marxist Criticism seem to agree to the view of art as the passive reflection of the economic base and to a romantic belief in art as projecting an ideal world and leading men to new values. This contradiction is clearly marked in the work of Christopher Caudwel whose idea of art's relation to reality is an efficient channeling of social energies on the one hand and a utopian dream on the other. Alick West in *Crisis and Criticism* (1937) also sees art as a way of organizing social energy and that the writer awakens in the readers similar energies. Further, in the discussion of ideology and aesthetics, several Marxist critics consider aesthetic as a mere secondary matter of style and technique. This finds expression in Lukacs *The Historical Novel*, which Eagleton quotes: "It does not matter whether Scott or Manzoni were aesthetically superior to, say Heinrich Mann, or at least this is not the main point. What is important is that Scott and Manzoni, Pushkin and Tolstoy were able to grasp and portray popular life in a more profound, authentic human and concretely historical fashion than even the most outstanding writers of our day …" (pp – 52/53).

Eagleton disagrees with Lukacs and several Marxists on the above point and argues that the adjectives used by Lukacs to portray popular life make what is meant by 'aesthetically superior'.

Chapter IV – The Author as Producer

Eagleton states that literature may be a product of social consciousness, a world vision but it is also an industry: books are also commodities produced by publishers and sold at the market for a profit. The Marxist critics understood the fact that art is a form of social production. Terry Eagleton explicates his views, drawing from the views of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht. He says that these Marxist critics see literature as a form of social and economic production, which exists alongside and interrelates with other such forms. According to Benjamin, art depends upon certain techniques of production, which are part of the stage of development of artistic production and they involve a set of relations between the artist and his audience. In Marxism, the stage is set for revolution when the productive forces and productive relations enter into contradiction with each other. Benjamin, in his essay, "The Author as Producer" (1934) applies

this theory to art itself. He states that an artist should not merely accept the old, existing modes of artistic production but should transform and revolutionize those forces: its purpose is not putting forward a message through existing media but it is a question of revolutionizing the media themselves. Cinema, Photography, Music, Literature etc not only alter the traditional technique and relations of artistic production but they continuously modify traditional modes of perception.

Brecht's 'Epic Theatre' exemplifies Benjamin's theory of revolutionary art as one, which changes the modes, rather than the contents of artistic production. Brecht succeeds in altering the functional relations between stage and audience, text and producer, producer and actor. Subverting the traditional theatre with its illusion of reality, Brecht produced a new kind of drama with its base on 'Alienation Effect'. This helps to distance the audience from the performance so that they can be prevented from identifying emotionally with the play and maintain its power of critical judgement. It also persuades the audience to question the attitudes and behaviour, which was accepted as 'natural'.

Eagleton deals with three interrelated aspects of revolutionary art – the new meaning it gives to the idea of form, its redefinition of the author and its redefinition of the artistic product itself. He argues that form announces modes of ideological perception and embodies a certain set of productive relations between artists and audiences. He agrees with Brecht, Benjamin and Machery when they consider the author as primarily a producer and not a creator. He states that the artist uses certain means of production (techniques of live art) to transform the materials of language and experience into a determinate product. In assessing the question of the nature of the artwork itself, Eagleton echoes Brecht in stating that a work should not be completed in itself but like any social product should be completed only in the act of being used.

Both Brecht and Eagleton here only emphasize Marx's view that a product fully becomes a product through consumption. Eagleton also addresses the Marxist debate on realism and modernism. He diffuses oppositional ideologies in them and opines that realism could be extended to include modernist techniques as seen in Brecht.

Eagleton also alerts the readers of 'technologism,' that is, art forms being trapped in the technical forces that could change the mode of production and the experience of art.

9.3 Conclusion

Terry Eagleton upholds in his *Marxism and Literary Criticism* the traditional Marxist view that literature is a part of historical process. However, he also includes in his consideration of literature the Neo-Marxist tolerance for formal experiments and Modernism.

9.4 Questions

1. Explain Terry Eagleton's view on Literature and Ideology.

2. Discuss Terry Eagleton's opinion on writer's commitment to society as revealed in *Marxism and Literary Criticism.*

3. Explain how Eagleton makes a Marxist evaluation of the link between form and content in literature

9.5 Key Terms

Base and Superstructure, Ideology, False Consciousness, Totality, Typicality, Epic Theatre, Alienation Effect

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10

"IDEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES" – Louis Althusser

Unit structure

10.0 Objectives
10.1 Louis Althusser
10.2 "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses:" An Overview
10.3 Conclusion
10.4 Questions
10.5 Key Terms

10.0 Objective

The primary objective of this unit is to introduce Louis Althusser's essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus" to the readers. The unit also aims to make the readers comprehend Althusser humanist and reformist views on ideology and state.

10.1 Louis Althusser

Louis Pierre Althusser was a renowned Marxist Philosopher, born in Algeria, studied in Paris and became a Professor of Philosophy. Althusser was also a long time member of the French Communist Party. He was also renowned for his attack on certain conventional ideological frameworks of Marxism. He is commonly referred to as structural Marxist.

Reading Capital is an influential early work of Althusser that makes an intensive philosophical re-reading of *Das Capital*. Althusser is also widely known as an ideology theorist and his best known work in this area is "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation." In this work, Althusser develops a theory of ideology based on Freud's and Lacan's concepts of 'the unconscious' and 'the mirror phase' respectively, and describes the structures and system that enable the concept of the self. According to Althusser, these structures are both agents of repression and inevitable – it is impossible to escape ideology; to not to be subjected to it.

Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays, of which "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" forms a part, *Politics and History* and *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978 – 1987* are some significant works of Althusser.

10.2 "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses:" An Overview

"Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" appears in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* and it is an excerpt of a longer piece that discusses the relation between state and subject. Althusser, in this essay asks why subjects are obedient, why people follow the laws, and why isn't there a revolt against Capitalism. Althusser's view of ideology comes out of his understanding of the relations between state and subject (between government and citizens), hence it is worthwhile to examine those ideas in detail.

The state, for Althusser, is a kind of governmental formation that comes up with Capitalism; a state or a nation is determined by the capitalist mode of production and it is formed to protect the capitalist interest. Althusser argues that it is historically true that the idea of nations as discreet units is co-terminous with Capitalism. He says that it is also possible that democracy be comparable with Capitalism as democracy gives the illusion that all people are equal and have equal power (and hence masks relations of economic exploitation).

Althusser mentions two major mechanisms for ensuring that people within a state behave according to the rules of that state, even when it is not in their best interest to do. The first is what Althusser calls the RSA, or Repressive State Apparatuses that can enforce behaviour directly, such as the police, and the criminal justice and prison system. Through these apparatuses, the state has the power to force one physically to behave. More important for literary studies, however, are the second mechanism that Althusser investigates, which he calls ISAs or Ideological State Apparatuses. These are institutions, which generate ideologies, which individuals then internalize and act in accordance with. The Ideological State Apparatuses, Althusser says, include schools, religions, the family, legal systems, politics, arts, sports etc. These organizations generate systems of ideas and values, which the individuals believe.

Althusser also examines how people internalize to believe the ideologies that these Ideological State Apparatuses create. Althusser explains the process by distinguishing the ideologies from

ideology. Ideologies are specific, historical and differing; one can talk about various ideologies such as Christian ideology, Democratic ideology, Marxist ideology etc. Ideology, however, is structural. Althusser says that ideology is a structure, and as such is 'eternal' i.e. to be studied at a given point of time; this is why Althusser says ideology has no history. He derives this idea of ideology from the Marxist idea that ideology is a part of the superstructure, but he links the structure of ideology to the idea of the unconscious from Freud and from Lacan, because ideology is a structure, its contents will vary, one can fill it up with anything, but its form, like the structure of the unconscious, is always the same. And, ideology works unconsciously. Like language, ideology is a structure, which we inhabit, which speaks to us but which gives us the illusion that we are in charge, that we freely choose to believe the things we believe, and that we can find lots of reasons, why we believe those things.

Althusser presents two thesis in his theory – the first thesis is that ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. He begins his explanation of this pronouncement by looking at why people need this imaginary relation to real conditions of existence; why not just understand the real. The first answer to this question, Althusser says, comes from the 18th Century idea that ideology comes from priests and despots. This is basically a conspiracy theory, which says that a handful of powerful men fooled the common people into believing these falsified representations of the world. The second answer is that the material alienation of real conditions predisposes people to form representations, which alienate them from these real conditions. In other words, the material relations of capitalist production are themselves alienating. Hence, the real world becomes something that is the product of our relations to it and of the ideological representations we make of it – the stories we tell ourselves about what is real become what is real.

The second thesis is that Ideology has material existence. The first thesis advances the familiar Marxist contention that ideologies have the function of masking the exploitative arrangements on which class societies are based. The second thesis posits that ideology does not exist in the form of ideas of conscious representations in the minds of individuals. Rather, ideology consists of the action and behaviours of bodies governed by their disposition within material apparatuses. Central to the view of individuals as responsible subjects is the notion of an explanatory link between belief and action, that: every 'subject' endowed with a 'consciousness' and believing in the 'ideas' that his 'consciousness' inspires in him and freely accepts, must *act* according to his ideas, must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice. (Althusser, p-

For Althusser, this is yet another effect of social practice. He says:

> I shall therefore say that, where only a single subject (such and such individual) is concerned, the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that *his ideas are his material actions inserted into his material practices governed by material rituals, which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which we derive the ideas of that subject* … Ideas disappeared as such (in so far as they are endowed with an ideal of spiritual existence), to the precise extent that it has emerged that their existence is inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals defined in the last instance by an ideological apparatus. It therefore, appears that the subject acts in so far as he is acted by the following system (set out in the order of its real determination): Ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus describing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief. (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p-21)

These material rituals could be compared to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus.* Ideological State Apparatus could also be seen anticipating Foucault's disciplinary institutions, which provide a critical re-thinking of Althusser. Althusser also recognized the role played by what he terms as Repressive State Apparatus. At times, when individuals and groups pose a threat to the dominant order, the state invokes Repressive State Apparatus. The most benign measures taken by the Repressive State Apparatus are the systems of law and courts where putatively public contractual language is invoked in order to govern the individual and collective behaviour. As threats to dominant order mount, the state turns to increasingly physical and severe measure; incarceration, police force and ultimately military intervention are used in response. In contrast to Ideological State Apparatuses, there is but one unified Repressive State Apparatus.

Further, Althusser says that ideology is a material practice and it depends on the notion of the subject. He says that there is no practice except by and in an ideology and there is no ideology except by the subject and for subject. In short, he implies that there

are no belief systems and no practices determined by those belief systems unless someone believes in them and acts on those beliefs.

The final part of Althusser's argument addresses the question – how is it that individual subjects are constituted in ideological structures? Or in other words, how does ideology create the notion of self. Althusser holds that the main task of ideology as structure and ideologies as specific belief systems, is to get people or subjects to believe in them. He argues that we are born into subjecthood because we are named before we are born; hence we are always – already subjects. Further, he says that we are always already subjects in ideology, which we inhabit and which we recognize only as truth or obviousness. Althusser also says that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. The word 'interpellation' comes from the same root as the word appellation, which means a name. He says that by hailing, an ideology creates a subject. This form of subject-creation is constantly seen in commercials where the viewers are constantly addressed as 'you'.

In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Althusser holds that our desires, choices, intentions, preferences, judgements and so forth are the consequences of social practices. He also says that it is necessary to conceive how society makes the individual in its own image. Within capitalist societies, the human individual is generally regarded as subject endowed with the property of being a self-conscious 'responsible' agent. For Althusser, however, a person's capacity for perceiving him / herself in this way is not innately given. He says that it is rather acquired within the structure of established social practices, which impose on individuals the role of a subject. Social practices both determine the characteristics of the individual and give him/her the range of properties he/she can have, and of the limits of each individual. Althusser argues that many of our social roles and activities are given to us by social practice; for example, the production of steel workers is a part of economic practice while the production of lawyers is part of politico-legal practice. However, other characteristics of individuals such as their beliefs about the good life or their metaphysical reflections on the nature of the self do not easily fit into these categories. In Althusser's view, our desires and preferences are inculcated in us by ideological practice, the sphere which has the defining property of constituting individuals as subjects. Ideological practice consists of an assortment of institutions called Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAS), which include the family, the media, religious organizations and most importantly the education system, as well as the received ideas they propagate. There is, however, no single Ideological State Apparatus that produces in us the belief that we are self-conscious

agents. Instead, we derive this belief in the course of learning what it is to be a daughter, a school child, a Black, a steel worker, a councilor and so forth.

Despite its many institutional forms, the function and structure of ideology is unchanging and present throughout history; Althusser states, "Ideology has no history". He argues that all ideologies constitute a subject, even though he or she may differ according to each particular ideology. He goes on to illustrate this argument with the concept of 'hailing interpellation'. He uses the example of an individual walking in a street; upon hearing a policeman shout "Hey you there!", the individual responds by turning around with the simple movement of a body transformed into a subject. The person being hailed recognizes himself as the subject of the hail, and knows to respond, even though there is nothing suspicious about his walking in the street. He recognizes, it is indeed he himself that is being hailed. This recognition is a misrecognition in that it is working retroactively. A material individual is always-already an ideological subject, even before he is born. The transformation of an individual into a subject has always-already happened; Althusser acknowledges here a debt to Spinoza's 'theory of immanence.' To highlight this, Althusser offers the example of Christian religious ideology, embodied in the voice of God, instructing a person on what his place in the world is and what he must do to be reconciled with Christ. From this, Althusser draws the point that in order for that person to identify himself as a Christian, he must first already be a subject; that is to say that by responding to God's call by following His rules, he is affirming himself as a free agent, the author of the acts for which he assumes responsibility. For Althusser, we acquire our identities by seeing ourselves mirrored in ideologies, and it is by being subjected to ourselves that we become subjects.

10.3 Conclusion

Althusser's theory on Ideological State Apparatuses is largely useful in the study of cultural literature. It enables one to talk about how a literary text, as a subset of transformation or production of ideology also constitutes us as subjects, and speaks to us directly. The most obvious form of how a literary work might interpellate the readers as subjects is the one that uses direct address, when the text says, 'dear reader' as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. All texts interpellate readers by some mechanism in some ways; all texts create subject positions for readers, whether that construction of subject position is obvious or not.

10.4 Questions

1. Explain how Althusser differentiates Repressive State Apparatus with Ideological State Apparatuses
2. Discuss Althusser's notion of subject in the contexts of State and its Ideology

10.5 Key Terms

Ideology, Repressive State Apparatus, Ideological State Apparatuses, Subject, Interpellation.

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11

BASIC CONCEPTS IN MODERNISM

Unit structure

11.0 Objective
11.1 Introduction
11.2 Concept of the Self in Modernism
11.3 The Value of Wholeness, Harmony and Radiance
 11.4 Conclusion
11.5 Key Terms

11.0 Objective

The primary objective is to familiarize the readers with the terminologies and concepts used in Modernism and modernist Literary Criticism.

11.1 Introduction

A series of landmark volumes of literary criticism that redefined the status and purpose of literature appeared in the 1920's and 1930's. These works include T. S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1920), F.R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English poetry* (1932) and William Empson's "Seven Types of Ambiguity" (1930). These exemplary works of modernist critical prose were largely preoccupied with special features of poetic language. These works also marked a transition in the terminology and style of literary criticism. Further, critics like Eliot and Leavis brought about a progressive, revisionist outlook and they were also interested in deep engagement with metaphysical poetry, romantic poetry and Elizabethan drama. On the surface, modernist critical prose appears to break with the critical approaches to the past. Critical essays published during this time were different, stylistically from their Victorian and Edwardian precursors. They were also influenced by Russian formalists.

Baudelaire as a critic was one of the first to explore the meaning of 'modern' relating to his view of the art of his time. In his essay, "La Modernite" he first gives the image of a little man running around searching for the modern and expresses the

normally accepted meaning "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent" but then adds "that which is capable of drawing the eternal from the transitory. Hugo Ball explains the condition of modern man as someone who has lost his divine countenance and become matter, chance and aggregate. He argues that the world of abstract demons has swallowed the individual. Otega Y Gasset, in responding to the effects of this condition on the arts coined the phrase "dehumanization of art". Dehumanization suggests the readymade art and the techniques of fragmentation.

11.2 Concept of the Self in Modernism:

The self has been a topic of interest throughout the history of human thought. The modernist artists and writers of the 20th century too were particularly interested in subjectivity and the concept of self. This interest arose from psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and from the ideas of philosophers like Friedich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Freud emphasized the role of the unconscious in shaping subjectivity. He divided the human mind into three parts: the Id, the Ego and the Super Ego. He argued that these parts, representing different drives are in constant struggle against one another. Another of Freud's major hypotheses was that human consciousness is the culmination of a complicated childhood development process that includes various crises like Oedipus complex and Electra complex. According to Freud, the past lingers always over the current self, and one has little agency when it comes to changing that self.

Philosophers have also helped in looking at subjectivity very closely. Nietzsche for example believed that life is given meaning by the individual and not by the social institutions.

Modernist literature was primarily concerned with these concepts of self. These ideas also made Modernism as a movement build on highly subjective premises. Stream of Consciousness writers represent this attitude to self.

Virginia Woolf demonstrates, in her novels, certain ideas of self that comply with the theories of Sigmund Freud and his contemporaries. Her narratives focus on the interiority, emphasizing the social through such interiority. In *Mrs Dalloway,* for instance, Woolf uses the interior monologue to bring the reader close to the self of her protagonist. For Woolf, the self is experimental and varies and it changes through discourse and interaction with other subjectivities. She considers society as necessary in the construction of self and the individual as only one ingredient in the

creation of human consciousness. Most of our characters seek time as a means of understanding themselves. Even then, their minds get entangled with their friends and their responsibilities. Woolf's construction of such an experimental self, which changes and grows through interaction, offers a contrast to the mirrored self which only reflects what it sees. While the self in Woolf's works is fluid and changing, it is still connected to the surrounding environment; the self is changed through reflecting and merging with the environment.

Jean Rhys configures different notion of self in her works. She believes that the writer can only write truthfully with his/her singular subjectivity. Therefore, she uses high autobiographical texts as a means of constructing the self. Her *Wide Sargasoo* exemplifies her notion of subjectivity. Antoinette, the protagonist in the novel tries to find herself in the mirroring of other women, but ultimately fails. She does not receive a positive social feedback that seems to be important in Woolf's notion of self. Therefore, she exemplifies not a reciprocal relationship between the self and society, but a relationship of contrast and rejection.

While modernism did bring a new focus on interiority and the self, authors and artists encompassed a great variation of ideas. Some viewed the self as only the individual whose motivations come from within, and others describe the self in relation to society and environment. Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, James Joyce and Marcel Proust demonstrate in their works the ideas of subjectivity propagated by Freud, Nietzsche and other contemporary thinkers.

11.3 The Value of Wholeness, Harmony and Radiance

Wholeness, harmony and radiance make James Joyce's notion of true and proper form of art. These principles of art indicate the impersonality of the work of art, so typical of the Joycean poetics. When he elaborated this theory, Joyce had come in contact with the idea of art proposed by Stephen Mellarme. One can also see this theory emerging in literary predecessors of Joyce – Baudelaire, Flaubert and Yeats and later, the definitive arrangement of this theory in the writings of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. In his essay, "Tradition and Individual Talent", Eliot amplifies this theory of impersonality by indicating that poetry is not an expression of self but rather an escape from it.

James Joyce was probably influenced by the critical method of considering art in Aristotelian terms. This is clearly indicated in Joyces' novel, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. Joyces' novel appears as an object centered work. In this novel the references are located inside the aesthetic object, and the object seems to be

the substitute of life and not the means towards the subsequent purer life.

James Joyce explains his Theory as a Formula: "art…is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an aesthetic end" (p-207). His character, Stephen amplifies it further: "when we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction, I require a new terminology and a new personal experience" (p-209). Such a statement on the autonomy of art is a typical feature of modernism represented by Joyce and Eliot. Joyce defines the aesthetic emotion as a sort of stasis, the arrangement of a sensitivity before an ideal pity and terror, a stasis provoked, protracted and dissolved into what he calls "the rhythm of beauty" (p-13). He also defines aesthetic rhythm: "Rhythm… is the first esthetic relation of part to part in any esthetic whole or of an esthetic whole to its part or parts or of any part to the esthetic whole of which it is a part" (p-206). Stephen talks about wholeness and radiance in the novel in terms of an aesthetic image, touching upon the temporal and spatial aspect of it:

> In order to see that basket….your mind first of all separates the basket from the rest of the visible universe which is not the basket. The first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object to be apprehended. An esthetic image is presented to us either in space or time. What is audible is presented in time, what is visible in space. But, temporal or spatial, the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as self bounded and self contained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which is not it. You apprehend it as one thing. You apprehend it as one thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. (p-212)

It is clear from these lines that Joycean concept of wholeness is a spatial delimitation. It is also a result of psychological focusing: it is the imagination that selects the aesthetic object. Joyce's concept of radiance is very subtle. It is a result of the harmony of the parts of a work. However, it is also linked to the soul. This concept is made clear in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. While explaining Shelley's notion of beauty and harmony:

This supreme quality is felt by the artist when the esthetic image is first conceived in his imagination. The mind in that mysterious instant Shelley likened beautifully to a fading cool. The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian phonologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley's, called the enchantment of the heart. (p-213)

These lines reveal that radiance is the solid clear display of formal harmony.

11.4 Conclusion

Modernism was not only a progressive movement that argued for liberalism in forms and themes but also an exercise of this right. It also reflected the best of philosophical and psychological ideas of the time. Writers like Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys stood for intense subjectivity, while others like Eliot, Pound and Joyce were more interested in the formal features of art.

11.5 Key Terms

Self, Wholeness, Harmony, Radiance, Stream of Consciousness.

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12

BASIC CONCEPTS IN POSTMODERNISM

Unit structure

12.0 Objectives
12.1   Introduction
12.2 Postmodernism as a Philosophy
12.3 Gilles Deluze, Felix Guattari and Postmodernism
12.4 Conclusion
12.5 Key Terms

12.0 Objectives

The primary objective is to familiarize the students with postmodernism. The unit also aims to impart the basic understanding of the concerns and terminologies of postmodern criticism and theory.

12.1 Introduction:

Postmodernism is a term that is used in a variety of art forms and across domains and disciplines. It is used in the contexts of architecture visual art, popular culture, fiction, literary theory and social sciences. Tim Woods in *Beginning Postmodernism* explains the aesthetics of Postmodernism. He defines Postmodernism as:

> Aesthetic self – reflexivity, in which artifacts explore their own constitution, construction and shape (eg: novels in which narrators comment on narrative forms, or paintings in which an image is left unfinished, with `roughed-in' or blank sections on the canvas). (p-7)

Plurality is considered to be the characteristic feature of postmodernism. Self, truth and vision appear to be pluralistic and fragmented in postmodern expression. Tim Woods explains this aspect of postmodernism in the contexts of reason and identity:

Postmodernism pits *reasons* in the plural – fragmented and incommensurable – against the universality of modernism and the long standing conception of the human self as a subject with a single, unified reason. The subject is the space demarcated by the `I', understood as a sense of identity, a selfhood, which is coherent, stable, rational and unified. Based upon this sense of individuality ('individuus' is the Latin word for 'undivided'), it is believed that people possess agency and can use their capacities to alter, shape and change the world in which they live. (pp. 9 -10)

Postmodern Theory is largely suspicious of the notion of unified coherence self, which is considered to be the foundation of rationality. Hence, it no longer believes in ideology or belief system.

12.2 Postmodernism as a Philosophy

Discussion about Postmodernism as a philosophy has been in vogue since the late 1960's. political, social and cultural values of Postmodernism have been debated upon since then Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* puts forward the hypotheses that the status of knowledge is altered in societies that have entered what is known as the Postmodern age. Lyotard considers the 1950s as the beginning of Postmodernism that coincided with the demise of *grandes histoires* and an incredulity towards meta narratives. Lyotard explains that the emergence of micro narratives and the disillusionment with total explanations of reality such as those offered by science, religion or communism resulted in Postmodern philosophy. Tim Woods interprets Lyotard's attitude to meta narratives and knowledge:

Indeed, Lyotard regards such narratives as violent and tyrannical in their imposition of a 'totalizing' pattern and a false universality on actions, events and things. Instead, all one can do is utilize local narratives to explain things, hence, knowledge can only be partial, fragmented and incomplete. (pp. 20 – 21)

Lyotard attacks meta narratives (the grand ideologies that control the individual) as they are foundational and they limit the power of language. Lyotard's argument is the delegitimisation of grand narratives in modern times. He states:

> We no longer have recourse to the narratives – we can resort neither to the dialectic of spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for post-modern scientific discourse. But as we have just seen, the little narrative *(petit recite)* remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science. (*Postmodern Condition*, p-60)

Lyotard identifies an equation between wealth and truth. He argues that in the postmodern era, the games of scientific language become the games of the rich. However, Lyotard's engagement with Postmodernism is more aesthetic than historical. His emphasis falls on the postmodern as a particular form rather than as a particular historical period. Tim Woods summarizes Lyotard's notion of Postmodernism in the following ways:

1. It is first and foremost 'an incredulity towards meta narratives' and an anti-foundationalism.

2. Although it presents the unpresentable, it does not do so nostalgically, nor does it seek to offer solace in so doing.
3. It contains pleasure and pain, in a re-introduction of the sublime.
4. It does not seek to give reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable, which cannot be presented. In this respect, there is something theological in his concept of representational art.
5. It actively searches out heterogeneity, pluralism, constant innovation.
6. It is to be thought of not as an historical epoch, but rather as an aesthetic practice.
7. It challenges the legitimation of positivist science.

(Tim Woods: *Beginning Postmodernism:* pp. 23-24)

Jean Baurdillard is another name associated with Postmodernism. His idea of Postmodernism is a combination of Marxism, Cybernetics, Social Theory, Psychoanalysis, Communication Theory and Semiotics. He follows the anti-foundationalist line of Derrida and Lyotard and develops an argument that the end of modernity is brought about by simulations

and new forms of technology, culture and society. His concept of postmodernity is based on three principle ideas – Simulation, Implotion and Hyperreality. Like Lyotard, he claims that the world has entered a new postmodern era of Simulations, which is conditioned by information and science and a new cybernetic technology. In his famous work, simulations, he argues that the distinction between the real and the unreal has become so blurred that the word hyperreal is used to signify 'more than real'. Baurdillard says that in a society where simulations are dominant, people lose distinction between the model and reality. He claims that simulation is an appropriate social model for the current era where signs do not bear any relationship to reality. He also regards this state of affairs as something to celebrate as it marks the transcendence of alienated sensibilities. He says:

> We leave history to simulation …. This is by no means a despairing hypothesis, unless we regard simulation as a higher form of alienation – which I certainly do not. It is precisely in history that we are alienated, and if we leave history we also leave alienation. (Baurdillard, p.23).

What Baurdillard implies in his writings is that the real is lost in a sea of simulacra and that there is no possibility for social change as people are all locked on a course towards the end of history.

12.3 Gilles Deluze, Felix Guattari and Postmodernism

Gilles Deluze and Felix Guattari are also exponents of French Postmodernist philosophical ideas. They have published two important joint works together – *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Their project has been focused on the attack on repressive mechanisms and the discourses of modernity. For this, they use a tool made of psychoanalytic ideas and post structuralism. They critique the capitalistic era and Freudian psychoanalysis at once arguing that the Freudian unconscious is a capitalist construction, a result of repression produced by Capitalism in the family. They argue that postmodern existence happens where individuals are able to surmount repressive modern forms of identity and become desiring nomads.

Deluze and Guattari (developed their notion of Schizoanalysis). This approach is about a new mode of postmodern self organized around the concepts of plural and

multiple identities and it also takes into account the de-centered or displaced consciousness. Contrary to conventional psychoanalysis, Deluze and Guattari consider desire to be essential and say that it does not signify a lack a subject in search of a lost object. They consider body as desiring machine. Their schizoanalysis has various tasks that can be termed as postmodern. Tim Woods sums up the tasks of schizoanalysis as:

1. It attempts a de-centered and fragmented analysis of the unconscious, aiming to recapture pre-linguistic experience, unconscious investments of sounds and sights, which liberate desire.
2. It seeks to release the libidinal flow and to create 'new' (postmodern) desiring subjects.
3. Contrary to the processes of psychoanalysis, which neuroticises the subject, it 're-eroticizes' the body by freeing it for libidinal pursuits.

    (Tim Woods, p.31)

By theorizing the microstructures of domination, Deluze and Guattari give a postmodern logic of difference. This logic strives for the liberation of body and desire. It also rejects the notion of unified, rational and expressive subject and replaces that with a postmodern subjectivity, which is de-centered and free to become dispersed and multiple.

12.4 CONCLUSION

Postmodernism has effectively questioned all totalizing notions and ideologies. It also considers identity, nationality, community and gender as constructs. Further, it celebrates plurality instead of rationality and it expresses an anxiety about verifiable truth. It has also made enough philosophical disturbance to pester the unity of any culture or school of thought.

12.5 KEY TERMS

Plurality, simulation, hyperreality, schizoanalysis

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13

"NOTES ON THE NOVEL" –
Jose Ortega y Gasset

Unit structure

13.0 Objectives

The aim of this chapter is to identify Ortega's arguments about the condition of the novel in the early twentieth century and the causes he states for the same. It also aims to bring out the premises behind his valorisation of the form of the modern novel.

13.1 Jose Ortega Y Gasset

Ortega was a Spanish philosopher and art critic. He received a doctorate in Philosophy and pursued further studies in Germany. On his return to Spain, he was appointed to teach philosophy. His journalistic writings on politics like *The Revolt of the Masses* are very well known. Politically, he was active in opposing the dictatorship in Spain. Hence, when a civil war broke out, he spent some time in exile at Argentina and Portugal, to finally return to Madrid much later.

His essay "Notes on the Novel" and the collection in which it appears *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays* are related to aesthetics. He approaches the question of literature in the context of the philosophy of art, and the aesthetic conditions responsible for creation of a work of art.

His work *The Revolt of the Masses* demonstrates that Ortega supported aristocracy. For him, intellectuals who think about and understand society and culture at large seek to maintain

harmony. The masses, on the other hand, can only work towards destruction of culture because Fascism came to power in the disguise of democracy and appeal to the masses that the grim economic and political situation of the country would change.

Typically, this position is called 'Mass Society Theory' position wherein the educated, the rich and the elite are understood to be rightful keepers of governance and administration and custodians of culture. They see the masses as 'average' minds – people who are not educated enough and cannot take correct decisions.

It is necessary to bear in mind this mass society theory position while reading Ortega's essay "Notes on the Novel". One will notice that Ortega's attitude towards the masses is the same s his attitude towards 'the average reader'. His contention in the essay is that the novel has to take a new shape in the twentieth century because the traditional social-realist novel will cease to exist. The realist novel is thus dead. While the earlier novel focused on plot, the modern novel must focus on character. Ortega also argues that this change will not go well with the masses. Thus, we see his larger bias against the masses.

13.2 "Notes on the Novel:" An Overview

The essay consists of his thoughts and musings on the condition of the novel in his contemporary scenario – the 1920s. His main argument is that the novel as we have traditionally known it is on its decline. He reflects on the reasons behind the phenomenon of this decline.

Ortega is known to be one of the first to notice that theory sells more than fiction. There is a boom in the publishing and sale of writings which are theoretical in nature while the novel does not enjoy the visibility and sale the way it previously did.

The reason why this is happening is that readers and specifically, writers are unaware of certain basic fundamentals about a literary genre. They do not comprehend that a genre may wear out. Epics, for instance, are hardly written now. Further, according to Ortega, people think that all it takes to write a 'good' novel is talent. Being gifted is not enough. So if a genre is suffering from a lack of genius, a gifted person would come to its rescue. Ortega argues that for a genre to survive, the crucial thing is the material and not abstractions like talent or inspiration or personal power. A literary genre can be identified as 'a stock of possibilities' different from each other – if these possibilities repeat each other, these would not be genres, but replicas.

The modern novel, according to Ortega, could be compared to a quarry which is definitely vast, yet finite. The contemporary writers have to make-do with the subjects or materials left behind by the previous writers. Talent alone can hardly achieve anything in a situation where the possibilities of a genre are limited.

The novel is decaying partly because it is getting increasingly difficult to find new subjects, and not newer or better talent. The very term 'novel' suggests the factor of the 'new': earlier, because of the 'novelty' of the subjects, the novels were very enthusiastically read. Because that novelty does not exist anymore, what was once readable, is now considered a bore.

Another reason for the decay of the novel is that the reading public has become subtler and more fastidious – therefore, a work has to be new and extraordinary to impress the reader. This is precisely why only a handful of old works continue to survive. However, the novelists do not have any one else to blame because they themselves are bringing about a change in the readers' taste by refining it – each time the readers are given a superior work, they expect more from the next. Ortega calls this 'cruelty of triumph' – every superior work destroys many previous ones.

Since the subjects to write about are scarce, a writer must make up for it by experimenting with elements other than content. Ortega's suggestion is that the writer focuses on the presentation of the content. He attempts to explain with the help of difference between a painter and a dauber. A painter brings alive a subject fully for the viewers to experience its being. A dauber, on the other hand, merely alludes to its subject. Similarly, the earlier mode of writing was 'pure narration' where an event or an action was merely being allured to – as in "John loves Jane". Now, the focus has to be on bringing that experience of John alive enough for the readers. Similarly, the interest earlier lay in adventures and action – the readers wanted to know what was happening to the characters. Gradually, there has been a shift in their expectations – the readers are now interested in the 'self-presence' of the characters, and their 'inner life'. A novel that brings alive the characters' minds performs an 'autopsy' of the mind and is a 'presentative' novel wherein there is no telling – what fills the space is the seeing. Earlier, the novel did not have to be 'presentative'; it merely narrated/alluded to the events/experience in an indirect manner. Now, it must be very direct and descriptive. Ortega points out that the novels that survive from the past are those that use autoptic method – works by Stendhal and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* are two such instances.

By its very nature, the method of narration/reference/allusion only emphasizes the absence of what it is referring to. It would be erroneous to attempt to 'define' a character because 'to define' is to

be scientific – science, in the process of defining, leaves its object behind. A definition is nothing but a concept and a concept is nothing but a mental allusion to an object. Therefore, a concept can only point at or indicate an object. Art, on the other hand, 'turns to things themselves'. A painting comes closer to the experience of an intercourse with an object than does a definition of that object. Therefore, the novel earlier only referred to a situation – the subject was new enough to hold the readers' attention. The modern novel no longer enjoys such a luxury. To 'tell' the readers is to expect them to imagine the character and the situation which is tantamount to expect them to be novelists!

Instead, the novelist must give 'visible facts' to the readers so that they discover and define the situation for themselves. The approach of the novelist should be that of an impressionist painter in that the impressionist paintings are fresh because they create the conditions of the subject of their painting; they are full of the idea of birth or the present of their subject. The non-impressionist paintings, on the other hand, project the subject as 'finished', 'mummified' and 'past', thereby indicating death.

The modern novel cannot afford to a mere story. By 'story', Ortega implies adventures and action; and these appeal either to children or to the 'barbarous residue' that human beings still have. A story cannot give more than a 'mechanical thrill'. Hence there is so much of contempt for the 'dime novel' and is considered in 'bad taste' and appealing to 'base pleasure'. Adventures, in Gasset's opinion, do not appeal to the 'superior portion of our sensibility'. Action should be treated as a mere pretext or a string to tie things together. A bad novel is a bore not because it does not have an interesting subject but because it does not have a core. The challenge for the modern novel is to 'linger around the character'; this ability to make the readers linger around defines that core. Since there is this demand to linger around, the novel is considered a 'sluggish', slow moving genre – the opposite of a story/serial/thriller wherein action or adventure predominates. There is an increasing focus on who these characters are, instead of on what they do. For instance, the characters Don Quixote and Sancho Panza survive because their selves are more important than their adventures.

The interest has thus shifted from the plot to the figures, from action (function) to persons (substance).Ortega finds this shift a symptom of going back to classicism where actions come from being. The focus on the action is a nineteenth century phenomenon.

Gasset gives the example of the difference between indigenous Spanish theatre and Classical French theatre to explain

tendencies prevailing towards being and action. One can see how he opposes an art of personages to an art of adventures.

	Indigenous Spanish Theatre	Classical French Theatre
1	It is considered 'popular'. By popular, Ortega means liked by the masses or huge number of people.	It is considered classical. By classical, he means meant for the aristocrats and the upper classes of the society.
2	This amasses all sorts of adventures and changes of fortune.	Here, the action is kept to its minimum, cut down to its smallest size.
3	The intention is to bring alive new and dangerous experiences and adventures to entertain people.	This lacked physical adventures and events of the outer life. The intention was to bring alive the mind of the character.
4	This presents no analysis ('anatomy') of sentiments.	The subject matter is the 'inner problems'. There are no passions or twists and turns in the plot. The focus is on the analysis of the passions.
5	The content is given to passion.	The content is given to contemplation.
6	The source of enjoyment is the ups and downs in the life of the characters.	The audience enjoys 'exemplary and normative character of tragic happenings'.
7	The focus in on vital emotion.	The focus is on ethical contemplation.
8	The heroes are ordinary characters, commoners.	The heroes are 'exalted characters' who do not take care of 'common urgencies of life'. They face moral conflicts.
9	These plays generally have the flavour of 'abandonment', 'orgiastic rites' and 'excesses' – of celebration.	Here, everything is articulated in a measured style, correct form and refinement. No coarseness is allowed. Everything happens according to a norm.
10	The tendency is to 'surrender to the surge of emotion'.	The tendency is self-control.
11	All is adventure – full of intrigues and elaborate vocabulary.	All is contemplation – distance between an object and oneself.

Ortega thus brings out the differences between the aesthetic intentions of the two theatres. While the indigenous Spanish theatre stands for function, the Classical French theatre stands for substance. While the former stands for action and 'lyrical

embellishment', the latter stands for 'paradigmatic personages'. The novel, according to Ortega must now move away from the former to the latter. It is now impossible to construct new and interesting plots but it is possible to invent interesting characters.

Ortega gives the examples of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Marcel Proust to discuss the predominance of being and substance and characters over action and adventure. He points out that it is a mistake to attribute Dostoevsky genius to his plots or dramatic action. The reason why his novels continue to be read is not his material or subject but his form and structure. Form may seem abstract but actually constitutes the true substance of art. Those who study Dostoevsky remain pre-occupied with his events and emotion and pay little attention to his form; they pay a lot of attention to his personal life but little to him as a 'conscientious craftsman'. His form is 'sluggish' not in a derogatory sense, as the very definition of the novel is premised on its slow movement as opposed to in a thriller or a dime novel. There are few occurrences in a Dostoevsky novel but these are intense – they involve 'drawing out each incident through a copious presentation of its minutest components'. The long conversations among his characters, for instance, help the reader feel the bodily existence of these characters. The characters are introduced with a biography but when they begin to behave, the readers are exposed to a discrepancy. Ortega holds that this strategy is important because that is exactly what happens in real life too – we are told something about somebody and we later realized that it is false. In this sense, Dostoevsky is a 'realist', not because he shows reality or everyday life but because he uses the form of life. His characters have the ambiguity we find in real life scenarios. And all this is achieved without any novelistic stylizing or embellishing language. His characters confuse the reader and define themselves.

On the other hand, Proust is an example where the idea of inner life is carried to its extreme. The only problem Ortega finds with Proust is a sense of exaggeration in the notions of purity and contemplation at the cost of the minimum of plot that Ortega recommends. Proust is called by Ortega radical – he withholds from the reader the minimum of drama required to sustain some interest. Dramatic interest, Ortega reiterates, has no intrinsic value – it is a mechanical necessity to bind things together; aesthetically it is nothing but dead weight. Again, looking at the example of Proust, this dead weight is indispensable. The essence of the novel lies in the characters' pure living and being.

Drama is concrete action. Substance is atmosphere or contemplation where everything is 'diffuse' and at rest. Therefore, Ortega repeats his definition of the novel – 'a diffuse genre, the latest creation of high art in the field of narrative prose'. The

modern novel has no other alternative except focusing on the contemplation. We hardly remember the actions or events in a novel but we do remember the personages. Therefore, to create a 'good' novel, one does not need marvels or unheard-of adventures but an ability to focus the attention of the readers on a character and on his/her inner mind: 'The reader's horizon must be narrowed – cut off from his real horizon and imprisoned in a small universe, the inner realm of the novel'. Therefore, a great novel transports us to another world and frees us from our own self and generously bestows upon us the gift of transmigration. So the novelist should lure us and then cut us off, leaving us no access to real life. Ortega calls this 'the gift of forgetting' whereby the novelist makes 'us forget the reality beyond the walls of his novel'.

Therefore, writing a novel with reasons other than aesthetic – political, ideological or satirical defeats the larger purpose of writing – to talk about substance and contemplation and not to preach or propagandize. It can be dangerous not to be content with being an artist and trying to be someone else – a politician, for instance. We are hermetically speaking closed to all actual reality. A novelist can write, propagate philosophical, political or moral ideas at the same time. Also, because a novelist can write only that which he knows very intimately; writing for these other transcendental purposes is difficult – this is precisely why writing a historical novel is such a problem. Imagining something is not enough; that which is imagined should also be correct. The only way to write beautifully and convincingly is to be enthusiastic enough to tell a tale about interesting characters and their conversations and passions: 'A silkworm enclosed in his magic cocoon, he (a novelist) must forget the world he leaves behind and happily go about polishing the walls of his self-made prison so as to step up all pores against the air and light of reality'. In simpler words, a novelist, while he writes his novel must care more about his imaginary world than about any other possible world. If he does not care, how can he make us care? He must be a somnambulist, infecting the readers too with the same somnambulism.

Thus, it is the nature of the novel to be impervious and hermetic – to produce an effect where nothing else in the outside real world has any impact on the reader. Poems, on the contrary, are meant to be looked at from the outside; they are like statues. A novel is meant to be perceived from within itself. It should not be conspicuous because it is a predominantly realistic genre and incompatible with outer reality. In order to survive, it must abolish the surrounding world. Therefore, a device that a novelist has at his/her disposal is autopsy – the real world must be covered with the imaginary world. The only way to write successfully is to supply a wealth of detail – overdoing prolixity and minuteness and lavish in

particulars. Ortega says: 'Great novels are a toll built by myriads of tiny animals while seeming frailness checks the impact of the seas'.

A poem is light and a poet is a wandering minstrel, with his lyre under his arm. A novel is heavy and a novelist is a part of a circus or nomadic tribe carrying huge baggage.

After describing the conditions necessary for a novel to come into existence, Ortega now moves on to discuss conditions that determine 'value' of a work. The content of a good novel is the experiences of the secrets of the mind. There has to be contempt for surface features – a novelist must be willing to go deeper into the souls of the characters. Hence, Ortega also declares that an average would not be able to understand such a novel and the novelist. In the earlier times, when nothing had been said, all subject and all content was popular. On the contrary, now distinctions must exist. This idea of judgement need not be disheartening according to Ortega, because great works are produced in the conditions of extreme restrictions, especially when artistic sensitivity gets refined. Only the average specimens (among the novels and novelists) decline and not those who can stand the challenge. Though it may seem that the novel is dying, the hidden deposits are only waiting to be discovered and only minds of rare distinction can see through the grim situation.

Such minds will easily recognize that the proper material for the novel is imaginary psychology. There has been growth in scientific psychology and the present reader is familiar with the research and has also had access to it through spontaneous experience. The reader is thus more refined, because s/he is a better psychologist than the old novelist. It is wise to make use of progress in psychology to write better. Ortega assumes that imaginary construction is possible.

Realism, traditionally, is understood to mean that the subject in the novel be identical with that of real life. However, as Ortega argues with the help of the example of Dostoevsky's characters, the notion of realism is heavily misunderstood. The characters in these novels of realism are so different from the ones we meet every day, while Dostoevsky's are not. Finally, the characters need not be real because 'it is enough that they are possible'.

13.3 Conclusion

Ortega defines the novel as a sluggish and slow moving genre. He also argues that it is an impervious genre. He identifies a time of crisis for the genre while he is writing in the 1920s and recommends that the traditional forms of writing in the 'realist' mode

die out and new styles focusing on the character's mind emerge. He establishes the differences between the traditional and the emergent as tendencies towards function and substance. He holds that imaginary psychology forms an appropriate subject for the modern novel. He also demonstrates that the works which continue to survive from the earlier times are the ones which have the tendency to focus on the mind of the character and not on the plot or action. He does not mention the novels by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf and others writing in the mode of stream-of-consciousness. This may suggest that though he correctly identifies the contemporary transition in the style of writing, he may not have been aware of the existing works in Spanish and in translation.

It is also necessary to understand that Ortega does not problematize the idea of 'good' novel. Later on, many theorists and critics have objected to the canonization of some works as good and others as bad – they have argued that such a notion of good and bad invariably masks power interests and safeguards them by upholding some works and rejecting the others. This is a typical elitist attitude.

While Ortega highlights that non-fiction sells more than fiction, he does so with an air of disapproval. Again, many scholars and novelists have attacked such a stance by celebrating the blurring of the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction.

13.4 Questions

1. Why does Ortega claim the novel to be dead or on the decline? Evaluate his reasons.

2. Discuss the strategies Ortega upholds for the writing of the modern novel.

3. Explore Ortega's views on differences between function and substance. How does he substantiate these in the discussion of theatre?

13.5 Key Terms

Novel, Realism, Modernism, Plot, Character, Action, Victorian Literature/Nineteenth Century Literature, Stream-of-consciousness

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14

"POSTMODERNISM AND CONSUMER SOCIETY" – Fredric Jameson

Unit structure

14.0 Objectives
14.1 Fredric Jameson
14.2 "Postmodernism and Consumer Society:" An Overview
14.3 Conclusion
14.4 Questions
14.5 Key Terms

14.0 Objectives

The basic objective of this unit is to familiarize the readers with Fredric Jameson's views on Postmodernism. The unit also aims to explain the Marxist perspective on Postmodernism.

14.1 Fredric Jameson

Fredric Jameson is a famous American theorist who has worked extensively on Literary Theory, Marxism, Culture Studies and the relationship between art forms and ideology. Jameson positions himself as the Marxist analyst who tries to locate, like Georg Lucaks, the ideological apparatus that operates within the literary movements like Modernism and Postmodernism. Jameson provides his neo-Marxist perspectives in his works like *Marxism and Form*, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism.* Jameson tries to deviate from conventional European models of literary theory by extending his interest in various cultural expressions like television serials, films, painting and architecture.

14.2 "Postmodernism and Consumer Society:" An Overview

Jameson's essay, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" was published in a book titled *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern.* In this essay, Jameson makes an attempt to

evaluate the concept and artistic techniques of Postmodernism from a Marxist perspective. He tries to prove in this essay how Postmodernism is a product of Late Capitalism and how it is largely different from Modernism in terms of its method and the manner of expression.

Jameson begins the essay with a statement that Postmodernism is not widely accepted or understood because of the unfamiliarity of its works. He argues that though Postmodernism is found in all art forms like the poetry of John Ashbery, music of John Cage and the architecture of Robert Venturi, it is not easily recognised by people. According to Jameson, Robert Venturi has created postmodern architecture by synthesizing the classical style with the popular. Similarly, he says that the music of John Cage is a combination of the classical with new wave rock. He also cites the films of Godard as finest manifestations of postmodern art. He says that all these art forms carry a specific reaction against the forms of high Modernism. He also indicates that the basic difference between Modernism and Postmodernism is that Postmodernism is against abstract expressionism and experimental individualism, which were the hallmarks of Modernism.

Further, Jameson goes on to discuss the distinguishing features of Postmodernism after observing that there are many different forms of Postmodernism as were of Modernism. According to Jameson, one significant feature of Postmodernism is its effacement of boundaries. He says that Postmodernism brings together high culture and the mass culture (popular culture). He also maintains that Postmodernism effaces the boundaries between various genres and discourses as it brings together history, literature, politics and anthropology. To illustrate this point, he gives the example of the emergence of a new form in literature in the 1960s called Theory. According to Jameson, literary theory is a pastiche of different disciplines. Jameson argues that a theorist like Michel Foucault is very difficult to understand and to classify. He wonders if Foucault represents philosophy, history, social theory or political science. He indicates that such theoretical discourses are the manifestations of Postmodernism. However, Jameson is of the opinion that literary theory and Postmodernism are the results of Multinational Capitalism which started having an impact from the 1950s. He also argues that Postmodernism is a result of certain social and political developments like neo-colonialsim, computerization and electronic information which became common in the 1960s. Further, Jameson indicates that Postmodernism, by bringing together the sublime and the banal together in a playful manner, reveals the inner truth of the social order of Late Capitalism.

Jameson continues with his discussion of features of Postmodernism. He says that 'Pastiche' and 'Schizophrenia' are the two central features of Postmodernism that correspond to the experience of time and space. Further, he tries to define pastiche by differentiating that from 'Parody'. He indicates that parody is an imitation of styles and expressions of others and it is a vehicle of satire. He says that parody mimics the original to ridicule. According to him, pastiche is blank parody. Like parody, pastiche also uses imitation but it is without satire and humour. In Jameson's view, pastiche is a device that manages to smudge the division of past, present and future.

Fredric Jameson continues to enlist the features of Postmodernism and considers the 'Death of the Subject' as the next important characteristic. By the word 'subject', Jameson means the individual self. According to Jameson, Postmodernism marks the end of individualism. He explains this by differentiating the notion of self in Modernism and Postmodernism. According to him, Modernism, in all its experimental expressions celebrates unique self and private identity. To illustrate his point, he talks about the experimental narrative in James Joyce and the experimental poetry of T. S. Eliot. Jameson also believes that individualism in art was a result of bourgeois Capitalism, that is, production oriented Capitalism which promoted the model of nuclear family and the notion of private self. Today, bourgeois Capitalism or competitive Capitalism is replaced with Multinational Capitalism. Hence, he believes that the bourgeois individual subject no longer exists.

Postmodernism, Jameson argues considers individual self as a philosophical or cultural construct. Hence, the modernist notion of self is no longer valid in postmodern art. He indicates that Postmodernism is in a hurry to write obituary notes on many modernist artists like Pablo Picasso, Marcel Proust and T. S. Eliot. Jameson indicates that postmodern ideology has indicated that these writers are a passé. He also indicates that Postmodernism suggests that nobody has a private world or style to express anymore. According to him, pastiche allows no stylistic innovations because it allows only an imitation of dead styles, that is, to speak through the masks and in others' voices.

Further, Jameson tries to explain notions of schizophrenia and pastiche by explaining a method of expression called the Nostalgia Mode found in fiction and films. He analyses a series of Hollywood retro movies like *American Graffiti* and Polanski's *The Chinatown*. He explains that these movies depict a life of early time but they are not historical. According to him, such movies are like simulated games which satisfy the urge to experience the sense of past associated with objects. Jameson argues that these movies

don't take the spectators to the past but bring the past to the present context by altering it drastically.

Jameson extends his discussion to the domain of architecture to explain the visible signs of pastiche and schizophrenia in Postmodernism. He says that the postmodern buildings of Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, Michael Graves and Frank Gehry indicate schizophrenia by generating a new space called the hyperspace. He argues that buildings which create such a space bring about changes in objects that equate the changes in the subject. To illustrate this argument he explains the philosophy and the art behind the architecture of Hotel Bonaventure in Los Angeles designed by John Portman. Jameson says that this building seems to create a new syntax in architecture. He holds that unlike a traditional building, this hotel does not have a *marquee* or *porti-co*. Instead, the building has lateral entrances. Secondly, the garden of the hotel is not at the front but in the backyard and that too, in the second floor. Jameson also observes that the hotel has dull lobby but prominent elevators and escalators. According to him, these new machines are kinetic sculptures which give a new idea of space. Jameson also compares the elevators and escalators to the narratives. In Modernism, he says that the narrative takes a stroll like the perspective of a drifter. In modernist narratives, the writer indicates that the more one moves the more one learns, as suggested by the great French writer, Baudelaire. In Modernism, readers and narrators are rooted figures like the *flaneurs*. Jameson says that in Postmodernism, as in Hotel Bonaventure, people don't move but they are moved across space by the devices of crowd movers. He argues that the postmodern narratives are also like the escalators and elevators. Further, he explains that the hotel building almost reaches the boundary of the street and thus effaces the boundary between inside and outside and the crowd and the customers. According to him, such a building creates a congregation of faceless crowd. He also comments on the glass skin of the building which is made of reflective sunglass. Jameson says that such a material gives a distorted reflection of the crowd which moves around it. Further, he explains how the building architecture juxtaposes kinetic sculptures with traditional Japanese art forms and paintings. Such a kind of architecture, for Jameson, is a pastiche. This art indicates the disappearance of a sense of history and it is symptomatic of a society located in Late Capitalism which is unable to retain its own past.

Jameson's central argument in the essay is that Postmodernism, along with number of media which bombard people with an overdose of images, helps people to forget the past. He says that Postmodernism creates a historical amnesia. He also says that it creates a dehistoricized subject. For him, pastiche and

schizophrenia are postmodern techniques that transform reality into images. To illustrate his argument, he says that Americans have already forgotten historical figures like John. F. Kennedy, thanks to over abundance of media images. Jameson concludes the essay by throwing open a question for the readers – Does Postmodernism replicate or reproduce or reinforce the logic of Consumer Capitalism? He says that the question must be left open but readers can guess what Jameson's opinion is.

14.3 Questions

1. Discuss how Fredric Jameson makes a Marxist evaluation of Postmodernism.

2. Explain how Jameson argues that Postmodernism and its symptoms are the products of Late Captalism or Multinational Capitalism.

14.4 Key Terms

Late Capitalism, Multinational Capitalism, Consumer Capitalism, Pastiche, Schizophrenia, Historical Amnesia

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15

"TOWARD A CONCEPT OF POSTMODERNISM" – Ihab Hassan

Unit structure

15.0 Objectives

This chapter attempts to summarize Ihab Hassan's essay. It discusses the origins and characteristics of the term 'postmodernism'. It should be used as a roadmap to follow-up on the parameters of the terms as used by Hassan to produce some sense of the term.

15.1 Ihab Hassan

Ihab Hassan was born in Cairo, Egypt. He studied to become an engineer and later on went on to study Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. He has taught at Wesleyan University, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He retired in 1999. He has written extensively on postmodernism.

15.2 "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism:" An Overview

The essay is a big challenge to read. As one shall see, Hassan defines 'postmodernism' in terms of other terms. It would require rigorous reading and familiarity with the terms and authors that have been discussed by Hassan.

At a point in time when Hassan writes this essay, postmodernism, he says, is 'an experience, an intuition' and thus points out that there has hardly been an attempt to reflect on it as a

concept or produce a definition of it. His essay is an attempt to generate a concept of postmodernism and he does so with the help of questions:

1. Is there really a phenomenon different from modernism?

2. Can we present its characteristics of 'its artistic, epistemic, and social character'? In other words, can we identify its chronology? This would involve an understanding of its origin, its "evolution" – a starting point and the ways in which it has moved further. Can we identify its typology? This would involve an understanding of classification of its trends and even counter-trends. For, as we shall see below, postmodernism is not a coherent phenomenon or concept. Its 'artistic' character would relate to an understanding of the art it has produced – literary and otherwise. Its 'epistemic' character would relate to the kind of knowledge it has produced – how does it help us to know things better? Or, what is its take on knowledge? Its 'social' character would imply a reflection on how it perceives society and social relations.

3. How is this postmodernism different from the modernist or avant-garde movement of the 1920s?

4. What are the problems one would face while attempting a definition?

Before proceeding further, Hassan clarifies that postmodernism, as a perspective, is not a break away from earlier minds in history; it is a significant revision of these. However, if one were to identify its practitioners in different fields, the names would go like this:

No	Subject	Important Names
1	Philosophy	Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard
2	History	Michel Foucault, Hayden White
3	Psychoanalysis	Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, R D Laing, Norman O Brown
4	Political Philosophy	Herbert Marcuse, Jean Baudrillard, Jurgen Habermas
5	Philosophy of Science	Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend
6	Literary Theory	Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Wolfgang Iser, the "Yale Critics"
7	Dance	Merce Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais, Meredith Monk
8	Music	John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez

9	Art	Robert Rauchenberg, Jean Tinguely, Joseph Beuys
10	Architecture	Robert Venturi, Charles Jencks, Brent Bolin
11	Literature	Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jorge Luis Borges, Max Bense, Vladimir Naboko, Harold Pinter, B S Johnson, Rayner Heppenstall, Christine Brooke-Rose, Helmut Heissenbuttel, Jurgen Becker, Peter Handke, Thomas Bernhardt, Ernst Jandl, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Julio Cortazar, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Maurice Roche, Philippe Sollers, John Barth, William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme, Walter Abish, John Ashbery, David Antin, Sam Shepard, Robert Wilson

Once one looks up the work of these authors, one would realize the diversity that exists within the concept and practice of postmodernism.

Let us now look at the origin of the term as discussed by Hassan.

No	Year	Used By	Work	Context
1	1934	Federico De Onis	*Antologia de la poesia Espanola e hispanoameriacana (1882-1932)*	'Minor reaction to modernism already latent within it, reverting to the early twentieth century'
2	1942	Dudley Fitts	*Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry*	'Minor reaction to modernism already latent within it, reverting to the early twentieth century'
3	1947	Arnold Toynbee	*A Study of History*	'A new historical cycle in Western civilization, starting around 1875'
4	1950s	Charles Olson		Used the term in general and not in terms of any specific definition

5	1959 and 1960	Irving Howe and Harry Levin		'a falling off from the great modernist movement'
6		Leslie Fiedler		'to challenge the elitism of the high modernist tradition in the name of popular culture'
7		Ihab Hassan		'to explore the impulse of self-unmaking which is part of the literary tradition of silence'

There is one very interesting point to be noted in some of the usages of the term postmodernism. The term seemed to have gained a lot of currency in the light of the increasing use of the term 'post' which came to replace the modifier 'beyond' – 'postcivilization', 'postculture', 'posthumanism', and 'posthistory'.

Hassan does not use the term against the term 'modern'; nor is it an attempt in an intellectual fashion. But, there is definitely some sense of intellectual power associated with the term. It tends to be used to claim as something important or intellectual and sometimes, it tends to rebel against the very idea of giving an importance to such intellectual power. Thus, there is a 'will and counter-will to intellectual power' inherent within it. Therefore, when it is welcomed or rejected, it is not the definition of the term per se, but a reflection of 'the psychopolitics of academic life' which is divided on several lines and draws different boundaries to operate with. To understand the flavour of the use of the term, one would have to reflect on one's own academic orientation and grasp the problems central to the definition of the term.

Hassan goes on to point out the conceptual problems associated with the term. Let us look at these one by one.

The term 'postmodernism' is 'awkward' because it evokes the term 'modernism'. Therefore, it is unclear whether it is trying to 'surpass' or 'suppress' the term 'modernism'. In a way, it contains its enemy within itself. Other terms do not do such a thing – for example, 'romanticism', or 'classicism'. 'Post' also suggests 'after'; but no postmodernist would agree that postmodernism comes after modernism. As shown in the discussion of the origin of the term above, the term began to be used quite early in the twentieth century and identifies some postmodernist tendencies in the modernist works too. However, we cannot use terms like 'The Atomic Age' or 'The Space Age' or 'The Television Age' because they convey technology and not any theoretical orientation.

The term 'postmodernism' suffers from 'semantic instability' – scholars do not agree over its meaning. This is because the term is relatively new and has come to be widely known only recently. Moreover, its relationship with other current terms – avant-garde, neo avant-garde, modernism – is hardly stable.

It is difficult to locate with certainty the origins of postmodernist attitude and perspective in time. Like modernism, postmodernism too slips and slides in time to a point that the differences between them tend to disappear.

History, Hassan says, is a 'palimpsest' – that is, it has several layers and strands of thought and action operating at the same time. It embraces all the points in time – past, present and future. Therefore, it is perfectly possible to be Victorian, Modern and Postmodern at the same time. Therefore, it would be silly to expect a clear-cut demarcation between the terms modernism and postmodernism.

Hence, a 'period' needs to be understood in terms of continuity and discontinuity rather than as a compartmentalized category. Postmodernism invokes two divinities at once: the Apollonian which is abstract and the Dionysian which is sensuous. The former refers to conjunctions and the latter to the disjunctions. Thus, postmodernism would inhabit in several contradictory tendencies: sameness/difference, unity/rupture, filiation/revolt, space/time, and mental/physical.

The instability is further understood when we perceive that in the light of postmodern attitudes or any new attitude, we tend to 'rediscover our ancestors'. So for instance, several authors are being restudied and reunderstood as being postmodern – Sterne, Sade, Blake, Lautreamont, Rimbaud, Jarry , Tzara, Hofmannstha, Gertrude Stein, the later Joyce, the later Pound, Duchamp, Artaud, Roussel, Bataille, Broch, Queneau, and Kafka.

One cannot produce a definition of the term 'postmodernism' on the basis of a single criterion. It certainly is 'antiformal', 'anarchic' or 'decreative' but it also attempts to discover a 'unitary sensibility'. In such a situation, how do we define the term?

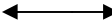Though the term suggests a change, it is difficult to point at one change as the defining change. There would hardly be any consensus regarding the choice of one particular event as the turn towards postmodernism.

The term is hardly about a change alone; it is also about mutation. Its psychological, philosophical, economic and political aspects are joined or disjoined in several ways. Therefore, to

understand postmodernism in literature, one has to consider its reflection on society and so on to grasp it in a larger framework. This inclusion of larger contexts further adds to the problem of definition.

The term seems to have gained some connotation of valour, privilege or honour. It brings together disparate writers and discordant trends. On the other hand, it also tends to be used with disapproval. Therefore, it gets difficult to identify the lines on which the term could be defined. Scholars disagree in that whether it is a descriptive category or an evaluative one. All these add to confusions about the term and interfere with a cohesive attempt at definition.

Hassan provides some perspective on the possibility of an understanding of the term – it could be located in the context of three modes of artistic change in the last hundred years: avant-garde, modern and postmodern. Avant-garde refers to the movements in the earlier part of the twentieth century – Pataphysics, Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Merzism de Stijl. These movements were anarchic in that they attacked the bourgeoisie psyche in their work. Modernism, was seen to be stable and aloof, and in the works of Valery, Proust, Gide, the early Joyce, Yeats, Lawrence, Rilke, Mann, Musil, the early Pound, Eliot, and Faulkner. Their works come across as 'hieratic, hypotactical, and formalist'. Postmodernism, on the other hand, is seen to be playful, paratactical and deconstructionist. Hassan, further, elaborates on the difference between modernism and postmodernism with the help of the following table:

↕	↔
Modernism	**Postmodernism**
Romanticism/Symbolism	Pataphysics/Dadaism
Form (conjunctive, closed)	Antiform (disjunctive, open)
Purpose	Play
Design	Chance
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Mastery/Logos	Exhaustion/Silence

Art Object/Finished Work	Process/Performance/Happening
Distance	Participation
Creation/Totalization	Decreation/Deconstruction
Synthesis	Antithesis
Presence	Absence
Centering	Dispersal
Genre/Boundary	Text/Intertext
Semantics	Rhetoric
Paradigm	Syntagm
Hypotaxis	Parataxis
Metaphor	Metonymy
Selection	Combination
Root/Depth	Rhizome/Surface
Interpretation/Reading	Against Interpretation/Misreading
Signified	Signifier
Lisible (Readerly)	Scriptible (Writerly)
Narrative. Grande Histoire	Anti-Narrative/Petite Histoire
Master Code	Idiolect
Symptom	Desire
Type	Mutant
Genital/Phallic	Polymorphous/Androgynous
Paranoia	Schizophrenia
Origin/Cause	Difference-*Differance*/Trace
God the Father	The Holy Ghost
Metaphysics	Irony
Determinacy	Indeterminacy
Transcendence	Immanence

These terms come from various disciplines (rhetoric, linguistics, literary theory, philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, political science, theology) and their wide range of reference conveys the difficulty of coming to terms with one singular definition. However, they do offer a perspective vis-à-vis modernism. But, it must also be noted that these dichotomies collapse when one finds the instances of similarities between modernism and postmodernism. One can only speak in terms of tendencies and not compartmentalized definitions.

This tendency in postmodernism, Hassan calls 'indetermanence' – a neologism that comes from 'indeterminacy' and 'immanence'. Both the terms are full of contradictions and allude to one another.

Indeterminacy (or rather indeterminacies) refers to ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt,

perversion, deformation, unmaking, disintegration, deconstruction, decenterment, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, decompostition, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, delegitimization, irony, rupture and silence. Because of these tendencies, our basic ideas of author, audience, reading, writing, book, genre, critical theory and literature have become questionable. This radical change can be seen in the works of Barthes, Iser and de Man. Barthes, for instance, defines literature as 'loss', 'perversion' or 'dissolution'. Iser offers a theory of reading on the basis of the reading of 'blanks' in a text and Paul de Man identifies literature to be 'a force that radically suspends logic'.

Immanence (or immanences) is the tendency to think in terms of abstractions: effusion, dissemination, pulsion, interplay, communication, interdependence – all of which refer to the human capacity to produce language. This immanence manifests itself into various forms: fact and fiction blend, or history is derealized by media into a happening.

Thus, postmodernism veers towards that which is open, playful and provisional.

15.3 Conclusion

Hassan quotes other scholars extensively and defines postmodernism in terms of the definition of other terms. In this essay, he attempts to talk about the origins of the term 'postmodernism' and refers to the artists and theorists working around the same. He refers to the problems related to the possibility of the definition of the term and finally offers an understanding with the help of the term 'indetermanence,' a neologism that comes from 'indeterminacy' and 'immanence'.

15. 4 Questions

1. Explain the problems associated with the definition of the term 'postmodernism' as pointed out by Ihab Hassan.
2. Discuss how Hassan offers an understanding of 'postmodernism' vis-à-vis 'modernism'.

15. 5 Key Terms

Avant-garde, Modernism, Postmodernism, play, intertext, indetermanence, deconstruction

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16

KEY CONCEPTS IN POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

Unit structure

16.0 Objective
16.1 Introduction
16.2 Postcolonial Criticism and Cultural Colonization
16.3 Eurocentrism
16.4 Decolonization
16.5 Conclusion
16.6 Key Terms

16.0 Objective

The objective of this unit is to familiarize the readers with the key concepts in Postcolonial Criticism and Postcolonial Theory.

16.1 Introduction

Postcolonial Criticism emerged as a distinct category in the 1980s after the publications of the *Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffith, *Nation and Narration* by Homi Bhabha and *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward Said. However, the beginnings of Postcolonial criticism can be traced to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* published in 1961. Fanon voiced in this work what is called "cultural resistance" to France's African Empire. Fanon argued that the first step for colonized people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past.

Another major work, which can be said to have inaugurated Postcolonial criticism, is Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, which exposes the Eurocentric Universalism that takes for granted the superiority of Western and the inferiority of the Oriental – the negative, passive 'other' of the West. Said identifies European cultural tradition of Orientatialism that identifies the East as the other and inferior to the West. Peter Barry explains the political significance of Orientalism, the Western scholars' attitude towards orient

> This means, in effect, that East becomes the repository or projection of those aspects of themselves, which Westerners do not choose to acknowledge (cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness and so on). At the same time, and paradoxically, the East is seen as a fascinating realm of the exotic, the mystical and the seductive. It also tends to be seen as homogenous, the people there being anonymous masses, rather than individuals, their actions determined by instinctive emotions (lust, terror, fury etc.) rather than by conscious choices or decisions.
>
> (Barry: 2008: 193-194)

Subsequently, Postcolonial criticism endeavoured to draw attention to issues of cultural differences in literary text. Postcolonial critics rejected the claim to Universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature. They also started analyzing the representation of other cultures in literature to see the limitations of Western outlook. Further, they tried to show how Eurocentric literature is often silent on matters concerned with colonization and imperialism. They also started celebrating hybridity and cultural polyvalence, that is, the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture. Postcolonial critics also develop critical perspectives whereby they could theorize and explain states of plurality, marginality and perceived otherness.

Postcolonial criticism is concerned largely with analyzing literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination. It also tries to analyse some literature written by colonizers especially the works of writers like Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Foster and so on.

16.2 Postcolonial Criticism and Cultural Colonization

Postcolonial criticism is concerned with an enquiry that shows how a British system of Government and Education inculcated British culture and British values that denigrated the culture, morals and even physical appearance of formerly subjugated people. This form of cultural colonization is also known as Neo-colonization.

The dynamic, psychological and social interplay between what ex-colonial populations consider their native indigenous pre-

colonial cultures and the colonizer's culture that was imposed upon them constitutes a large portion of the study for postcolonial critics. Postcolonial cultures include both a merger of an antagonism between the culture of the colonized and that of the colonizer, which are difficult to identify and separate into discreet entities. Postcolonial critics maintain that so complete was the colonizer's intrusion into the government, education, cultural values and daily lives of the colonial subjects that even after independence, colonial practices are continued in such countries.

A good deal of postcolonial criticism addresses the problems of cultural identity as it is represented in postcolonial literature. Such studies analyse postcolonial literature to trace the psychological inheritance of a negative self-image. They also try to identify how the natives are alienated from their own indigenous cultures, which had been devalued for so long that much of the pre-colonial culture has been lost.

16.3 Eurocentrism

It refers to the use of European culture as the standard by which all other cultures are negatively contrasted. Over a period of time, Eurocentrism like Orientalism has come under the postcolonial hammer. One form of Eurocentrism is Universalism, i.e., an attempt to judge culture and literature in terms of its universality. It is the Western bias that a great literary text should have universal themes and characters. However, this universality depends upon resemblance to European ideas, ideals and experiences. European natives, the British and the Americans were the cultural standard bearers in Universalism.

Eurocentrism has also created a division of the Planet and its population into different worlds – First World, Second World, Third World and Fourth World. The Eurocentric model of the First World is comprised on Britain, Europe and the United States and the Second World is made of white populations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Southern Africa and the former Soviet Block. The Third World is comprised of developing nations such as India, African nations, Latin American countries and South East Asia. The Fourth World in this Eurocentric hierarchy is made of indigenous population subjugated by white settlers, and native Americans and aboriginal Australians. Postcolonialism reacts vehemently to the imperialist politics that has created such an uneven world.

16.4 Decolonization

It refers to the rejection of the colonialist ideology by the colonized. It also stands for the act by which the colonized reclaim pre-colonial past. One of the debates that come up in the context of decolonization is the use of the colonizer's language after independence. On the one hand, English is seen as a common language for various indigenous people within Third World and Fourth World nations to communicate with one another. On the other hand it is also seen as a medium loaded with imperialist ideology and terminology.

Decolonization also has certain practical difficulties. Firstly, desiring to reclaim a pre-colonial past is not easy. Secondly, much of the pre-colonial culture has been lost due to many generations of colonial domination. Further, one will also have to admit that even if there had been no colonization, the ancient culture would have changed by now: "no culture stands still".

16.5 Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial critical theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously colonized countries or literature written in colonizing countries, which deals with colonization or colonized people. Such an approach focuses particularly on:

a.   the way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority of the colonized people and

b.   literature by colonized people, which attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past. Further, postcolonial theory also deals with the ways in which literature in colonizing countries appropriates the language, images, scenes, traditions and so forth of the colonized countries.

Postcolonial theory is built in large around the concept of otherness. However, the very term otherness has significant connotations.

Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of otherness. However, the concepts of otherness touch upon various implications. Following are some major explanations of otherness:

1.   Otherness includes doubleness, both identity and difference, so that every other, every different and excluded is dialectically created and includes the values of the colonizing culture.

2. The western concept of the oriental is biased, as Abdul Jan Mohamed argues that if the west is ordered, rational, masculine and good then, the orient is chaotic, irrational, feminine and evil.

3. Colonized people are highly diverse in their nature and their traditions, so that while they may be the 'other' from the colonizers, they are also different from one another in terms of their own past, and should not be totalised or essentialised.

4. The colonized people will also be other than their past, which can be reclaimed but never reconstituted and hence their past must be revisited in partial, fragmented ways.

Postcolonial theory is also built around the concept of resistance, of resistance as subversion or opposition or mimicry. The concept of resistance carries with it ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality etc.

The concept of hybridity is another significant idea in Postcolonial theory. It refers to the mingling of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and colonized cultures. The assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, and the cross fertilization of cultures can be seen as positive, enriching and dynamic, as well as oppressive. Hybridity is also a useful concept that helps one to break down the false sense that the colonized cultures or the colonizing cultures are monolithic, or have unchanging feature. Homi K Bhabha in his article in *Re-drawing the Boundaries* talks about the complex issues of representation and meaning in the contemporary postcolonial context:

> Culture as a strategy of survival are both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the middle passage of slavery and indenture, the voyage out of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement – now accompanied by the territorial ambitious of global media technologies – make the question of

how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue. It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences – literature, art, music, ritual, life, death and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification, the natural(ized), unifying discourse of nation, peoples, or authentic folk tradition, those embedded myths of cultures' particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition.

16.6 Narrating the Nation

Postcolonial theorists like Homi K Bhabha and Benedict Anderson explore the link between cultural nationalism and narratives. Bhabha argues that nations, like narratives lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. He indicates that nationalist discourses produce the idea of nation. However, he believes that a rigid notion of nation is impossible because people and cultures have moved across boundaries. Bhabha says that the figure of the nation is a problem because of indeterminacy in its concept and indecisiveness of vocabularies in different cultures. According to him, the locality of national culture is neither unified nor unitary. Bhabha says that the boundary of a nation is many faced and it must always be understood as a process of hybridity. Bhabha argues that nation as a cultural space has transgressive boundaries and it is often located in interruptive interiority. Bhabha suggests that exiles, émigrés, refugees and gatherings have changed the notions of frontiers and nations. He suggests the possibility of temporality in place of nation rather than self-generating nation that is prefigured in language or culture. He speaks about the possibility of a liberal fluid notion of Nation that could be made possible with the help of writing:

> This double writing or dissemi-*nation*, is not simply a theoretical exercise in the internal contradictions of the modern liberal nation. The structure of cultural liminality – within the nation – that I have been trying to elaborate would be an essential precondition for a concept such as Raymond Williams' crucial distinction between residual and emergent practices in oppositional cultures, which require, he insists, a non-metaphysical, non-subjectivist' mode of explanation.
>
> (Bhabha: 1990:299)

Postcolonial theory has split the national subject into many ethnographic perspectives. This process has also generated a narrative authority for many minority discourses.

16.5 Conclusion

Postcolonial criticism focuses largely on the forms of hegemony seen in the cultural expressions in the backdrop of the great drama of imperialism and de-colonization. Postcolonialism provides an ideological framework for the writers and critics of the so called Third World to interrogate and critique Imperialism, Neo colonialism and the other similar forces of oppression.

16.6 Key Terms

Imperialism, Orientalism, Decolonization, Neo-colonization, Hybridity, Nation, Narration

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17

BASIC CONCEPTS IN FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Unit structure

17.0   Objective

The objective of this unit is to familiarize the readers with basic concepts and terms used in Feminist Literary theories.

17.1 Introduction

Feminism is considered as an organized movement, which promotes equality for men and women in political, economic and social spheres. Feminists, in general, believe that women are oppressed mainly due to their gender in the dominant ideology or patriarchy. Patriarchy is a system, which oppresses women through its social, economic, political institutions and cultural practices. Men, to maintain greater power over women have created boundaries and obstacles for women. Patriarchy also perpetuates the oppression of minorities and homosexuals. Various schools of Feminism like Radical Feminism; Liberal Feminism, Cultural Feminism and Socialist Feminism have advocated drastic changes in the power relation between men and women.

Feminist theory is an extension of Feminism that tries to interrogate gender bias through theoretical engagement. Feminist theories have developed largely under three main categories:

a. Theories having an essentialist focus, which include Psychoanalytic Feminism.

b. Theories aimed at defining and establishing a feminist literary canon or theories seeking to re-interpret and re-vision literature, culture and history. This branch includes Gynocriticism and Liberal Feminism.

c. Theories focusing on sexual difference and sexual politics. This group includes Gender Studies, Lesbian Studies, Cultural Feminism, Socialist Feminism and Queer Theory.

Simon De Beauvoir's study, *The Second Sex,* is generally considered to be the origin of feminist literary theory. Though Beauvoir's work is attacked for a flawed perception of her own body politics, it is nevertheless considered as a ground breaking book of feminist theory that interrogates the 'othering' of women by Western philosophy. However, merely unearthing women's literature did not ensure a prominent place for feminist theory. Hence, subsequent feminist theories were engaged in assessing and questioning number of preconceptions inherent in a literary canon dominated by male beliefs. Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Judith Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader* (1978), Elaine Showalter's *Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) are just a handful of many critiques that question cultural, sexual intellectual and / or psychological stereotypes about women.

17.2 Key Terms and Concepts in Feminist Literary Theory

A discourse in Feminism or a feminist interpretation of cultural text invariably touches upon certain terms and concepts that are popularized by various branches of feminist literary theory. A basic understanding of these terms and concepts is integral in the study of feminist approaches to literature and cultural expressions.

17.2.1 Feminist Critique

According to Elaine Showalter, Feminist Critique is an interpretation of text from the feminist perspective to expose clichés, stereotypes and negative images of women, generally focusing on male literary and theoretical texts. Feminist Critique also calls attention to the gaps in literary history that has largely excluded writings by woman. This approach which dominated feminist criticism first emerged in the 1970s and is strongly linked to the decade's political agendas. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, for example, connects the mis-treatment of women in fiction by Henry Miller and others to the oppression of women in a patriarchal society. Showalter suggests that by continuing to emphasize writings by men, the strategy of Feminist Critique remained largely dependent on the existing models of interpretation.

The main interest of Feminist Critique is to explore the extent of patriarchal ideology in literature, namely to explore the material forms of social, economic and political discrimination of women. Further, it examines the representations of women and homosexuals to show how gender, in contrast to biological sex, is culturally constructed and how, therefore, masculinity and femininity are depicted in literature.

17.2.2 Ecriture Feminine

This concept was mainly developed in the work of French feminist, Helene Cixous. She defines it as writing from / by the female body. Founded in part on Jacques Derrida's linguistic theories, it is a revolutionary concept that tries to explode the oppressive structures of the conventional, androcentric (male-centred) language and thought. According to Cixous, what makes *ecriture feminine* strong is the subversive and excessive character of female sexuality; like feminine sexuality, it is multiple instead of single, diffused instead of focused, oriented towards process instead of goal. Celebrating multiplicity and openness, *ecriture feminine* breaks apart the binary oppositions that organize masculine writing: head / heart, active / passive, culture / nature, father / mother. However, *ecriture feminine* has met with certain objections because it often seems to define femininity as a quality inherent in female biology and essentially opposed to masculinity thereby reinforcing the very distinction it tries to dismantle. Yet in French, the adjective *feminine* is ambiguous – referring both to biological sex (the female) and to cultural / historical gender (the feminine) – and this ambiguity is also present in the references to *ecriture feminine* by Cixous and others. Though it frequently invokes the images of the female body, *ecriture feminine* is sometimes defined as a product of culture and history as per instance, the idea that women learn to speak with and through their bodies more than men do. Thus, it can also be applied to describe a style of women-centred writing.

17.3 Gynocriticism

This term was first used by Elaine Showalter in her essay, "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979). It indicates woman as a writer, as a producer of textual meaning. Gynocriticism is considered as a branch of Feminism concerned with developing a specifically female framework for dealing with works of women. Gynocriticism aims to develop woman-centred tools to understand production, motivation, analysis and interpretation in all literary forms including journals and letters. Further, it also tries to identify feminine subject matters in literature written by women in an attempt to uncover in literary history a female tradition. Showalter argues that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experience,

thinking, evaluation and self-perception. Her objective was to develop female aesthetics.

Showalter says that there is no term in English or literary theory to describe a discourse that specializes in history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. She also spells out the concerns of Gynocriticism as follows:

1. To identify what are taken to be the distinct feminine subject matters in literature written by women.

2. To uncover in literary history, a female tradition.

3. To see how women writers emulate and find support in earlier women writers who, in turn, give emotional support to their own readers and successors.

4. To show that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experiencing subjectivity.

5. To specify the traits of a woman's language, that is, woman's style of speech, writing, sentence construction and discourse.

Showalter explains in her essay the scope and objectives of Gynocritics:

> Gynocritics is related to feminist research in history, anthropology, psychology and sociology, all of which have developed hypotheses of a female subculture including not only the ascribed status and the internalised constructs of femininity, but also the occupations, interactions and consciousness of women.

Showalter also defines the parameters and concerns of Gynocritics She says that it is concerned with women as producers of textual meaning and "Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problems of female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career, literary history, and of course, studies of particular writers and works" (p- 25)

17.4 Queer Theory

Queer Theory is a body of academic writings that has since the early 1990s attempted to redefine and destabilise categories of sexuality in the light of poststructuralist theory. It was rooted in the lesbian and gay activism of 1970s but now it is more skeptical

about inherent concepts of gay and lesbian as given identities. Queer Theory stresses the historical variability, fluidity and provisional nature of sexualities. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) is a key text in Queer Theory. The concerns of Queer Theory are also associated with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). One of the prime concerns of Queer Theory is the investigation of the paradoxes of homosocial male bonding and homophobia in English fiction.

Queer Theory is considered as a product of libertarian Lesbianism spearheaded by Paulina Palmer. The instructional acceptance of the term Queer Theory came from the 1990 Conference at the University of California. Queer Theory rejects female separation and instead sees an identity of political and social interest with gay men. It tends to endorse experimental forms of sexuality within Lesbianism such as Sado-masochistic role-play. Judith Butler, a prominent contributor to Queer Theory points out that identity categories like 'gay' and 'straight', "tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points of liberatory contestations of that very oppression" (pp 14-15). Taking this further, she argues that all identities, including gender identities are "a kind of impersonation and approximation … a kind of imitation for which there are no original" (p- 21). This opens the way to a postmodernist notion of identity that identifies with a range of different roles and positions. Further, what is challenged here is the distinction between naturally given, normative 'self' of heterosexuality and rejected 'other' of homosexuality.

Eve Sedgwick, in *Epitemology of Closet* argues the fluidity of identity including sexual identity. She maintains that gayness may be openly declared to family and friends, not so clearly to employers and colleagues, and perhaps not at all to banks or insurance companies. Hence, being 'in' or 'out' is not a simple dichotomy or once and for all event. Sedgwick is of the opinion that degrees of concealment and openness of gayness co-exist in the same life.

The consequences of this kind of argument are far reaching both for politics and literary criticism. Peter Barry explains the political implications:

> The political consequence is that when we claim that gayness, or blackness, is merely a shifting signifier, not a fixed entity, then it becomes difficult to imagine how an effective political campaign could be mounted on its

> behalf.   For in the name of anti-
> essentialism, we have removed these
> bottom line concepts on which all forms
> of 'identity politics` depend.
> (Barry: *Beginning Theory*: p-146)

The literary consequences of Queer Theory could be understood at two levels. Firstly, there is an obvious difficulty of deciding what a lesbian / gay text is. Secondly, a more specific literary consequence is that of anti-essentialism that debunks literary realism, as realism tends to rely upon notions of fixed identities and stable points of view.

Queer Theory also reworks the possibilities of what a lesbian / gay text is. Bonnie Zimmerman proposes three possibilities of a lesbian / gay text:

1. One, which is written by a lesbian (if so, how do we determine who is a lesbian, especially if we take the anti-essentialist line just outlined?)

2. One written about lesbians (which might be by a heterosexual woman or man, and which would also come up against the problem of deciding what a lesbian / gay person is in non-essentialist terms).

3. One that expresses a 'lesbian vision' (which has yet to be satisfactorily described)

Queer Theory foregrounds literary genres previously neglected, which significantly influenced ideals of masculinity or femininity such as the 19th Century adventure stories with a British Empire setting. It also favours texts and genres, which subvert familiar literary realism like thrillers, comic fiction and sexual fantasy.

17.5 Conclusion

Feminist Literary criticism by and large revalues women's experience. It also examines representations of women, gender and sexuality in literature by men and women. Furthermore, it explores the question of whether there is a female language and a woman-centred way of thinking, experiencing and expression.

17.6 Key Terms

Gender, Sexuality, Queer Theory, Gynocriticism, *Ecriture feminine,* Feminist Critique

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18

KEY CONCEPTS IN READER RESPONSE CRITICISM

Unit structure

18.0   Objective
18.1   Introduction
18.2   Certain Theoretical Assumptions of Reader Response Criticism
18.3   Interpretive Communities
18.4   Horizon of Expectations
18.5   Conclusion
18.6   Key Terms

18.0 Objective

The objective of this unit is to familiarize the reader with the basic concepts of Reader Response Criticism and Reader Centred Critical Theory.

18.1 Introduction

Reader Response Criticism, developed by a variety of literary theorists and critics in the 20th C, focuses mainly on Reader's Responses to literary texts. In this branch of criticism, the relationship between the reader and the text is highly valued and the text does not exist without a reader. Reader Response Criticism also evaluates interpretive communities. Interpretive Communities are groups of critics, who have agreed upon certain elements in the texts as being more significant than others.

Writers such as Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss make the core of the Constance School of Criticism that propagated Reader Response theories.

18.2 Certain Theoretical Assumptions of Reader Response Criticism

I. Reading is a performative art and each reading is a performance similar to singing a musical work.

II. Literature exists only when it is read; meaning is an event.

III. Literary texts possess no fixed and final meaning. Literary meaning and value are transactional, created by the interaction of the reader and the text.

18.3 Interpretive Community

Interpretive Community is a significant concept in Reader Response criticism. Stanley Fish observes that readers belong to same interpretive community with shared reading strategies, values and interpretive assumptions. This implies that the interpretation of the reader often defines how his community will look at a text. In Reader Response criticism, the reader and the interpretive community to which the reader belongs judge the work. This process breathes life into the text. Reader Response criticism might look at the way in which different interpretive communities value a text for historical purposes.

Stanley Fish coined the term 'interpretive community' in the famous essay, "Interpreting the Variorum." At the time, he wrote this essay, he was associated with affective stylistics, a form of criticism that gave priority to the reader in the critical process and focused on reading as a temporal activity.

Fish's theory states that a text does not have meaning outside a set of cultural assumptions regarding both what the characters mean and how they should be interpreted. This cultural context often includes authorial intent. Fish maintains that we interpret text because we are a part of interpretive community that gives us a particular way of reading a text. Further, he claims, we cannot know whether someone is a part of our interpretive community or not, because any act of communication that we could engage in to tell whether we are a part of same interpretive community would have to be interpreted, i.e., because we cannot escape our interpretive community, we can never really know its limits.

This idea has been very influential in Reader Response criticism, though it has also been very controversial. It is often interpreted as a relativistic standpoint that 'words have no meaning'. However, Fish implies that readings of a text are culturally constructed.

18.4 Horizon of Expectations

This term was used by Hans Robert Jauss to designate a set of cultural norms, assumptions and criteria shaping the way in

which readers understand and judge a literary work at a given time. It may be formed by such factors as the prevailing conventions and definitions of art on current moral codes. Such horizons are subject to historical changes, so that later generation of readers may see a very different range of meanings in the same work and re-evaluate it accordingly. Horizon of expectations indicates the purview of a text or a reader, the set of historically, psychologically and culturally conditioned assumptions or conventions that are implicit either in the verbal meaning of a text or interpretive strategy of the reader.

In his essay, "The Change in the Paradigm of Literary Scholarship", Jauss points out the rise of the new paradigm and emphasizes the importance of the interpretation by the reader, replacing the obsolete literary scholarship methodology, which involved the studies of accumulated facts.

Jauss's theory of horizon of expectations is a compromise between Russian Formalism, which ignores history and social theories, which ignore the text. He explains how the horizon of expectations is constructed in the text:

> A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the "middle and end", which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre on type of text. (Jauss: *The Change in the Paradigm*)

Further, Jauss explains that the horizon of expectations is found through the reader's life experience, customs and understanding of the world, which have an effect on the reader's social behaviour. Jauss also points out that the horizon of expectations is a crucial element in connecting literature and society. He argues, "the social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations …".

18.5 Conclusion

Reader Response criticism brought to the fore the dynamic role played by the reader in the production of meaning of a text. It also promoted an enquiry into the process of reading on the basis of the understanding of the reader's locatedness and community.

18.6 Key Terms

Horizon of Expectations, Interpretive Communities, Reading as Performance

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19

"THE PITFALLS OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS" – Frantz Fanon

Unit structure

19.0 Objectives

This chapter seeks to familiarize the readers with postcolonial theory, and help them identify its basic premises and key theorists and critics. It would help the readers to locate Fanon in the postcolonial legacy and one of his important works – *The Wretched of the Earth*. Finally, the readers would look at Fanon's argument in one of the chapters in the same work – "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness".

19.1 Postcolonial Theory – An Introduction

One of the several advancements in generating critical thought and knowledge suggests that human beings do not use language innocently – it invariably subscribes to existing patterns of thinking around the subject they talk about. These patterns could be roughly called 'discourses'. French poststructuralist, Michel Foucault, was the one to theorize the term. Postcolonial theory identifies the discourses which define colonization and its processes, and the experience of colonialism. It studies the impact on economic, political, social and cultural conditions of the colonized countries and the peoples. It also studies the nature of the existing power structures and hierarchies on the lines of gender, race and caste. Further, it studies the process of colonization and the conditions in which independence and thereby decolonization happens. It scrutinizes the legacy of colonial culture

even after the colonizers have left and how colonization and decolonization impact the interaction between the First and the Third Worlds.

Postcolonial theory is part of both literary and cultural theory. In other words, it is used in interdisciplinary ways across humanities and social sciences. Its typical preoccupations are: representation of the colonized, ways of exercising power, ways of responding to and resisting the colonizer and his culture and the hybridity that results after such an interaction between the two cultures. There exists a lot of diversity amongst what different thinkers and theorists identify as relevant issues of Postcolonial studies and what they have to say about them. For instance, some scholars use the term 'postcolonial' with the hyphen and some do not. Some object to the very usage of the term because it connotes the centrality of colonization in every discourse, instead of trying to break away from it and resisting it. The notion of map forms one of the central concerns of the postcolonial studies because location and geography are invariably tied to the notion of identity and culture.

19.2 Frantz Fanon

Frantz Fanon is a crucial thinker in postcolonial studies. He has theorized the processes of decolonization and psychopathology of colonization. His work revolves around the issues of black consciousness, identity, nationalism and its "pitfalls", decolonization, language as a tool of colonization and the impact of colonization on the black body. His work is well known to have contributed to studies across disciplines.

Fanon was born on the Caribbean island of Maritinique in 1925. At the age of 18, he joined the Free French Forces and later enlisted in the French army. His famed work *Black Skin, White Masks* is an echo of his experiences in the army. After a brief stint with politics, he studied medicine and psychiatry in France. Fanon practiced psychiatry in various hospitals in France and Algeria. After penning many classics which mainly dealt with the 'disalienation of the Black Man' and torture inflicted by the French forces on the Algerians, he succumbed to lukemia and died in 1961 in the USA.

Black Skin, White Masks is Fanon's first analysis of the effects of racism and colonization. It was originally titled "An Essay for the Disalienation of Blacks". It is a manifesto that presents Fanon's personal experience as a black intellectual in a whitened world and elaborates the ways in which the colonizer/colonized relationship is normalized as a psychology. He says that the processes of colonization blind the black man to his subjection to

the whites; projecting one to be white is to be the norm (and therefore normal). This only alienates the black man's consciousness and has serious repercussions on his identity and existence.

19.3 *The Wretched of the Earth*

The Wretched of the Earth was first published in 1961. It carries a foreword by the novelist and existentialist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre. In this book, Fanon takes further his earlier proposition that colonization conditions the blacks to think that black represents negative things while white represents civilization, and argues that to overcome this sort of conditioning, a new world order has to be established. He analyzes the role of class, race, and national culture in the struggle for national liberation. Now, that requires a drastic revolution, which in turn requires sheer violence. Fanon argues that this violence would destroy everything – not only the old civilized/barbaric binary but also identity formations like black and white. Thus, violence would not only destroy, it would also purify, as he demonstrates in his opening chapter "On Concerning Violence". It generated a lot of controversy because Sartre in his introduction was understood to have praised and encouraged the notion of violence present in the text. Several later theorists like Homi K Bhabha argue that Sartre's choice to highlight only the principle of violence in the text has led to the situation where all the other aspects of the text are ignored. For instance, Fanon's critique of imperialism is also inherently connected to the critique of nationalism. The fact that Fanon also talks about the mental health and role of intellectuals in revolutionary situations is seriously overlooked.

We must also understand that Fanon adopts a typical Marxist framework along with a psychoanalytic one. His very idea of a revolution is Marxist and further, he places the onus of the revolution on the peasants. It is the peasants, who can and should execute the revolution. After all, because they have been the rural underclass, they have seen colonization at its cruelest and most exploitative form. The peasants are also the ideal group to initiate the revolution because they are the farthest from the corrupting influences of the colonizer. Fanon, thus, points out an interesting detail that colonization, in order to exist peacefully, co-opts the colonized and it is the middle class or the bourgeois that is most vulnerable to this co-option. One should notice that 'bourgeoisie' is again a typical Marxist concept. He further points out that, though it seems that the bourgeoisie are in the forefront of the struggle for independence or decolonization, they benefit from the economic structures of colonization.

In "On National Culture", Fanon suggests that the idea of a nation is a mere notion. It is also dangerous because it again depends on essentialist, totalizing, fetishized, often middle-class-specific understanding of collective identity. It inhibits diversity and heterogeneity among the people, and mistakenly identifies all people as historically and culturally unified. The notion of the nation, thus, imposes unity where none may naturally exist, at least along the lines of culture, psyche and customs.

19.4 "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness:" An Overview

In this essay, Fanon identifies that nationalism often fails in its objective of achieving liberation for the whole of the nation. He argues that independence/decolonization happens but it does not get reflected in the aspirations of the whole nation. It is the privileged middle class that invariably usurps the colonizer's power and authority and colonizes the working class proletariat. Fanon blames the middle class for its "intellectual laziness". He says that this so called national middle class is incapable of any success because it only seeks to replicate the bourgeoisie of the mother country and in fact continues to be controlled by the same. The leadership promised before independence, while struggling for independence is only a lie. When independence is declared, this leadership does not do anything for the upliftment of the truly afflicted people – the working classes.

Fanon reviews the condition of the nation after the colonizers have left. He describes what happens to the people of a nation when it gains independence. He blames the existing governance and administrative structure for such a situation and gives examples to point out what is wrong and why. The essay is a sharp, polemical critique of what he calls the 'national bourgeoisie' and its ways of usurping power and of its ideologies. His main argument is that power just changes hands after decolonization – the colonizers are merely replaced by the national bourgeoisie. He highlights the failures in the national projects as undertaken by the national bourgeoisie and puts across one point – they are incapable of running the affairs of the country; they do not identify with the masses because their mindset is highly colonial/European/Western and they can only exploit the resources of the land to get rich. It is necessary to examine the essay in greater detail elaborating on different aspects of the argument and trace how it evolves.

Fanon opens the essay by pointing out that "History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism" He begins on a note of disillusionment. Because the educated classes in the newly

independent nations are not prepared enough to handle the situation, there are no practical links between them and the masses they are governing, they are lazy and cowardly – all these reasons lead to a series of misfortunes. The masses go through all evils when colonized and are tempted to join the cause of 'the fight for democracy' but it all only leads to the rise of neo-liberal universalism.

The national consciousness, according to Fanon, does not emerge as what it should have been – a projection of the aspirations and belief systems of all the people in the nation, what he calls 'the innermost hopes of the whole people' and 'the immediate and most obvious result of mobilization of the people.' Instead of representing these standpoints, national consciousness becomes 'an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty'. The reason for this heavy distortion is 'retrogression', that is, evoking the notions of the tribe/race instead of nation/state. These are again, in turn, a result of the inability of the middle class to rationalize their actions. Fanon defines middle class along three lines: 'intellectual laziness', 'spiritual penury' and 'profoundly cosmopolitan mould' of mind. In other words, this national middle class is an under developed one – primarily because it does not have sufficient financial resources. Its technological power does not match the colonizer's, a typical situation in which they are caught goes thus: the middle class (national bourgeoisie) is very small in number; university and merchant classes are small in number and are only concentrated in the capital, financers and industrial magnates are not a part of this group. Thus, this national bourgeoisie survives only through intermediate activities – it realizes that it must continue the system as set up by the colonizers – and thus appeals to the mother country or the former colonizer for help.

The ideal thing that an authentic middle class should do is 'to put at the people's disposal the intellectual and technological capital that it has snatched' from the colonial universities. Instead, it becomes anti-national – 'stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeoisie'. It mobilizes people to gain independence from the colonial system, but does not have any vision of the economic progress after decolonization because it remains ignorant of the economy of the country – it knows nothing more than 'an approximate, bookish acquaintance with its own country's natural resources. After independence, when the colonial constraints do not restrain it any more, it is unable to manage the economic affairs because it does not possess any managerial abilities. It can only depend on local/artisanal products and in many ways remains similar to colonial ways for handling production and economy. It remains dependent on traditionally grown crops. The way it markets it basic products remains the same. Nothing new happens in industrialization. The country continues to be a mere exporter of

raw material to Europe. While it gets its economy nationalized, it only gets transferred the economic power from the colonial hands to its own. It becomes an intermediary between the nation and other countries/international companies. And that is how it becomes neo-colonial – instead of transforming the nation intellectually, economically and socially, it transforms the nation into a capitalist enterprise. It becomes 'the Western bourgeoisie's business agent' because of 'meanness of outlook' and 'absence of all ambition'. An ideal national bourgeoisie must have the spirit 'of the inventor and the discoverer of new worlds'. To appease the Western countries, it would seek to expand the tourism industry – what Fanon contemptuously calls as setting up 'the brothel of Europe'.

Fanon, thus, records the failure of the state one by one – the big farmers insist that agriculture be nationalized and many more facilities be given to them but no modernization/development takes place. As Fanon says, "There will be no modernization of agriculture, no planning for development, and no initiative: for initiative throws these people into a panic since it implies a minimum of risk, and completely upsets the hesitant, prudent, landed bourgeoisie, which gradually slips more and more into the lines laid down by colonialism. The bourgeoisie never reinvests the profits it earns from the government ventures – instead it spends those profits on displaying their status symbols."

At another level gets initiated the process to procure the positions that were reserved only for the foreigners previously – 'an anxiety to place in the bourgeoisie's hands the power held hitherto by the foreigner'. That would be living up to its motto, 'Replace the foreigner'. This national bourgeoisie emerges from certain very specific areas who after independence 'show a primary and profound reaction in refusing to feed the other nationals' or 'the nationals of these regions look upon the others with hatred, and find in them envy and covetousness, and homicidal impulses. Old rivalries which were there before colonialism, old inter-racial hatreds come to the surface'. These obvious fissures and the lack of a united front do not let the independence fruitfully, failing to bring equality of spirit among all the people. Religious and racial rivalries are only two examples. Fanon argues that the national middle class is responsible for establishing a racial philosophy in the newly formed nation. He, again, is contemptuous of the class as a whole, and blames its laziness and imitative attitude for the same. This racism gets reflected in the way the new government and of course its members, the bureaucrats posit ridiculous questions to their own people – questions, for example, that ask if they are cannibals, or if they know what electricity is.

All the attempts in establishing bureaucracy and administration are fake, even the parliament. The end result, Fanon

says, is 'It does not create a State that reassures the ordinary citizen, but rather one that rouses his anxiety'. This happens through the processes of bullying and threatening and suppressing the citizen. Even when the focus is on making some sort of assurances to the people, they come out only in the form of prestige expenses like those of grandiose buildings. The interior and underdeveloped parts of the country are grossly neglected.

The so-called national leader, after becoming one democratically and lawfully, gets co-opted in the capitalist system – he begins to run the affairs of the country as if he is a representative of profit makers closely watching the developments in the country in order to exploit it to its fullest. It would be worth quoting Fanon at length here:

> In spite of his frequently honest conduct and his sincere declarations, the leader as seen objectively is the fierce defender of these (capitalist) interests, today combined, of the national bourgeoisie and the ex-colonial companies. His honesty, which is his soul's true bent, crumbles away little by little. His contact with the masses is so unreal that he comes to believe that his authority is hated and that the services that he has rendered his country are being called in question. The leader judges the ingratitude of the masses harshly, and every day that passes ranges himself a little more resolutely on the side of the exploiters. He therefore knowingly becomes the aider and abettor of the young bourgeoisie which is plunging into the mire of corruption and pleasure. (Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth:* pp.133-134)

In these lines, Fanon elaborates on power and the uses it is put to. This is what leads to a neo-colonial enterprise, especially when the former colonial power continues to exert a lot of influence and pressure on the government.

Fanon also identifies how the leader is also 'the most eager worker in the task of mystifying and bewildering the masses'. He keeps the people of his country away from reality, putting into force his ideological weapons – reminding them of the glorious past when the whole of the country united to liberate it, and then "expelling them from history or preventing them from taking root in it….

Today, he uses every means to put them to sleep, and three or four times a year asks them to remember the colonial period and to look back on the long way they have come since then."

Another revolution would start only when the masses are convinced that nothing has changed in their lives. Meanwhile, the party becomes lethargic because it has been doing nothing and added to it, there are fissures in the party. It gradually becomes obvious that even the army and the police are advised by the foreign experts. The former colonizer, thus, continues to hold the affairs of governance indirectly. Fanon puts it thus: "…scandals are numerous, ministers grow rich, their wives doll themselves up, the members of parliament feather their nests and there is not a soul down to the simple policeman or the customs officer who does not join in the great procession of corruption". The national bourgeoisie, however, is hardly affected by any criticism and opposition. The vicious circle continues where the country is stagnant economically. The leaders, on the other hand, get busy preparing for settling down elsewhere after they retire. They know that they cannot continue to be in power for ever but they still manage to make most of the time they have. The regime gets harsher in the process of suppressing discontent.

The middle class, thus proves to be 'useless' and 'harmful' and shouldn't be allowed to survive. The rule of the bourgeoisie is however only a phase in the development of the country. An authentic bourgeoisie would, on the other hand, create the conditions necessary for the development of the country and its peoples. Fanon blames the existing one for its shallowness, mediocrity, intellectual failure and mimicking attitude. It is impotent in that it fails to get any kind of concessions from the West, despite having strong connections with Western powers.

The concrete suggestions and solutions Fanon puts forth are: 1) the trading sector should be nationalized and 2) people should be given political education. As he puts it, 'The political education of the masses proposes not to treat the masses as children but to make adults of them'. This is in contrast to what the national bourgeoisie has been doing – 'holding people in check either by mystification or by the fear'. Fanon, thus, condemns them: "These heads of the government are the true traitors in Africa, for they sell their country to the most terrifying of all its enemies: stupidity. The tribalising of the central authority, it is certain, encourages regionalist ideas and separatism. All the decentralizing tendencies spring up again and triumph, and the nation falls to pieces, broken in bits."

True government is an organic formation – it looks at the hearts of the peoples, not at the diagrams and statistics; it is 'the

energetic spokesman and incorruptible defender of the masses'. It gets rid of everything Western and bourgeoisie. It does not resort to means like using 'obscuring language': "Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand. And if you think that you don't need them, and that on the contrary they may hinder the smooth running of the many limited liability companies whose aim it is to make the people even poorer, then the problem is quite clear…. We must explain what we are about. The people must understand what is at stake. Public business ought to be the business of the public."

Fanon talks about making space for expression: "The citizens should be able to speak, to express themselves and to put forward new ideas…. The government's duty is to act as a filter and a stabilizer…. The youth of Africa ought not to be sent to sports stadiums but into the fields and into the schools…. The capitalist conception of sport is fundamentally different from that which should exist in an under-developed country. The African politician should not be preoccupied with turning out sportsmen, but with turning out fully conscious men, who play games as well…. We ought to uplift the people; we must develop their brains, fill them with ideas, change them and make them into human beings…. A government which calls itself a national government ought to take responsibility for the totality of the nation…. the soldier should know that he is in the service of his country and not in the service of his commanding officer…. the government must guard against the danger of perpetuating the feudal tradition which holds sacred the superiority of the masculine element over the feminine…. a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness".

19.6 Conclusion

Fanon, thus, does not merely criticize the existing structure, but also gives concrete solutions to address the existing problems. The essay is remarkable for its sharp critique of neocolonialism and the way he conceptualizes new structures that would give rise to power gradually after the bourgeoisie phase passes away.

19.7 Questions

1. Comment on the various aspects of neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist attitudes of the national middle class.
2. Examine the condition of a nation, as Fanon describes it, when it goes through the bourgeoisie phase.
3. What are the solutions that Fanon raises to address the existing imbalance in the country under the national bourgeoisie.

4. How does Fanon describe the national middle class? Why is he so contemptuous of it?
5. Elaborate on the concept of nationalism as Fanon theorizes it.

19.7 Key Terms

Power, colonization, decolonization, Marxism, bourgeoisie, nation, neocolonialism, ideology, colonialism, imperialism, postcolonialism.

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20

SEXUAL/TEXTUAL POLITICS – Toril Moi

Unit structure

20.0 Objectives

This chapter attempts to present Toril Moi's arguments and theoretical position in detail with the help of chapter-wise discussion of the themes/authors/texts chosen by her. Her sensibility of the feminist theory and criticism is best understood in the ways in which she brings out the debates across the diverse schools of thought within feminist theory and criticism. The reader would be able to identify Moi's stance vis-à-vis each of the issues raised by her and develop an understanding of what informs her agenda.

20.1 Preface

Sexual/Textual Politics is written, in Moi's own words, as an introduction to feminist literary theory. It attempts 'to discuss the methods, principles and politics at work within feminist critical practice' (xiii). However, she does not claim to be neutral in her discussion of feminist writers, theorists and critics. She approaches the sphere of writings on Feminism with a critical attitude. This

means that she does not agree with anybody and everybody; she speaks from a position. For instance, she brings to our notice that there is hardly any critical debate about the methodologies used by different feminist writers. This absence of the debate can have serious consequences for feminist writing because it is only in the dialogue and debate that problems get addressed or there is a danger of falling under a totalitarian setup where only certain specific principles of a position get passed on as feminist principles, without taking into consideration the diversity of subject positions that several feminists occupy. Race and class, theoretical positions and methodologies matter immensely while voicing feminist concerns. In fact, the term 'feminism' has come to be replaced by the plural 'feminisms' precisely to recognize that there are numerous perspectives from which one may look at women's struggles or gender relations.

20.2 Introduction

In this introductory chapter, Moi discusses the attitudes of certain feminist critics (chiefly represented by Elaine Showalter) towards Virginia Woolf's works. She goes on to take a critical look at the assumptions behind the resisting, negative and dismissive attitudes (for that is how Woolf has been traditionally looked at) and finally dismisses them in turn as too simplistic. She concludes with her own 'different, more positive feminist reading of Woolf' (1).

To put it in one statement, Showalter (according to Moi) tries to evade some of the central conflicts of Feminism. Woolf's modernist style, the stream-of-consciousness, is seen as apolitical and of no consequence – it is seen as a failure to represent women's serious concerns. It is seen as 'extremely impersonal' and distracting because of her style that incorporates may voices. Showalter seems to claim that Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* uses 'many different personae to voice the narrative 'I' [and] results in frequently recurring shifts and changes of subject position, leaving the critic no single unified position but a multiplicity of perspectives to grapple with' (2-3). Instead of looking at this multiplicity as an advantage and a strategy, Showalter finds it 'elusive', 'refusing to be entirely serious'. Central to Woolf's essay is the concept of androgyny and androgyny is not seen as liberating. The problem with Woolf, according to Showalter is that she (Woolf) is not seen as articulating one perspective and her elusiveness 'is then interpreted as a denial of authentic feminist states of mind' (3). Ideally, a feminist position, according to Showalter, is the 'angry and alienated'. It is possible to read Woolf only after detaching oneself from its style and narrative strategy, and on doing that, one realizes that Woolf is not an important writer at all from the feminist point of view.

Moi's view is that if you detach yourself from the narrative strategy that Woolf uses, you miss the point and fail to read her in the real spirit. Moi goes on to identify the assumptions behind Showalter's positions in assessing Woolf's position vis-à-vis feminist agenda. These assumptions are: a text should reflect the writer's experience and if the experience is felt authentic by the reader, the text is valuable. On these grounds, Showalter would think Woolf does not transmit any experience to the reader because she does not have any – thanks to her upper class background – an upper-class woman, Woolf lacked the necessary negative experience to qualify as a good feminist writer. She is not seen to impart any relevant position and hence, she cannot belong to 'female mainstream'. Woolf, in this sense, knew very little about the question of female experience.

Another of Showalter's assumptions, as pointed out by Moi, is the preference for realism. Showalter agrees with Georg Lukacs in looking at realism 'as the supreme culmination of the narrative form' (5). Lukacs' position in turn is that of a 'proletarian humanist' who views any attempt in modernist-style writing as a 'distortion and dismemberment' of the human experience. Realism is valued by Lukacs because it speaks of characters in terms of types, that leads to 'a three-dimensionality, and all-roundness'. Showalter applies this approach to writings by women and judges modernist or formalist experiments in writing as 'fragmented, subjectivist, individualist psychologism', 'decadent' and 'regressive'. Showalter, of course, does not claim to be recognizing the class factor in her perspective on gender relations. Therefore, she is seen as simply borrowing Lukacs' argument to attack Woolf's writing which she then dismisses as 'empty sloganeering and cliché, stylistic tricks of repetition, exaggeration, and rhetorical question…irritating and hysterical' (7). Thus, according to Showalter, 'good feminist fiction would present truthful images of strong women with which the reader may identify' (7). She also dismisses Doris Lessing on similar grounds. What she is looking for is revolutionary art, which means 'the representation of strong, powerful women in literature' (8).

Moi has a different take – she holds that to search for a unified, single holistic perspective is like looking for 'a phallic self'; it claims to be 'autonomous' and 'banishes from itself all conflict, contradiction and ambiguity' (8). Such a search, critics like Showalter fail to see, betrays certain foundational principles of Feminism. To look for realism is to look for a 'given'.

Moi attempts to rescue Woolf from critics like Showalter and argues that Woolf is central to feminist concerns from a 'deconstructive' perspective. Woolf's writing, according to Moi, is deconstructive because it 'exposes the duplicitous nature of

discourse,' 'refuses to be pinned down to an essential meaning,' and has a 'free play of signifiers that will never yield a final, unified meaning' (9). Moi thus rescues Woolf through textual and linguistic theory and sees her as 'playful' in the sense of deconstruction. Moi says, "Through her conscious exploitation of the sportive, sensual nature of language, Woolf rejects the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the Father or the phallus as its transcendental signified" (9).

Moi also sees Woolf from a psychoanalytic perspective. An individual's experience cannot be seen only through the articulation of conscious thought – that experience is a result of several 'unconscious sexual desires, fears and phobias,…, a host of conflicting material, social, political and ideological factors of which we are equally unaware' (10). Therefore, it is very simplistic and reductive to look for a single unified self. Woolf's style needs to be seen in this psychoanalytical and deconstructionist perspective. This perspective makes one realize that to be detached from Woolf's style is not to read her at all; and looking for a single 'noncontradictory perception of the world' is a reactionary attitude that will not help feminist objectives at all. In order to read Woolf, one must recognize that she is not claiming for equality with men and also not claiming the superiority of women vis-à-vis men. She rejects the dichotomy between men and women, masculinity and femininity. This is a poststructuralist position, as articulated by Julia Kristeva. Moi, thus, calls for 'a combination of Derridean and Kristevan theory…for future feminist readings of Woolf' (15). It would then be recognized why Woolf's writings refuse to be conclusive and coherent and this need not be seen as a compromise, but an empowerment.

20.3 Chapter One – Two Feminist Classics

Toril Moi opens the chapter by mentioning that the 'new' feminists in the 1960s were politically committed activists who participated in the Civil Rights Movement and protests against the Vietnam War. She also points out that such connections between women's movement on the one hand, and civil rights and peace movements on the other, were not completely new. The connection existed in the 19th century too when women supported the abolition of slavery. She points out why the connections exist: "…the values and strategies that contributed to keeping blacks in their place mirrored the values and strategies invoked to keep women subservient to men" (21). She adds further: "…the same discrepancy between male activists' egalitarian commitment and their crudely sexist behaviour towards female comrades" (22) has been a consistent example of a betrayal that women activists have always felt.

Moi raises the similarity for a reason – to highlight the commitment and concerns of the feminist activists, to state that they have an agenda, to contribute to Civil Rights Movement and Peace Movement, being two of them. She then goes on to address the same question of agenda in the context of feminist literary criticism – what is it supposed to do? She answers that one immediate possibility is to extend this political action of the activists to the cultural domain, to work for institutional changes in the academia through the medium of literary criticism, to expose that the conventional 'good' literary criticism is "laid down by white bourgeois males" (23). Now, there are two options that can be considered to handle this idea of 'good' literary criticism: to reform that 'good' literary criticism or to reject it as reactionary and not care about such a thing. There are some like Lillian S Robinson who choose to take up the second option. However, a majority follows the first – they choose to work in the academia '…and are thus inevitably caught up in the professional struggle for jobs, tenure and promotion' (23). Moi calls this 'professionalization of feminist criticism' and goes on to point out its challenges. In this chapter, she deals with two feminist critics – Kate Millet and Mary Ellman. What follows is a brief account of how Moi discusses them.

Kate Millet – *Sexual Politics* (1969)

Moi's own text echoes Millet's. Because of the importance of the text, Millet is often called the 'mother' of feminist literary criticism. Moi calls *Sexual Politics* 'the world's best selling PhD thesis' (24) to highlight Millet's success in the discussion of the options available to feminist critics. Moi points out that Millet, in her book is concerned with three things:

1. What is the nature of power relationships between the sexes?

2. How has the feminist struggle evolved in the 19th and the 20th centuries? Who are its opponents?

3. What is the sexual power-politics behind these two? In this context, she discusses the works of D H Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet.

Moi highlights that Millet's is a reaction against New Criticism – a practice in literary criticism that ignores socio-cultural context of the text. Millet is not interested in 'authority and intentions of the author' (24) but in bringing in a perspective different from that of the author and pitting it against the author's to produce a conflict. This conflict effectively reveals the underlying premises of a work. This strategy of producing a conflict is seen as 'revolutionary' because it refuses to accept the authority of the author's voice. It is also seen as feminist because it rejects the role of reader as passive (read feminine) receiver of authoritarian discourse.

Moi also goes on to point out the problems in Millet's attitude in her text. One, Millet does not acknowledge her own feminist predecessors or writers who have written about Feminism. Her views on patriarchy are influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's but, no such acknowledgement is made. She avoids any significant discussion of Mary Ellman and Katharine M Rogers. Millet also largely deals with male authors (except Charlotte Bronte) and ignores Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton and Doris Lessing. She discusses John Stuart Mill and not Mary Wollstonecraft. Moi speculates that in this omission, it seems, '…as if Millet wants to consciously or unconsciously to suppress the evidence of earlier antipatriarchal works' (25). Moi's attitude is not that of dismissal. She evaluates possible reasons too. In this case, for instance, she notes that stylistic coherence could be a reason why Millet suppresses the mention of any precedents. Moi argues that Millet has one objective in her text '…to show how the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex' (26) and therefore every other details is subordinated to this thesis statement. If she goes on to highlight that other women have written about this sexual politics before her, she may not be able to discuss the enormous extent of this power because she would then be saying that it has been possible to revolt against this power. We must also bear in mind that Moi does not undertake a mere survey of feminist critics. She approaches every position with her own clarified position – as discussed in her "Introduction", she values a poststucturalist or a deconstructivist position. Seen from this perspective, the fact that Millet does not mention her predecessors is quite a drawback according to Moi. Moi believes that it is indeed very necessary to show "a few exceptional women have indeed managed to resist the full pressure of patriarchal ideology becoming conscious of their own oppression and voicing their opposition to male power" (26).

Moi also explains that Millet has also been careless in the way she handles Freud in her text. She reduces psychoanalysis to what Moi calls 'a form of biological essentialism' (27). Millet ignores the fact that Freud had revised his own position several times and that it is not possible to bring Freud down to any one single interpretation. She accuses Freud of using science (in his theories of penis envy, female narcissism and female masochism) to prove subservience of women after proving them to be a less sexed lot. Moi points out that Millet fails to acknowledge 'Freud's arguably most fundamental insight: the influence of unconscious desire on conscious action' (28). This means that 'not all misogyny is conscious, and that even women may unconsciously internalize sexist attitudes and desires' (28). Again, Moi also goes on to explain why Millet could possibly be doing this. She points out that if Millet's dismissal of the unconscious could be seen as empowering – because if women agree that unconscious is an

important factor involved in the subjugation of women, they may not see '…sexual oppression as a conscious, monolithic plot against women' (29) and maybe a compromise on the 'optimistic view of the possibilities for full liberation' (29). How can one fight anything if it is happening at the unconscious level? We wouldn't even be aware of it. If you see the unconscious as a factor in oppression, you do not see rationality as a weapon to fight against the patriarchal rule. And according to Millet, reason alone can lead to women's liberation. Perhaps that is why she attacks Freud and rejects his theory.

Moi goes on to highlight other drawbacks in Millet – Millet reduces everything to a binary opposition, she does not pay attention to the form of the texts and carries out only a content analysis; she chooses to use a simplistic theory that literature reflects society without answering how, and finally, she reads texts only by men writers and does not write about how to read women's texts.

Mary Ellman – *Thinking About Women*

Though Ellman wrote before Millet, her text was never seen as influential as Millet's. *Thinking About Women* is largely written for a general reader. It has been responsible for initiating research in the study of stereotypical images of women characters in literature and critical categories used by male reviewers while reviewing texts written by women.

Ellman's main contention is that we think in terms of sexual analogy, we not only use sexual terms but also have sexual opinions, and sexual categories influence all aspects of human life. For instance, Ellman says, "Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips" (quoted on pg 33). It would also be appropriate to quote how Ellman produces a spoof of a male review:

A male reviewer writes thus about a female author:

> 'Poor old Francoise Sagan. Just one more old-fashioned old-timer, bypassed in the rush for the latest literary vogue and for youth. Superficially, her career in America resembles the lifespan of those medieval beauties who flowered at 14, were deflowered at 15, wee old at 30 and crones at 40'.

Ellman mocks at it thus:

> Poor old Francois Sagan….
> Superficially, his career in America
> resembles the life-span of those
> medieval troubadours who masturbated
> at 14, copulated at 15, were impotent at
> 30 and prostate cases at 40 (quoted, pg
> 33)

Ellman thus demonstrates how women writers have been treated and with her spoof goes on to demonstrate how ridiculous that has been. For those of us who simply refuse to understand the necessity of Feminism or feminist literary criticism, Ellman, perhaps has the most straightforward answer. She goes on to point out that male writers present femininity in eleven stereotypical ways – formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy and as the Witch and the Shrew.

Moi calls it 'an ironic masterpiece' and has been seen as 'a funny feminist book' (35). However, she also points out the problems that have been noticed in the way it has been received by many feminist critics. They see her as using the strategy of 'evasiveness' or using an evasive style and call it a very feminine thing to do. However, as Moi points out, to tag Ellman's style as feminine is to misunderstand what she has been trying to do in text – Ellman has been trying to show "that the very concepts of masculinity and femininity are social constructs which refer to no real essence in the world, and second that the feminine stereotypes she describes invariably deconstruct themselves' (36). We see Moi highlighting a deconstructive perspective here. In other words, to call Ellman feminine would be to ignore the fact that no style of writing is essentially feminine or masculine and it would be to conform to the same sexual categories (or the metaphysical trap) that male reviewers have been using to 'evaluate' works by women. Ellman's is a position that defies against a conventional feminist position that 'feminists must at all costs be angry all the time, and that all textual uncertainty such as that created by irony must be explained in the end by reference to an underlying, essential and unitary cause' (39). However, Ellman, according to Moi, holds a Bakhtinian position in demonstrating that 'anger is not the only revolutionary attitude available to us' (40) and that laughter can be seen as empowering too. Ellman, according to Moi, has not been generally read in this light.

20.4 Chapter Two – 'Images of Women' Criticism

Moi notes that there are a huge number of studies that undertake to review how women characters have been represented in literary texts. A typical 'images of women' study would involve 'harsh criticism for the writers' creation of 'unreal' female characters'; sometimes women writers are accused of 'being worse than male writers in this respect, since they, unlike the men, are betraying their own sex' (42). The feminist critics using this form of criticism emphasize autobiographical connections, either with the author's life or with the readers', as a chief criterion in determining the merit of the text. 'The act of reading is seen as a communication between the life ('experience') of the author and the life of the reader' (4). Moi holds that though it is essential to make one's position clear and 'that no criticism is neutral', references to autobiography and personal references in a text seem to be 'narcissitic' and 'caricaturing' (43).

Moi points out that 'to study 'images of women' in fiction is equivalent to studying *false* images of women in fiction written by both sexes' (43) (italics original). Many feminist critics have a problem with the fact that fiction does not show many details or the lived reality of women – no female character is depicted as shaving her legs, for instance, when women are, in reality, seen to be doing so very frequently. Thus, the quarrel of such a criticism is that women are not shown as they really are, in the context of their slavery and drudgery and giving in to demands of beauty.

There are two main assumptions behind such a study – "the 'real person' as such is never seen to be conveyed in literature and to show 'reality' is the primary goal of literature. Moi calls this 'an almost absurd ultra-realist' position" (44). Moi has a problem with this position because it assumes that 'art can and should reflect life accurately and inclusively in every detail' (44). She thinks that it would be a lot more productive and challenging to see how writers select their material and what makes them choose certain themes and situations. She does not believe that literature should be checked for the 'real life' details. Writing should be considered as a complex process of its historical, social, political and ideological factors. Instead, this form of criticism assumes that all of us have 'equal and unbiased access to reality and writers choose an incorrect model of reality to depict. It fails to consider that reality too is a construct. According to Moi, the focus should be on exposing how certain writers give in to certain ideologies and not on checking how 'true to life' a text is. Otherwise, literature gets reduced to autobiography.

Another major problem with this form of criticism is that it uses the methodology of content analysis. In other words, it fails to take into consideration the formal properties of a text. Thus, it attacks modernism because modernism is seen to interfere with representing 'reality' 'as it is'. We saw similar Lukacsian comments in Moi's "Introduction" used to attack Virginia Woolf. Modernist style is seen to be operating in a vacuum, isolating a character from the 'reality'. It is seen to be too abstract and thus removed from everyday/concrete/practical 'reality'. It is a typical materialist approach to literature. This form of criticism is also against Formalism or New Criticism because it is seen as ahistorical. Both Modernism and Formalism are attacked because they are not seen as capable of any 'truthful' reproduction of life. However, Moi contends that it is possible to reflect 'reality' without using realism as a technique.

There are a few other inconsistencies within 'images of women' criticism. On the one hand, it asks for realism (which is equated with reality); on the other, it looks for female 'role-models' and strong female characters. Again, on the one hand, it wants to see the author's own experience and authenticity; but on the other, it wants women who are 'self-actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on men': "It is important to note here that although female readers need literary models to emulate, characters should not be idealized beyond plausibility. The demand for authenticity supercedes all other requirements" (46). Such an attitude is strongly normative or prescriptive – it lays down what one 'should' do or what is the ideal thing to be done; here two main things – comparison with author's life and use of sociological data to check the authenticity of representation. Moi points out that this form of criticism deals 'with literature from a kind of inverted sociological perspective' (47). To think about the female writers with a checklist of what they should do or should not, is to ignore the contexts in which they wrote. However, Moi concludes on a note of understanding the reasons behind such strong attitudes: "For a generation educated within the ahistorical, aestheticizing discourse of New Criticism, the feminists' insistence on the political nature of any critical discourse, and their will to take historical and sociological factors into account must have seemed both fresh and exciting" (48).

20.5 Chapter Three – Women Writing and Writing about Women

As Moi points out, feminist critics began to examine works of women writers from 1975 onwards by looking at the economics of the marketplace when they wrote socio-political environment, existing stereotypes of the woman writer and artistic conditions. In

other words, these critics argued that society, not biology, shapes women's literary perceptions. Moi discusses three works that follow this trajectory.

Literary Women (1977)

Ellen Moers, the author, goes on to map the undercurrent of women's writing in the context of mainstream writing. Moi finds it

> too engrossed in circumstantial details, too unaware of any kind of literary theory to function well as criticism, and far too limited in its conception of history and its relations to literature (53)

Moi finds it full of 'plot summaries, emphasis on personal details and biographical anecdotes' which may work as an introduction but is not enough for the mature feminist literary histories.

A Literature of Their Own (1977)

Elaine Showalter, in this book, charts out a history of English women novelists and divides this literary subculture into three major phases: Feminine (1840 – 1880), Feminist (1880 – 1920) and Female (1920 – 1960). The first phase is characterized by imitation of the prevalent styles of writing, the second phase by fight for rights and autonomy and third by a self-discovery, a turning inward. Moi acknowledges the book to be 'a veritable goldmine of information about the lesser-known literary women of the period' (55) but highlights that its theoretical assumptions are not defined. It does not state anything about the relationship between literary practice and feminist politics.

The Madwoman in the Attic (1979)

Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar study major women writers of the nineteenth century with an attempt to understand women's aesthetics and how the women writers responded to the mainstream male tradition. Gilbert and Gubar note that the women writers had to cope with the image of woman as selfless and angelic and had to subvert patriarchal literary methods through the use of the figure of the madwoman. The madwoman was 'the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage'… the women writers conjured up

> 'this mad creature to come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation'… 'In projecting their

anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures, creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines, women writers are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them' (59).

Gilbert and Gubar offer original readings of the work of these women authors. However, they too leave many theoretical issues unanswered. For instance, Moi points out their insistence on the identity of author and character is too simplistic and commits the autobiographical fallacy – the tendency to look for the author in the character. Secondly, such an attitude can only transform all texts by women writers into feminist texts. Thirdly, they think of anger as the only feminist position – to take a feminist stand, one has to be necessarily angry. All these lead to the establishment of the author as the transcendental signified of his or her text. Moi speaks from a poststructuralist perspective when she quotes from Roland Barthes "The Death of the Author" – to establish the author as the sole explanation of a text is very reductionist. If they argue that patriarchal ideology was a monolithic unified totality, then they do not answer how it was possible for women to write in such circumstances. Moi's take is that only a sophisticated account of contradictions within the patriarchal setup would undertake to answer such a question. She is more interested in the 'paradoxically productive aspects of patriarchal ideology' (63). She holds that Gilbert and Gubar undo their own attempts at understanding women's aesthetics when they begin to search for wholeness in the women's texts: 'Perhaps it isn't such a good feminist idea to start telling the whole, integrated and unified story of the Great Mother-Writer after all?' (67). Moi agrees with Mary Jacobus when she says that 'they form a tight lacing which immobilizes the play of meaning' (67).

20.6 Chapter Four – Theoretical Reflections

So far, Moi has been highlighting the critical practice in Anglo-American feminist literary theory. This chapter is concerned with the theoretical formulations and models that have informed the praxis in Anglo-American literary Feminism. Moi acknowledges that Anglo-American feminist critics have not been very receptive towards literary theory, because they see it as an abstract activity which has nothing to do with the material conditions of life, oppression, politics and struggle. Also, theory as a study in knowledge has been perceived as a male domain – since many of those theorists have been men. Moi chooses to discuss three feminist critics who come very close to reflecting on the theory behind Anglo-American feminist criticism.

Annette Kolodny

Kolodny in her essay "Some Notes on Defining a Feminist Literary Criticism" (1975) argues that treating women's writing as a separate, unique category would lead to hasty generalizations. She holds that gender is relational and not absolute or given and therefore advocates feminist comparativism. However, Moi contends that despite projecting a sensitive understanding of gender, Kolodny begins to use the model of New Criticism where a critic analyzes style and image and other formal properties of a text. Moi, therefore, holds that Kolodny pays very little attention to the role of politics in critical theory. While her attempt is to understand feminist engagement with aesthetics, Kolodny also advocates pluralism – using and recognizing diverse frameworks to understand gender in literature. However, in no way does she show ways in which such engagements and recognition do not backfire on Feminism.

Elaine Showalter

Showalter's theoretical model studies two broad things – woman as reader and woman as writer – 'feminist critique' and 'gynocriticism'. The former involves the study of ideology in the works of male authors. The latter studies history, themes, genres and creativity in women's writing. The purpose of gynocriticism is to learn women's experiences and feelings. But Moi points out the error in such a project – it assumes that women's experiences are not available in writings by men. Also, looking for authentic female experience is a traditional humanist approach. If the project of gynocriticism is to study the 'female' text in its history, anthropology, psychology and sociology, it excludes the study of signifying practices of the text. If Showalter's agenda is to develop an interpretation, she escapes very important theoretical questions (which she dismisses as 'male' theoretical activity) – questions that ask one to define a text, an act of interpretation, and an act of reading. Moi points out another inconsistency in Showalter – Showalter denounces male theorists like Lacan, Macherey and Engels, but approves of Edwin Ardener and Clifford Geertz.

What one could conclude is that overdoing theory interferes with a real understanding of women's texts. But what kind of theory is suitable and how much and by whom are all unanswered.

Showalter rejects the canon of great writers because this canon (of 'great' writers and their 'great' works) has ultimately been developed by male bourgeois critics. In her 'feminist critique', Showalter seems to create a separate canon and therefore does not do away with the very idea of hierarchy of some texts as 'great' and 'superior' and therefore, oppressive. While a feminist critic

would launch attacks on male writers, s/he would not do so at women writers. The reverence of women writers would be left intact.

Myra Jehlen

Jehlen in her article "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism" (1981) advocates an 'investigation, from women's viewpoint, of everything' (79). While her insistence on the relational nature of gender is applaudable, her call for return to the study of patriarchal canon does not respond to the question of 'how to avoid bringing patriarchal notions of aesthetics, history and tradition to bear on the female tradition' (81). Jehlen seems to advocate the need to decode the author's voice but a typical poststructuralist perspective as in Barthes would argue that the author's voice is no longer reliable, no longer the last word on the text, in any case.

To conclude, Moi holds that Anglo-American feminist criticism while recognizing the need to study a text in its socio-historical context, the need to challenge the apolitical method of New Criticism, it has had a very undefined, ambiguous relationship with criticism as such. Instead of pointing out that no act of criticism is a neutral or a 'value-free exercise' (85), Anglo-American feminist criticism has fallen into the same trap. There is hardly any evidence of new approaches and analytic procedures being developed in Anglo-American feminist criticism. The following statement summarizes Moi's stand:

> My reservations about much Anglo-American feminist criticism are thus not primarily that it has remained within the lineage of male-centred humanism but that it has done so without sufficient awareness of the high political costs this entails. The central paradox of Anglo-American feminist criticism is thus that despite its often strong, explicit political engagement, it is in the end not quite political enough; not in the sense that it fails to go far enough along the political spectrum, but in the sense that its radical analysis of sexual politics still remains entangled with depoliticizing theoretical paradigms (86).

This unambiguous statement is important to bear in mind while studying her discussion of feminist interventions in poststructuralism or vice versa. Clearly, she is enthusiastic about

French Feminist theory, because it questions the very notions of essences and absolutes and the framework of binary opposites.

Briefly put, French Feminist theory rejects all traps of rhetoric, discourse and language that do not problematize the notion of a stable self with a stable conscious and the act of establishing oneself as 'man' or 'woman'. It borrows heavily from psychoanalytical studies by Jacques Lacan and productively brings out possibilities of understanding self, body, gender and politics.

20.7 Chapter Five – From Simone de Beauvoir to Jacques Lacan

Moi hails de Beauvoir as 'the greatest feminist theorist of our time' (89) and points out that Beauvoir initially refused to identify herself as a feminist because she believed in the project of socialism and held that once Capitalism was overthrown, women would automatically be equal to men. Class affiliation, for her, was more important than gender relations. But later on, Beauvoir was disillusioned with Sartre's existentialist philosophy which she interprets as constructing woman as man's 'other'. She holds that 'throughout history, woman has been denied the right to her own subjectivity and to accept responsibility for her own actions' (90). She is made to internalize herself in the image of an object. She goes on to refuse 'a notion of a female nature or essence' (90).

While discussing Beauvoir, Moi points out that Marxist-feminist approach has not seen any serious study but also acknowledges that much Marxist-feminist criticism simply adds 'class' as another theme in Anglo-American feminist criticism instead of exploring new possibilities in the study of such an intersection.

Moi, then begins her discussion of French Feminism. The following statement perhaps provides one of the best introductions to French Feminist theory:

> Whereas the American feminists of the 1960s had started by vigorously denouncing Freud, the French took it for granted that psychoanalysis could provide an emancipatory theory of the personal and a path to the exploration of the unconscious, both of vital importance to the analysis of the oppression of women in patriarchal society (94).

French Feminist theory borrows heavily from the intellectual work of Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Lacan. The reader may feel lost in allusions and references and dismisses it as intellectualism but it must be recognized that French theory has given us new insights into 'the nature of women's oppression, the construction of sexual difference and the specificity of women's relations to language and writing' (94). One interesting feature of French Feminism is that its theorists have rejected the project of equality with men, because these theorists think it is an attempt to make women become like men.

20.8 Chapter Six – Helene Cixous: An Imaginary Utopia

Helene Cixous is concerned with 'the relations between women, femininity, feminism and the production of texts' (100), 'encourages non-linear forms of reading' and 'her style is often intensely metaphorical, poetic and explicitly anti-theoretical' (101). She declares that she is not a feminist because she thinks that terms like 'feminist' inevitably keep us caught up in the oppressive hierarchy of binary opposites created by patriarchy. For Cixous, feminists are women who want power and that in a way gives legitimacy to the existing patriarchal setup by claiming that women should also be a part of it. Cixous's strategy is different – she shows how patriarchy is based on binary thought where the feminine side is always seen as negative and powerless as in Head/Emotions, Sun/Moon, Activity/Passivity and so on. Her whole theoretical project is "to undo this logocentric ideology: to proclaim woman as the source of life, power and energy and to hail the advent of a new, feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes" (103).

Empowered by the tools of deconstruction like 'the free play of the signifier', 'defferal' and 'difference', her strategy is to expose the failures of binary oppositions and pleasures of open-ended textuality. She, then has clear positions to hold – all human beings are inherently bisexual, a feminist practice of writing can never be defined and so on. The hallmark of Cixous's work is her attitude of anti-essentialism and anti-biologism. However, as Moi points out, Cixous's theory is equally "riddled with contradictions: every time a Derridean idea is evoked it is opposed and undercut by a vision of woman's writing steeped in the very metaphysics of presence she claims she is out to unmask" (108).

For instance, she defines woman as someone who gives without a thought of return. Here, Cixous returns to the metaphysical definition of woman – something she argues against. She also goes on to hold that the 'nameless pre-Oedipal space

filled with mother's milk and honey [is] the source of the song that resonates through all female writing' (113).

Moi holds that 'Fundamentally contradictory, Cixous's theory of writing and femininity shifts back and forth from a Derridean emphasis on textuality as difference to a full-blown metaphysical account of writing as voice, presence and origin' (117). Moi adds:

> 'It is just this absence of any specific analysis of the material factors preventing women from writing that constitutes a major weakness of Cixous's utopia. Within her poetic mythology, writing is posited as an absolute activity of which all women qua women automatically partake. Stirring and seductive though such a vision is, it can say nothing of the actual inequities, deprivations and violations that women, as social beings rather than as mythological archetypes, must constantly suffer…. In her eagerness to appropriate imagination and the pleasure principle for women, Cixous seems in danger of playing directly into the hands of the very patriarchal ideology she denounces. It is, after all, patriarchy, not feminism, that insists on labelling women as emotional, intuitive and imaginative, while jealously converting reason and rationality into an exclusively male preserve' (121).

This critique essentially targeting anti-essentialism turning into essentializing act and targeting the exclusion of materialist perspective is a critique in general of French Feminist theory. But what Moi upholds is their attempt to locate the questions of feminist aesthetics while addressing the discourses in which these analyses take place. French Feminism questions categories and categorization but eventually seems to fail when it lets those very categories creep in.

20.9 Chapter Seven – Patriarchal Reflections: Luce Irigaray's Looking-glass

Like Cixous, Irigaray is also concerned with "a highly sophisticated feminist deconstruction or critique of patriarchal discourse and provides much inspiration for women in search of

new models for resourceful political readings of literary or philosophical texts" (129). Irigaray goes on to focus on mysticism as a domain used by women:

> Though not all mystics were women, mysticism nevertheless seems to have formed the one area of high spiritual endeavour under patriarchy where women could and did excel more frequently than men. For Irigaray, mystical discourse is the only place in Western history where woman speaks and acts in such a public way. Mystical imagery stresses the night of the soul: the obscurity and confusion of consciousness, the loss of subjecthood. Touched by the flames of the divine, the mystic's soul is transformed into a fluid stream dissolving all difference. This orgasmic experience eludes the specular rationality of patriarchal logic (135).

Moi points out that to define 'woman' as a mystic, is again necessarily to essentialize her. Like Cixous, Irigaray holds that women ought not to try to become the equals of men. The strategy that Irigaray upholds is that of mimicry of male discourse. Mimicking the men would reject male discourse because it would be challenging it at the same time. However, Irigaray fails to address the possibility that a woman imitating male discourse could be a woman speaking like a man, repeating his position. Irigaray does not give us specific strategies to imitate or mimic men, nor a theory of how this will work to women's advantage. If according to Irigaray, there is a woman's style that cannot be essentialized, why does she go on to define it in terms of its intimate connection with fluidity and the sense of touch?

The attack from the materialist perspective comes into the picture again with Monique Plaza, who holds that Irigaray fails to give us any materialist perspective on women in everyday life. She offers no way to address women's oppression in everyday situations. Her discussion is largely ideological/discursive:

'The notion of 'Woman' is imbricated in the materiality of existence: women are enclosed in the family circle and work for free. The patriarchal order is not only ideological, it is not in the simple domain of 'value'; it constitutes a specific, material oppression' (147).

To Plaza's position, Moi goes on to add:

> The paradox of her position is that while she strongly defends the idea of 'woman' as multiple, decentred and undefinable, her unsophisticated approach to patriarchal power forces her to analyze 'woman' (in the singular) throughout as if 'she' were indeed a simple, unchanging unity, always confronting the same kind of monolithic patriarchal oppression (147).

Similarly, Irigaray's analysis lacks historical orientation. She does not study 'the historically changing impact of patriarchal discourses on women' – for instance, what makes women's lives in the twentieth century different from those in nineteenth century? To conclude, 'Irigaray's failure to consider the historical and economic specificity of patriarchal power, along with its ideological and material contradictions, forces into providing exactly the kind of metaphysical definition of woman she declaredly wants to avoid' (147).

20.10 Chapter Eight – Marginality and Subversion: Julia Kristeva

While Anglo-American feminist criticism focused on the differences and similarities in the ways in which men and women communicate and on language-related issues like sexism, Kristeva's project calls for the study of the speaking subject as an object for linguistics:

> This would move linguistics away from its fascination with language as a monolithic, homogenous structure and towards an interest in language as a heterogeneous process…. The speaking subject must instead be constructed in the field of thought developed after Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Without the divided, decentred, overdetermined and differential notion of the subject proposed by these thinkers, Kristevan semiotics is unthinkable (151-2).

If one continues to study language in a typical differences-and-similarities approach, one will reach a dead end, as pointed out

earlier – masculinity and femininity would be presented as stable essences and this would hamper feminists' projects because it would prove that there are some language habits naturally available to women and alien to women. Kristeva holds that the context of an act of speaking is important as it gives us an insight into its intertextuality – where every utterance is seen as participating in a constant play of dialogue and referentiality. Studying language habits on the basis of gender can only lead to conspiracy theories where language is seen as 'man-made', holding monopoly over it, deliberately making women invisible.

As expected from a poststructuralist position, Kristeva's concept of gender is that it is relational. For her, there is nothing male or female, her model uses an understanding of 'a theory of marginality, subversion and dissidence' (165) which ties together many oppressed figures – the rebel, the psychoanalyst, the avant-garde writer, women and the working class. Again, coming from a typical materialist perspective, many disagree with this lumping together of so many subject positions for all of these figures are not necessarily central to the mode of production in the society in exactly the same manner.

20.11 Afterword: Politics and Theory, Then and Now

Moi wrote *Sexual/Textual Politics* in 1982 and all the chapters discussed above formed the text. In her second edition, she added an afterword to the book wherein she reflects on the agenda of her book back in 1982 and its reception since then. It is easily one of the most important parts of the book which clearly and directly warns us against looking at the text as a mere survey of feminist literary theory.

Moi establishes that her book was attempted to provide 'a serious and lucid analysis of key issues in feminist theories' (174). However, it was also an attempt to intervene in feminist debates. Personally, her stand is anti-essentialist; her argument is that one needs to acknowledge differences among women's groups – something that was seen as betrayal in 1982. Her primary task was to engage with the attack on theory at a time when activism was privileged over writing theory. Feminism, after all, was not born in the academic circles but in the activism fighting for basic socio-economic rights. As pointed out in the discussion of Anglo-American feminist criticism, theory was dismissed as an abstract male activity – the most political thing to do was to not bother about academics and a career in academics, to reject the university system and criticism as male projects and take to the streets.

Moi underlines that when she wrote this book, she wanted to deliberately enter the debate on the theory and explain that no matter what one does, one always occupies a theoretical position, that theory and politics are not isolated. In fact, it is necessary to know about as many theoretical positions as possible, because one maybe unconsciously following any of those: 'unacknowledged theoretical allegiances are far more difficult to change than those we are able to name and think about' (175). The text, thus becomes more of 'a sustained argument in favour of theory' (175) rather than a mere survey of theory. In the first part, where the discussion focuses on Anglo-American school, Moi is seen using the term 'theory' in the sense of 'literary theory' whereas in the second one on French school, it begins to refer to 'critical theory' – modernist, poststructuralist, postcolonial, psychoanalytical, feminism, queer theory and postmodern thought.

The text, in Moi's words, 'favours the freedom of readers over the power of writers' (176) because it voices its concerns against the autobiographical approach and intentional fallacy. It concerns itself with a psychoanalytical understanding of the subject.

Finally, the text/afterword ends with a defence of theory as a political act. As a theoretical argument, it is not limited to feminism alone; it addresses all the angry questions against theoretical projects. Moi recognizes that theory is dismissed as bookish, with no 'real life' impact, with no practical, visible effects. She points out that no human activity can always be enough to address an issue; theory does not hold a magic wand when it attempts to understand our oppression and so it cannot 'guarantee' that the right theory would give us the right solution and set all the injustices right. The poststructuralist perspective should be able to guard us against such attempts to look for guarantees as metaphysical traps: 'to ask for general justification is to ask for a metaphysical ground beneath our feet' (184)

However, there is one thing that theory can do – spread the knowledge of the injustice around us. One only needs to be clear on some basic questions – in what way is one's writing different from those in other disciplines? What is the political, ethical and existential value of one's work?

20.12 Conclusion

Moi's "Preface", "Introduction" and "Afterword" concisely establish what she has to say. She problematizes the New Critical/sociological/autobiographical approaches of Anglo-American feminist criticism and argues that they are too reductive,

and contradictory and only seek to replace the existing power structure with another one, where women would have more power. She is sympathetic towards French Feminist theory because it attempts to do away with the notion of gender as an essence and works strongly with the concept of the unconscious to argue that gender relations are not conscious conspiracies by men and men alone.

20.13 Questions

What do you make of Toril Moi's understanding of Virginia Woolf? What does it say about her theoretical position?

Examine Toril Moi's problems with Anglo-American feminist criticism with reference to any three of its texts/authors.

Explain in what ways poststructuralism informs Toril Moi's understanding of issues in feminist theory and criticism.

Discuss how Toril Moi establishes the relationship between politics and theory. How would you summarize her project in her text *Sexual/Textual Politics*?

20.14 Key Terms

Feminism, theory, poststructuralism, gynocriticism, subject, object, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, critical theory

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21

"INTERPRETING THE VARIORUM" – Stanley Fish

Unit structure

21.0 Objectives

This chapter would first introduce the readers to general frameworks in literary theory, especially Formalism. Then, it would orient the reader towards Stanley Fish and reader-response theory/criticism. Finally, it would discuss the main arguments in Fish's essay, "Interpreting the Variorum".

21.1 Introduction

Literary criticism concerns itself with generating ways to think about texts. It, for example, raises questions of a given text like: What is its genre? What are the tools at my disposal by means of which I can scrutinize its form, content and value? How have others interpreted the text before me and how can those interpretations help me? What are the sets of assumptions that govern each interpretation? Do we value certain kinds of works over others? What is the basis for such likes and dislikes? How can and do we arrive at the significance and value of a text? Or, as in some every advanced and contemporary thought processes – are notions of 'value' or 'worth' of a text innocent and natural? What do we do when we evaluate a work of literature?

Formalism was a school of literary theory and criticism that emerged in the 1920s, primarily in Russia and then spread to

Europe and America. It is typically characterized by a study of the form of the text – its genre, structure and other technical details and focus on how the use of technical devices enhance and impact the text. It places a lot of emphasis on the study of language and how it shapes a text. It is categorically seen as a protest against biographical approach to literature where the identity of the author was invariably brought in to explain the text. Instead of looking at the text via the author's assumed intentions, Formalism focuses on patterns of language use that characterize a given text – grammar, rhythm, rhyme, figures of speech, stanza forms, imagery and so on. It is crucial to note that Formalism recognizes a text to be a self-sufficient entity, something that is independent of author, his/her intentions and other factors that constitute the external world. As M H Abrams puts it, such an approach engages with "a detailed consideration of the work itself as an independent identity" or "an independent and self-sufficient verbal object."

21.2 Stanley Fish

Stanley Eugene Fish is an American scholar in literary theory and law. He has taught at the Florida International University, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of California, Berkeley, John Hopkins University, Columbia University and Duke University. He has authored more than ten books, and has written extensively on Milton, law and postmodernism.

21.3 Reader Response Criticism

As a school of thought, reader-response criticism emerged in the 1960s. It is an approach that focuses on the reader instead of relying on the text as an independent entity. It argues that the reader has an agency of his/her own, that his/her mental processes and emotional experiences and responses engage with the text. It does not believe in the text as 'a given'. According to this approach, readers interpret the text according to certain motivations and assumptions. If the earlier approaches were preoccupied with the figure of the author and then that of the text, reader-response criticism concerns itself with the issues and aesthetics of reception. It pays considerable attention to the identity, role and function of the reader – that were ignored in earlier theories or systems of criticism. It questions the idea that meaning rests within the text and the reader merely unearths it or receives it passively. It ideally holds the reader to be an active mechanism in meaning-making, relying on the bases of assumptions that s/he chooses to adhere to. In this sense, Formalism and its premises are only one approach to read a text. There are several other sets of premises and ideologies that the reader may rest his/her act of interpretation on. Formalism would typically work around questions like "What does this

sentence mean?" It is very obvious that the question presumes that the sentence contains meaning, an essence that can be captured or arrived at. On the other hand, reader-response criticism would ask the question "What does this sentence do?" That in itself acknowledges this encounter between the reader and the sentence. Depending on the answer to this question, on what the reader sees as action/drama in the sentence, s/he reads the sentence s/he has thus written. Stanley Fish, and other critics like Jane Tompkins and Wolfgang Iser were the first ones to advocate such a critical approach.

21.4 "Interpreting the Variorum:"An Overview

A variorum is a collection of different versions or editions of a single work with commentaries written by editors discussing the differences between the various editions, also largely trying to substantiate why one particular edition is more authentic than the other. Such a commentary would also involve the upholding of one way of reading over the reader, giving evidence from that specific edition that supports one interpretation over the other. In this essay, Fish discusses the variorum of Milton's poems and points out some basic problems with the ways in which it is interpreted by different editors.

Fish begins with remarking that the commentaries in the variorum manage to resolve many questions, but he is interested in the theoretical assumptions which contribute to the failure in situations where the questions are left unanswered. The editors have generally chosen to adhere to ally with one interpretation over the other. Fish suggests that these questions "are not meant to be solved, but to be experienced" and any effort to justify one interpretation would fail. He holds that the critics (commentators and editors) have been asking the wrong questions because they are based on wrong assumptions. He goes on to substantiate and demonstrate his point with the help of five examples.

The first example is the following sonnet:

> Lawrence of virtuous father virtuous son,
> Now that the fields are dank, and ways are mire,
> Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire
> Help waste sullen day; what may be won
> From the hard season gaining; time will run
> On smoother, till Favonius reinspire
> The frozen earth; and clothe in fresh attire
> The lily and rose, that neither sowed nor spun.
> What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,
> Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise

To hear the lute well touched, or artful voice
Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?
He who of those delights can judge, and spare
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

The gist of the poem is this: the speaker invites his friend in merry making – entertainment, a lively conversation, wine, music and so on – as a break away from usual work because it is winter time and nothing much can be done. However, the last two lines pose a great problem for the reader. There is a conflict surrounding the word 'spare' because it can mean two things – 'leave time for' and 'refrain from'. One meaning privileges such a merry making and advocates the idea of leaving time for experiencing such pleasures. Thus, the person who leaves time for "those delights" is "not unwise". On the other hand, the second probable meaning would say that the person who refrains from such pastimes is "not unwise". After Fish recognizes the controversy, he goes on point out why it arises. It is not a mere wise, playful use of the word "spare" but a whole lot of assumptions that choose to see that very word as problematic. The problem is not the word but the typical formalist approach that loads it many meanings. Fish says, "…evidence brought to bear in the course of formalist analyses – that is, analyses generated by the assumption that meaning is embedded in the artifact – will always point in as many directions as there are interpreters; that is, not only will it prove something, it will prove anything." Fish does not believe that the controversy is inconclusive but uses that controversy to prove that the ambiguity does not merely lie within the text. It lies in the minds of the readers, which is why some readers choose one resolution of the ambiguity over the other. He is not concerned with the question, "what does 'spare' mean?" Instead, he is concerned with the question, "what does the fact that the meaning of 'spare' has always been an issue mean?". He points out that "The advantage of this question is that it can be answered". The shift happens from looking at the word's "true" meaning (which is inconclusive) to understanding the processes whereby readers load the word with meanings. It would be interesting to read their different attitudes and standpoints into the meaning that they think suits the situation here. The word and the controversy speak volumes about how it is difference in perspective that is the bone of contention, and not language – language is just a symptom of the conflict among these perspectives.

Fish also points out that the sonnet has very smartly achieved a very important mission with the problematic use of the word. It has already put the onus on the reader to decide what is to be done with "those delights" – should they be given up or pursued? The controversy is the evidence that the reader, while interpreting the poem, has become a part of conflict; his/her

mediating processes have already been subject to play in the way s/he has agreed to interpret the word. The sonnet is no longer a dialogue between the two friends but between the poem itself and the reader. What adds to the brilliance of the poem (and Fish's argument) is the "evasive" nature of the last two words "not unwise". It is true that the person who can "spare" (leave time for or refrain from) such activities is "not unwise" but as Fish demonstrates, "neither can it be said that he is wise". Therefore, what is now at issue is not whether one should interpret "spare" in a positive way or negative way, or whether one should indulge in those pleasures or stay away from them; but what would the choice be seen as – wise or unwise. Therefore, the controversy does not end with the word "spare" but moves into conflict in categorizing the reader and then leaving the reader wonder if it is wise or unwise to indulge.

Fish thus demonstrates that reading is an experience and it is this idea of experience that formalism has been discarding while privileging dictionaries and grammars and histories: "to consult dictionaries, grammars, and histories is to assume that meanings can be specified independently of the activity of reading. In other words, it is the structure of the reader's experience, rather than any structures available on the page, that should be the object of description."

Fish gives another example with the sonnet "Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered saints":

> Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
> Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
> Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old
> When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
> Forget not: in thy book record their groans
> Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold
> Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
> Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
> The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
> To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
> O'er all the Italian fields where still doth sway
> The triple Tyrant: that from these may grow
> A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
> Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

On the one hand, the speaker is seen to pray to God but on the other, he is seen to question God's ways of administering justice – how can he let his followers to be killed? The end of the poem is seen to be "an affirmation of faith in the ultimate operation of God's justice". However, if seen in the context of the astonishment over the fact that God didn't save the truthful, the last

lines can also mean "since by this example it appears that God rains down punishment indiscriminately, it would be best perhaps to withdraw from the arena of his service, and thereby hope at least to be safely out of the line of fire".

The third example is the sonnet "When I consider how my light is spent":

<div align="center">

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
Doth God exact, day-labour, light denied,
I fondly ask; but Patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, his state
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait.

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As Fish notes, the problem again lies with the last lines: "For some this is an unqualified acceptance of God's will, while for others the note of affirmation is muted or even forced … The object of impatience is a God who would first demand service and then take away the means of serving…" It is this context, Fish famously remarks: "The poem, says one critic, 'seems almost out of control'. The question I would ask is 'whose control?' " The point he is trying to put across is that the reader has to do "extraordinary number of adjustments" while negotiating with these last two lines. He holds that the lines are an indication of the speaker's complaint "Is that the way you operate, God, denying light, but exacting labour? – but even as that interpretation emerges, the poet withdraws from it by inserting the adverb 'fondly,' and once again the line slips out of the reader's control." Again, the 'character' of Patience in the poem is quite interesting. We do not know if these lines (if assumed to be uttered by Patience) are internalized by the speaker or he simply "listens to them, as we do". If the speaker is uttering these lines, the doubts are all resolved, but if these are the words of Patience, then the doubt continues. There are no punctuational or technical details validating any one perspective. The same problem applies to the word "wait": it can mean waiting with an expectation (and therefore, very involved in service) or just plainly waiting. What Fish deduces from again such an impasse is that though the critics acknowledge that the uneasiness in the poem and the fact that no meaning can be pinned down here, they fail to "make analytical use of what they acknowledge" because they do not operate on the mode of

experience. As noted earlier, reader-response criticism rests strongly on the notions of what it is to experience a text. The commentators and editors have tried to settle the conflict by using punctuation to make sense of the situation, the sense they identify to be primary or predominant, but that in itself is a symptom of an experience.

Fish then goes on to theorize his problems with the schools of thought or set of assumptions that do not recognize the reader as an active agent and his/her mental experiences and responses as the most important carriers of meaning: "Editorial practices like these are only the most obvious manifestations of the assumptions to which I stand opposed: the assumption that there is a sense, that it is embedded or encoded in the text, and that it can be taken in at a single glance". Fish calls such a position "positivist, holistic and spatial" which he discards for a "temporal" and "experiential" one. The problem with the former is that its goal is to arrive at a meaning and involves distancing from the text ("stepping back"), and "putting together" separate words or grammatical structures or whatever those technical details may be. Such a positivist approach considers the text to be self-sufficient and pays nothing beyond lip service to the reader's competence because s/he, it assumes, is only to "extract" meaning that is already there independent of who is reading the text. For Fish, readers are not "led to" meaning but "have" meaning. They have meaning because they indulge in a lot of mental processes: "making and revising of assumptions, the rendering and regretting of judgements, the coming to and abandoning of conclusions, the giving and withdrawing of approval, the specifying of cause, the asking of questions, the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles". Fish is thus against being static; he champions the cause of "a moving field of concerns, at once wholly present (not waiting for meaning, but constituting meaning) and continually in the act of reconstituting itself".

Fish continues with a much smaller example from Milton's *Comus*:

Bacchus that first from out the purple grape,
Crushed the sweet poison of misused wine.

Bacchus is the god of wine and is negatively associated with "revelry and excess" and the description of wine as "sweet poison" confirms the negative, disapproving tone here too. However, when we reach the word "misused" all the expectations built up earlier tumble down – because if wine is "misused", surely it is not the inherent flaw of the wine; rather the blame should rest with the people who misuse it. Thus, knowing or possessing the information about Bacchus already creates a bias in the reader's mind and Fish says that it would be productive if instead of settling down with a meaning that information (dictionaries and grammar) provides us

with, the readers ought to focus on what that piece of information does to us. The reader would recognize the debate in a more rounded sense of the term, without "stepping back" from it; and to recognize the debate is also to be a part of it. There would be no harm in thinking about the author's intentions but it is much more fruitful if that intention is located "in the succession of acts readers perform in the continuing assumption that they are dealing with intentional beings". In other words, it is imperative to become conscious of the fact that we look for intentions and that colours our interpretations of a text. What we would thus discern would be a consciousness of "descriptions of a succession of decisions made by readers about an author's intention: decisions that are not limited to the specifying of purpose but include the specifying of every aspect of successively intended worlds; decisions that are precisely the shape because they are the content, of the reader's activities."

Thus, neither the author's intentions nor the formal properties exist outside the mental or mediating processes of a reader and are not already present in the text. In another example from "Lycidas", Fish once again shows the same dilemma:

The willows and the hazel copses green
Shall now no more be seen,
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.

It appears that the lines say, "After Lycidas's death, willows and the hazel green copses shall not be seen fanning their joyous leaves to anyone's soft lays anymore." However, on a closer scrutiny, it becomes obvious that the willows and the hazel green copses will not be seen by Lycidas (unlike the earlier interpretation where they would just die and will not be seen by anyone) and they would not fan their joyous leaves to Lycidas's soft lays (but they would continue to do so to others' softy lays!). What just got demonstrated is this: "…rather than intention and its formal realization producing interpretation (the "normal" picture), interpretation creates intention and its formal realization by creating the conditions in which it becomes possible to pick them out …. or formal units are always a function of the interpretative model one brings to bear; they are not "in" the text." The line (as a formal structure) is not a brute fact but a convention. Similarly, "facts" of alliteration and grammar are conventions, not natural. Grammar or syntax is only one model of interpretation. The difference lies in the condition of being conscious, of acknowledging that one is making meaning or interpreting by choosing one model. As Fish says, "The moral is clear: the choice is never between objectivity and interpretation but between an interpretation that is unacknowledged as such and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself."

In the last part of the essay, Fish introduces one of his most important contributions to reader-response criticism, the concept of "interpretive communities": "Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions." This can be understood well, if we try to engage with a very relevant question: If meanings are made by the readers, then why do different readers read the same text differently or read different texts in a similar fashion or the same reader reads different texts differently? The answer lies with the strategies of interpretation and reading that one reader or a set of readers chooses to make use of. Different readers read a text like "Lycidas" in the same way; it is because they take two important and same "interpretive decisions" – that "Lycidas" is a pastoral and it was written by Milton. Both "pastoral" and "Milton" are interpretations. If a reader chooses to decide that "Lycidas" is a fantasy text, and other agree with him/her, it is a different strategy that is being adopted and therefore the interpretation of the text in this light would differ. One could similarly read a text like *Adam Bede* assuming or deciding that *Adam Bede* is a pastoral and is written by George Eliot who chose Milton as her model. Thus, though *Adam Bede* and "Lycidas" are two different texts, the interpretations based on this assumption would be the same. Thus, we do not read a "given" text, but we read texts "written" by us. We agree to read/write a given text in a similar vein and thus form an interpretive community. We read the poems/texts we make. When we choose to follow or execute different interpretive strategies, we produce different texts and even different formal structures.

21.5 Conclusion

Fish summarizes the essay thus: "If it is an article of faith in a particular community that there are a variety of texts, its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them. And if a community believes in the existence of only one text, then the single strategy its members employ will be forever writing it. The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," while actually speaking, each would perceive the text (or texts) according to its own interpretive strategies." If there is stability in interpretations, it is not because the texts are stable but the mental outlook of the interpretive communities is stable. And these communities change – they "grow larger and decline, and individuals move from one to another." This change is possible because the interpretive strategies in turn are not natural, given or universal, they are learned. Fish ends on a very interesting note: "…how can any one of us know whether or

not he is a member of the same interpretive community as any other of us? The answer is that he can't, since any evidence brought forward to support the claim would itself be an interpretation… The only "proof" of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in your community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: "we know." I say it to you now, knowing fully well that you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me."

21.6 Questions

1. What are the basic principles of Formalism? How does Stanley Fish counter them?

2. Why does Fish give importance to the figure of the reader in the process of reading? How is his position new and different?

3. What does Fish mean by "interpretive communities"? How does this concept relate to the argument in this essay?

21. 7 Key Terms

Reader, reader-response criticism, interpretive communities, literary theory, reception aesthetics, Formalism, New Criticism, criticism

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QUESTION PAPER

M.A. Part- II

English Paper – V

Literary Theory and Criticism

3 Hours   **Total Marks : 100**

N.B. : (1) All questions compulsory.

(2) All questions carry equal marks.

1. (a) Why does Aristotle regard both philosophy and history as inferior to literature? Discuss with reference to his views in Poetics.

OR

(b) While the Neo-Classical writers assigned an exalted position to 'reason', the Romantics regarded the 'imagination' similarly. Substantiate with reference to Wordsworth's "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads".

OR

(c) In "The Function of Criticism" Arnold states that the goal of criticism is 'to see the object as in itself it really is', free of polemics, agendas and preconceptions, in order to provide disinterested observation and assessment. Discuss.

2. (a) Evaluate the concept of "defamiliarization" and show how it helps to accomplish the form and techniques of a literary text as elaborated by Victor Shklovsky in his essay "Art as Technique".

OR

(b) The validity of Marxist literary criticism lies not in its historical approach to literature but in its radical understanding of history. Discuss with reference to Terry Eagleton's Marxism and Literary Criticism.

OR

(c) A deviation from the mainstream Marxist thought, Althusser's interpretation of state and ideology offers a comprehensive understanding of Marxism. Discuss.

3. (a) Modernism allowed enormous scope for experimentation which ultimately produced new genres, new literature. Discuss with reference Ortega ye Gasset's <u>The Death of the Novel.</u>

    OR

   (b) Evaluate Ihab Hassan's arguments for and against the postmodernist phase of history in the light of <u>The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Culture.</u>

    OR

   (c) Comment on Frederic Jameson's evaluation of postmodernism in contemporary Western society with reference to his "Postmodernism and Consumer Society".

4. (a) For Toril Moi, the concept 'Feminism' symbolizes a political discourse that underlies struggle against all forms of patriarchy and sexism. Discuss with reference to Moi's "Sextual / Textual Politics: Feminst Literary Theory".

    OR

   (b) 'The idea of a national culture and how such a culture may be created given these conditions of materiality and the vision that ought to guide those engaged, politically and culturally, in a war of national liberation is what informs Fanon's writing'. Discuss with reference to "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness".

    OR

   (c) How does Stanely Fish argue that the focus of the literary critic should be "the structure of the reader's experience rather that any structure available on the page"?

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