Master of English
4th Semester

COURSE : ENG – 403

CRITICAL THEORY :
PART 1 AND PART 2

BLOCK – I & II

Directorate of Open and Distance Learning
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ENGLISH
COURSE : ENG – 403
CRITICAL THEORY : PART 1 & PART 2

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ENGLISH
COURSE : ENG - 403

CRITICAL THEORY

CONTENTS

Block - I

Unit -I

Bakhtin, From Rabelais and his World (On Carnival)

Contents:

1.0 Objectives:

After completing this unit you will be able to achieve the following objectives. This unit will help you to:

- Provide a brief account of the life and works of Mikhail Mikhailovic Bakhtin
- Understand the relevance of Rabelais and his world within its literary and political context
- Explain Bakhtin's idea of Carnival, its relation with grotesque as well as the different viewpoints held by Bakhtin and Fraser in relation to theory of grotesque.

1.1 Introduction:

In this unit we shall examine the work of another prominent postmodern theorist, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin. Based on his famous work Rabelais and His World (1984), this unit shall specifically discuss his idea of the carnivalesque. As you will see, Bakhtin proposes his idea of carnivalesque as anarchic and liberating moments in which the world is turned upside down and thereby inverts the social, political and legal hierarchies of the world temporarily. It is also important to stress that carnival in Bakhtin's work is both a description of historical phenomena as well as certain literary tradition referred to as carnivalesque i.e. when the spirit of carnival pervades any work of literature it promotes the carnivalesque. While discussing the idea of carnival Bakhtin also highlights the relation between grotesque and the spirit of Carnival as witnessed in the medieval and renaissance grotesque. The renaissance and medieval grotesque are filled with the spirit of the carnival that liberates the world from all its gloominess and darkness and therefore the grotesque is an integral part of the culture of the folk humor and the carnival spirit. The discussion that follows will help us achieve a more detailed understanding of the idea of carnival as proposed by Bakhtin.

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1.2 Life and works of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin:

Mikhail Bakhtin(1895-1975) was a prominent theorist of discourse in the twentieth century. He was a Russian philosopher, literary critic and semiotician who was re-discovered by the Russian scholars only in the 1960s. Working under the shadow of Stalinism, issues of political resistance was one of the important traits of his work. He was refused his doctorate because of the controversial nature of his work on Rabelais, and subsequently sentenced to internal exile in Kazakhstan during Stalin's purges. When alive much of what he wrote was initially shrouded in controversy. Bakhtin was re-discovered when some students at Gorky Institute came across his book on Dostoevsky entitled *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (1984) and his dissertation on Rabelais that they found in the archives. His dissertation on Rabelais was published in 1965 and thus his famous work *Rabelais and His World* (1968) is actually his once rejected doctoral dissertation.

In his first major work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* Bakhtin developed some of the concepts which were to inform much of his works. His concept of 'Polyphony' meaning multiple voices is central to this analysis. He considers Dostoevsky's work as a site of different voices unmerged into a single perspective and also not subordinates to the voice of the author. The multiple voices have their own perspectives, their own validity as well as its own narrative weight in the novel. Here, he also introduced the concept of dialogism. Dialogism does not simply mean different perspectives on the same world but also involves the distribution of utterly incompatible elements within different perspectives on the same world. In his The *Dialogical Imagination,* Bakhtin extends his analysis of dialogism through the concept of Heteroglossia. Another important work by Bakhtin is *Rabelais and his world,* which shall be examined in the next section of the unit.

Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* published in 1968, traces the history of grotesque in European culture and literature by focusing in Rabelais' writings. Francois Rabelais (1494-1553) was a writer of fantasy, satire, the grotesque, bawdy jokes and songs. Rabelais interests Bakhtin because his work casts a retrospective light on the folk culture of humor and at the same time his novel is an immense tragedy of folk humor. Moreover by dealing with the work of Rabelais, Bakhtin also tries to highlight the positive aspects of the art of grotesque. To highlight how the grotesque proposes an alternative way of becoming in which the spirit of carnival have an important role to play.

In *Rabelais and his World,* Bakhtin propounded his widely cited concept of the carnivalesque in different works of literature. This literary mode shares a close alliance with the disregarding of authority and inversion of social hierarchies that are permitted in many cultures during the season of carnival. This particular mode of presentation finds its way in different works of literature by introducing diverse voices from social levels that freely mock and subverts authority, flout social norms by ribaldry and exhibit various ways of profaning what is regarded as sacrosanct. It is the carnival's power to overthrow, though temporarily, the rigid social hierarchies that attracts Bakhtin to the carnival form. And according to him, to explain this there can be no better writer then Rabelais because he claims that in Rabelais it is for the last time one sees the possibility of incorporating into literature the collective chthonian impulse to carnival (Bakhtin,xii).

1.3 Bakhtin's idea of Carnival:

Bakhtin's theory of carnival as it is developed in his seminal work *Rabelais and his World* has impacted on a variety of disciplines. Although the concept is completely literary, he claims a historical

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underpinning to it by tracing the occurrence of the carnivalesque in ancient, medieval and renaissance writers. Carnival embodies a popular folk based culture whose defining feature is its irrelevant antipathy to the official and hierarchical structure of everyday life. Carnival is an assertion of freedom where all people participated to bring about a temporary liberation from the established order of life. The inherent feature of carnival that attracts Bakhtin is its emphatic and purposeful "heteroglossia" as well as its multiplicity of styles.

Carnival was often performed in the public sphere like the street, alleys, market place, town squares etc. When talked about carnival as a performance, one should not confuse carnival with theatrical performances. Carnival does not know footlights and at the same time it is a participatory form of pageantry that saw no distinction between the actors and the spectators. People did not see or enjoy carnival rather they lived in it. During carnival time the only law that governed the people was the law of freedom and thereby there was no life outside it. To quote Bakhtin, Carnival

> ... has a universal spirit ; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants

One important characteristics of carnival is the role reversal where the public dressed up as kings and clergy and behaved like wise. All that was considered to be holy and held in high regard was debashed with ridicule without any real life repercussions. This alternative way of living through the act of play and laughter placed every individual on the same plane. Bakhtin characterizes carnival as 'the people's second

life, organized on the basis of laughter' (Bakhtin, 8), insisting that the laughter which gave form to carnival rituals freed them completely from all religious and ecclesiastical dogmatism. The main highlight of the carnival is that it is universal in scope and is directed to everyone including those who participated in the carnival. Carnival laughter is ambivalent because it is gay and triumphant and at the same time mocking and deriding. Distinct from other utopianism, Carnival is not based on abstract thoughts and hypothesis rather it's a physical utopian experiment which was enacted and performed both in body and mind. It is a medium to express collective frustration against the world. The utopian world that they create during the carnival is sensuous and bodily rather than intellectual. It temporarily reorganizes societal constructs through performances.

Bakhtin claims that in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance a boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. Bakhtin states that in the middle ages carnival played an important role in the lives of ordinary people. These people had a double sphere of life: the official and the unofficial. The first sphere was governed by the church and the feudal state and the second, was characterized by laughter, parody, songs and reversal of the official system. For him, the clown, the fool and comic rites subvert the official sphere dominated by the church and the state. During the renaissance, carnival played an important role in the lives of all class of people. They devoted about three months of a year to such festivities. In renaissance carnival, they celebrated the freedom that came from inversions in social hierarchies, suspensions of sexual restraints and the possibility of playing new and different roles.

Though carnival and carnivalesque have the same root, they mean two different yet related things. Carnival usually refers to an established

period in time where specific cultures engage themselves in a celebration of the world where the commonly held values of the world or the cultural milieu are reversed. Similarly, when this type of spirit is seen in any work of literature where they assail the unassailable, take fiction as truth or make magical the real truth by blurring the distinction between the two, it is then the work promoted the carnivalesque. Carnivalesque as a literary mode parallels the flouting of authority and temporary inversion of social hierarchies that, in many cultures, are permitted during the season of carnival. These subversive and parody traits are most prominently found in the works of Rabelais and Dostoevsky.

1.4 Carnival and the Grotesque

Bakhtin points out that the grotesque sees its origins from the culture of folk humour and the carnival spirit. The exaggeration of the body to be grotesque is also related to the carnivalesque. There are comic figures/performers, such as clowns, that contribute to the grotesque image. Aand thus he recaptitulates his views on the grotesque as follows:

> Actually the grotesque liberates man from all the forms of inhuman necessity that direct the prevailing concept of the world. This concept is uncrowned by the grotesque and reduced to the relative and limited. [...] The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness and all pretence of an extra temporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new possibilities. (Rabelais and His World 49)

According to Bakhtin, in Rabelais' work the material bodily principle i.e. the images of the human body with its "food, drink,

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defection, and sexual life" (Bakhtin,) in its exaggerated form plays a predominant role. For Bakhtin, this images are nothing but modified heritage of the culture of the folk humour. Bakhtin terms this as 'grotesque realism' where the "cosmic, social and bodily" elements are given an indivisible whole.

One essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation. Degradation is the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract and thereby transferring it to a material level, to the sphere of earth and body. The concept of "upward" and "downward" are limited to topographical meaning where "downward" is earth, and "upward" is heaven. Degradation has not only a destructive, negative aspect , but also a regenerating one. For instance, Earth is not only an element hat devours, swallows up (grave,the womb) but at the same time it is also an element of birth, of renascence. In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive:

> It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots, of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body. We repeat: the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. (Bakhtin, 19)

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The grotesque image in contrast to the classic image of the finished man, reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an unfinished man always in "growth and becoming". And this makes ambivalence another indispensable trait of grotesque realism. For him, grotesque is always a representation of unfinished metamorphosis of death and birth, of growth and becoming; It is frightening and humorous all at the same time. A more detailed understanding of Bakhtin's concept of grotesque and carnival will be carried in the next section of the unit where he refutes the theory of grotesque propounded by the German theorist, Wolfgang Kayser.

1.4.1 Bakhtin and Kayser's theory of the grotesque

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the grotesque has lost all its medieval and renaissance characteristics and considered as a vulgar comic genre or as a peculiar form of satire that was directed towards isolated and purely negative objects. This understanding of the grotesque is highly visible in G. Schneegan's book entitled *The History of Grotesque Satire (1894)* where he defines satirical grotesque as "always negative… the exaggeration of the abnormal, an exaggeration that is incredible and therefore becomes fantastic" (Bakhtin, 45). Here Schneegan fails to grasp the positive hyperbolism of the material bodily principle; the positive regenerating power of laughter. He sees merely "the negative, rhetorical satire of the nineteenth century, a laughter that does not laugh" (45, Bakhtin). His purely satirical interpretation of the grotesque is typical of the literary approach of the second part of the nineteenth century as well as of the first decade of the twentieth century.

Rabelais traces some basic characteristics of the modern grotesque image by dealing with German literary critic Wolfgang Kayser's work *The Grotesque in Painting and Poetry* (1957) which he

considers to be the "first and the only serious work on the theory of the grotesque "(Bakhtin, 46). While dealing with the theory of the grotesque he does not discuss the integral relation between grotesque and carnival and instead grounds his theory on the concept of existentialism. To this, Bakhtin states that the true nature of the grotesque cannot be separated from the culture of folk humour and carnival spirit.

Kayser defines grotesque as being gloomy and terrifying. This association of gloominess with the grotesque, according to Bakhtin, is an alien concept because the medieval and renaissance grotesque filled with the spirit of grotesque liberated the world from all that is dark and terrifying. Grotesque takes away all the fear and therefore is completely gay and bright..Fear is the extreme expression of narrow minded and stupid seriousness which is defeated by laughter" (Bakhtin,47). Kayser further identifies hostility, alienation, inhumanness to be essential trait of the grotesque. Stressing particularly on the element of alienation he claims that the groteseque is an alienated world where all that is friendly and familiar becomes hostile. In short terms, the world undergoes a change. In this context Bakhtin points out that alienation discloses the potentiality of different world, of another order and another way of life" (Bakhtin,48) which liberates man from the confinements of the of the apparent false unities that exist in the world; it liberates from the undisputable and the stable. Sustaining to its root culture of folk humor, the world turns into an alienated one to be destroyed and then to be regenerated and renewed. Here it also becomes important to note is that the new world is experienced by people both in thought and body. The bodily participation/awareness of the alternate world is of immense importance in the grotesque.

For Kayser, grotesque is only an art form that expresses the id. He does not use the term in a Freudian sense but that defines it as the alien power that governs the world, men, their life and their behavior.

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For him, the theme of madness used in the grotesque indicate the presence of some alien, inhuman spirit in the mad man. But Bakhtin defies the interpretation stating that the theme of madness in grotesque is used to escape the 'false truth'of the world so that one can view the world with eyes free of this 'false truth'. Grotesque is involved in liberating man from all its 'inhuman consciousness' therefore it cannot limit itself by the alien power of the id. Rather the grotesque which is guided by the principle of laughter and the carnival spirit "frees human consciousness, thought and imagination for new potentialities (Bakhtin,49); it is guided by the carnival consciousness and thereby the "id" is 'uncrowned' and transformed into a 'funny monster'. The abstract is brought down to the physical world.

According to Kayser, grotesque "expresses not the fear of death but the fearof life"(Bakhtin, 49-50). Bakhtin defies this statement by claiming that grotesque imagery never represents death as a negation of life but part of life as a whole. Death in grotesque is indispensable component of life,the condition of life's constant renewal and rejuvenation. On Fraser's idea of grotesque laughter , he formulates it as "laughter combined with bitterness which takes the grotesque form acquires the trait of mockery , cynicism and finally becomes satanic. He looks at the laughter as a negative element. To this Bakhtin adds that Kayser completely misses the gay, liberating and generating element of grotesque laughter.

From the above discussions, we see that by discussing Kayser's theory of the grotesque Bakhtin makes it clear that the grotesque can never be separated from the idea of carnival. For him, the grotesque in modern traditions has lost the true aesthetic nature because of its deviation from medieval folk culture. The depth, variety, and power of separate grotesque themes can be understood only by its relation to the

unity of folk and carnival spirit. As Baktin makes it clear that "if examined outside of this unit , they become one sided, flat and stripped of their rich content"(Bakhtin,51-52).

Check Your Progress

1. State whether **True** or **False**:

   a. Carnival is a sum total of different festivities and rituals that involve the subversion of the established order of life.

   b. Carnival is a permanent state of life.

   c. Grotesque is an inseparable part of the folk humour and the carnival spirit.

   d. Kayser considers grotesque laughter to be filled with cynicism and mockery.

   e. Bakhtin and Kayser share the same idea on the theory of grotesque.

   f. For Bakhtin, grotesque is the form of expressing the id.

2. In which book does Mikhail Bakhtin introduce his concept of Carnival?

3. What do you mean by 'carnivalesque'?

4. Name the nineteenth century writer who wrote the book The History of Grotesque Satire.

5. Name the book written by Wolfgang Kayser that discusses his theory of the grotesque.

6. Fill in the blanks:

   a. Bakhtin considers carnival as a _____ and _____ that stood beyond the official dom.

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b. Carnival was a _____ form of pageantry that saw no distinction between _____ and _____

c. Carnival is based on _____ utopian experiment.

d. In renaissance carnival, they celebrated the freedom that came from inversions in _____ , _____ and _____.

e. _____ is one important feature of carnival laughter.

f. The true nature of the grotesque cannot be separated from the culture of _____ and _____.

g. According to Kayser, the grotesque world is an _____.

h. Fear is the extreme expression of _____ and _____ which is defeated by _____.

i. Grotesque imagery does not represent death as a _____ but part of life as a _____.

j. The unity of _____ and_____ is important to understand the theme of grotesque.

1.5 Let us sum up:

In this unit, we familiarized ourselves with Mikahil Bakhtin's concept of carnival and its relation with the grotesque. He describes carnival as an anarchic and liberating period in time where the social, political and legal hierarchies are inverted temporarily. It is a universal phenomenon that included each and everyone who participated in it. Similarly, carnivalesque is the literary mode or practice in which diverse voices from different social levels freely mock and subvert authority, flout social norms by ribaldry and also exhibit various ways

of profaning what is regarded as sacrosanct. Moreover, Bakhtin also establishes how it is importantto link grotesque with the folk humour and the spirit of carnival to understand the actual nature of the different themes used in the grotesque. Thus, he makes it clear that the grotesque is inseparable from carnival culture and at the same time is more than any vulgar comic genre.

1.6 Key Words:

Heteroglossia : It is a Bakhtinian term which means the simultaneity of many levels of dialogues and languages. For Bakhtin, novels are the prime examples of what he calls heteroglossia. In the case of novel, the different voices from different social levels are given equal importance, thereby showing as the site of struggle, carnival and subversion.

Grotesque : Grotesque is used to describe different artistic forms that combined incongruous elements. In the recent time it is used to refer to anything unnatural, strange, absurd, ludicruous, distorted, wildly fantastic, or bizarre. It has often been identified as a sign of decadence.

Existentialism : It is a philosophy which views human being as a isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe. It conceives the human world as possessing no inherent truth, value or meaning and represents human life as a fruitless venture for purpose and significance. It begins its search from nothingness to nothingness and thereby the existence is both anguished and absurd.

Utopia : Utopia designates a class of fictional writing that represents an ideal, nonexistent political and social way of life. It is derived from Utopia (1515-1516), a book written by the Renaissance humanist Sir Thomas More which describes a perfect commonwealth.

The utopian world is generally superior to the present world or manifest exaggerated versions of some of its unsavory aspects, serve primarily as vehicles for satire on contemporary world and human life.

1.7 Suggested Readings :

Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*

Terry Eagleton's *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory and Literary Theory : An Introduction*

Ann B. Dobie's *Theory and Practice : An Introduction to Literary Criticism*

Pramod K Nayar's *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism.*

Possible Answers to CYP Questions

1. a. True b. false c. True d. True. e. False. f. False

2. Rabelais and His World

3. carnivalesque is the literary mode or practice in which diverse voices from different social levels freely mock and subvert authority, flout social norms by ribaldry and also exhibit various ways of profaning what is regarded as sacrosanct.

4. G. Schneegan

5. The Grotesque in Painting and Poetry.

6. a). Second world, second life. b) Participatory, actor, spectator. c) Physical. d) Social Hierarchy, suspension of sexual restraint , possibility of playing new and different roles. e) Ambivalent. f) folk humour, carnival spirit. g) alienated world. h) narrow mindedness, stupid seriousness, laughter. i) negation of life, whole. j) folk, carnival spirit.

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1.11 Model Questions:

1. Explain the idea of Carnival as propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin.

2. Do you think that Carnival is a universal phenomenon? If yes/ no give reasons.

3. What link does Bakhtin draw between carnival and the grotesque?

4. Show the different points of similarity and differences between Kayser and Bakhtin's theory of groteseque. Does Bakhtin agree with Kayser's understanding of the grotesque?

Unit- II

Foucault, "What is an Author?"

1.0   Objectives

1.1   Introduction

1.2   The evolution of Author as a concept

1.3   The properties of an "author-function" and its working through various discourses

1.4   The function of the "return to the origin" concept

       Check Your Progress

1.5   Let us sum up

1.6   Keywords

1.7   Suggested Readings

       Possible Answers to CYP

       References

       Model Questions

1.0 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to achieve the following objectives. This unit will help you to

- Explain the function of an author as developed by Foucault.

- Identify the change of the relationship between author and his work.

- Analyse how the function of an author works.

- Describe the changes and developments that can be seen through the roles that an author with and without his works have played.

1.1 Introduction

"What is an Author?" by Michel Foucault is originally a lecture on literary theory given at the College de France on 22nd February 1969 by the French philosopher. The essay directly concerns the relationship between author, text, and the reader and is mostly a response to an essay written by Barthes. The essay "The Death of the Author" was written in 1967 essay by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes. Here he argues the traditional notion of literary criticism where it is emphasized that the interpretation of a text should be free from any form of biographical context of the writers. Owing to the characteristic figure of an an author Foucault in his essay makes several arguments as to what kind of characteristics are needed to establish an individual as an 'author'. This text tries to find the function of an author and his role to form an idea without him being subjected to define his work through the lens of an established author but rather according to Foucault his work should independently determinative of the knowledge that he wanted to procure rather than his position as an author. The text thereby renders the idea of free flowing of thoughts. Foucault defines the function of the author and the concept of the author throughout the different

times of past, present and future. The essay challenges the authoritative function of an author and the interpretation of the work was based or given to be interpreted by the readers.

(Paul-Michel Foucault is one of the most important figures in critical theory. He was born on 15th October, 1926 in Poitiers, France and was educated at the Lycee Henri-IV, at the Ecole Normale Superieure where he developed an interest in philosophy. He was a major figure in developing the theories of Post-Structuralism, Postmodernism, etc.)

1.2 The evolution of Author as a concept

In the beginning of the essay, Foucault raises the question of the general functions of an author within any discourse and speaks of the ways, in which an author has been used by him in terms of the 'rules' or the principles in order to present the idea that he wanted to create by any respective author's work. He have used various other 'discursive' layers in his book *The Order of Things* when he used the terms of "natural history", "analysis of wealth" and "political economy" in its most general form. But the use of authors like Buffon, Cuvier, Ricardo was primarily through an ambiguous understanding of the ideas as it wit was understood that those writers' thoughts and ideas would cohere with Foucault's representation of thoughts. Foucault well understands the creation of confusion when he uses the names of the writers like Buffon or Marx as both of them are diversely different writers when it comes to understanding them through a personal viewpoint. But Foucault, states that by using the names of the writers, he wanted to bring into focus certain 'concepts' and 'theoretical relationship' that may interrelate to their work. He further talks of the allegations being made about his using of names like Linneaus and Buffon and further by placing Cuvier next to Darwin as it prescribes to make them belong to a 'monstrous family'.

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By not escaping such names of discursive practices like "natural history" or "political economy" he is trying to delimit the functions that may unite these varied ideas together to understand it more in a wider sense, but however he does realize that one cannot overlook the demand of a direct response about the author when it is Knowledge and literature or Theory of a concept, any literary genre or even a branch of Philosophy and the more concerned fact always remains about the author and his related works. Such an observation of a forcible related similarity between author and his work has been started since the days of portraying the 'visuality' of a character; that is the supposed hero in a story. In its most basic form, it is treated that the characteristic of a hero must match up to the biography of the author who writes the story, thereby forming a critical category called "the man and his work". But Foucault's attempt through his work give rise to the ways as to how, an author can be seen through the many perspectives of as an authority that can be individualized through the work that he writes and he finds a problem with such a development.

Foucault wanted to focus on the fact which dealt with the author's relationship with the text in a way which doesn't bind him only to the text but is able to produce an idea beyond the text. In this sense Foucault wanted to explain how writing cannot be the vehicle to be used by the writer to convey his feelings to the reader rather, writing should be the flow of language without the idea of what and where the author stands in with regard to the idea that he is conveying. In this context, Foucault quotes Samuel Beckett, who in his book, *Texts for Nothing*, writes about the important functions of an author.

What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking.

Foucault sees this line as an expression of some of the major principles of contemporary writing. Such writing represents the factuality

of interplaying of signifiers, or on discussion which places more importance on the "acoustic" quality of the signfier that addresses it own self-references and about the language itself. Today's world of writing have become more self-explanatory and it has stopped over emphasizing of meaning to be expressed but what is more expressed is the meaning that is produced and brought out through the "exterior deployment" of the words. The usage of more signs to deploy the meanings has been in use and in due course of time, the traditional form of writing have transgressed and transformed to find and associate a new way of writing. Foucault's purpose of the essay was also to deviate and from any emotions related to the act of writing or the emphasis put on to represent a certain language rather his sole purpose was to discuss a space where the act of writing frees itself from the incorporation of any direct subject. Foucault goes on to discuss about the preconceived notions of knowing the interrelationship of writing and death that has been followed throughout the various genres of writing. But such a way of writing has drastically changed because of the appearance of the ways that certain modern writers follow. Before, while representing the interrelationship of death and writing, the writers like in the Greek narratives transcends the role of a 'hero' when he accepts an early death thus making his life valorized more by accepting an early death and in this way, death compensates of all his flaws. Taking further, on the theme of death and its representation in writings, Foucault talks of the characters like in *Arabian Nights*, where the narrator in the story keep on telling stories to avoid the imminent death. But such a stratagem has been stopped to be used for the modern writers like Franz Kafka, Flaubert, Proust. These writers have defined death in a more personalized way because at present times of writing the death of any character in the story or of the writer becomes a unique characteristic of their individuality. Writing at present times does not require the representation

of the writer himself rather it is the absence of him that makes the writer clearer of his thoughts. Writing now is concentrated of killing the self and the writers now are ready to be sacrificed or not appear at all throughout the narrative.

They represent life in its totality and such sacrifices happen in the life of the author and the characters on daily basis. For Foucault, in order to understand the true relationship of death and writing, it is only possible by eliminating completely the true characteristics of the Individual as a writer which is meant to provide the understanding of the conceptions without necessarily assembling one's own character to it. The disappearance of the author from his own writing has become the singular way to know about his individuality. The modern writers like them have opted to transverse the concept of death in their writing and Foucault speaks of the reinvention of the concept of death. Such a change of privileged emphasis from the position of the author has change the way of the writing. According to Foucault the task of the criticism while determining the task of the author and its relation with the author shouldn't be about reestablishing author's work to himself or to reconstitute author's experiences to be reflective in his work but it must concern with the structure of the work by the author and to have a clearly defined structure of the work that is discussed for its internal function working for to elucidate a certain meaning.

Foucault now shifts his discussion to understanding the concept of "work". What may be in general called as work? He questions the validity of a work which is not written by someone who is understood to be an "author" and is a mere individual. For instance what category of work does Marquis De Sade's paper of works fall in before he established himself as an author? Such a question has been raised because the book that he wrote named *Letters from Prison* was during his days in prison. He further questions that if an individual has not established

himself as an author; will his work be of any relevance or as such when a work can be entitled as "work". Along with the doubtful invocation of whether to call an individual author or not, Foucault calls in for an assumption that even if an individual is assumed to be an author, which of his work should be treated of as important and of relevance. For example: Friedrich Nietzsche is one of those writers who have written a large number of works, but the question arises among all of the works that he has written which are the ones the ones that should be published and given the status of "work" after his death. This is a question that is in need of a required framework because after Nietzsche's death is it possible to publish all his works which are still merely in the form of drafts and the notes which may include certain 'aphorisms'. For example there might be many reminders of many trivial things like an appointment, a laundry or an electricity bill. Such unclear thoughts for Foucault should be properly guided in through an established framework. Here, the question lies in the fact that which references in the life of a writer can be taken for inspiration to be claimed as work. Questioning the relevance to what can be called as a work, Foucault underscores the various problems that arises due to the ownership of an individual's work. He cites example of the works like *The Arabian Nights, Stromata's Clement of Alexandria* and *The Lives of Diogenes Laertes* where the primary sources of the books have not been established but still is popularly well-known in as critical works. So, even though at some points, many works have been appreciated without the author being a prominent figure but the problematic nature of the rules that unites and signifies a work is problematic. Foucault then goes on to explain about the detention of the certain thesis that detains him from using the measure of author's disappearance is the concept of *ecriture.*

'Ecriture' is the French word for Writing or refers to one or more specific senses used by French theorists. It originally was formulated

by Jacques Derrida to represent a criticism of the most significant binary between speech and writing in his essay 'Signature Event'. Ecriture here is a concept that speaks of in a self referential mode. The concept is used to bring out the factors that a text would provide with the notion of a temporality and the spatial dispersion of the ideas that it would inhere. But this very concept when used in writing has transposed the characteristics of an author to a position of anonymity. The nature of such scientific study of the work by the author will let it bring out a form of religious and spiritual mode of characteristics to the work. Furthermore by providing the work by an author, Foucault questions about the position of the work being transcended to a certain form of theological affirmation spiritual origin. He further argues that if writing is put on to the surface to explain out of a certain historical affluence, it means that the writing should be elucidated through certain implicit characterization by providing a meaning which transcends its basic meaning for what it stands for.

Foucault then explains the problems which is imposed due to the use of the name of the author and the problems that are created by the functional use of an author's name. A certain name of an author stands as an institution in itself especially when particular meaning is attempted to be inhered from it. It is observed that the name of a certain author provides with a category for him to belong into. Such a category is indicative of the concerned pattern that an author would like to follow. Foucault describes how a certain alteration of an author's work can bring a change among the likes of the people or them following the function of the established author. He puts into perspective, how the work of authors define their function as authors and any alterations made to the already established believe of their body of work changes the perspective of people with regard to understanding the author. He gives the example of a change that may be evident if one can establish

that some of the sonnets attributed by Shakespeare is actually not written by him. This may drastically change the general believe of how Shakespeare works as an author in a reader's mind.

1.3 The properties of an "author-function" and its working through various discourses

Foucault adds that the name of an author serves as an entity that is not limited to its singular function of a certain idea but it acts as a whole 'classification' that can differentiate itself from other texts and consequently can create a relationship among the other texts. In this regard, the writer quotes,

An author's name is not simply an element of speech.

An author's name does also characterize a particular manner of existence of discourse. For Foucault, the name of an author comes with a preponderance of a function that survives through ages. The body of work that an author involves himself tends to create a discourse which regulates in the form of culture that he comes up from. Such discourses are brought up by the homogenized character of work that several writers contribute through their works. For instance, writers like Hermes, Hippocrates and Balzac although are different generic writers but the vast body of work are brought together to create a common discourse. But according to Foucault there exist too, many discontinuities among the authors and their relationship with the discourses. Such discontinuities could be resolved by the use of originating subjects or the common usage of a language which would support the interpretation. Thereby, the name of an author in our culture functions as a certain variable which is known to the masses through his works and the certain discourse that he falls into. An author before defining its belongingness or function into a discourse, one must consider the various characteristics that may differentiate a certain discourse from other discourses.

Discourses according to Foucault, is created by the appropriation of rules and codifications which has been established since throughout the years. Such a discourse is created with exact appropriation of culture in order to differentiate through the various bipolar fields of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. While adapting to the appropriation of culture of the moment, a writer of the present age (starting from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century) had to accept the law of social property but at the same time, there was a change of duties which prompted the inclusion of a transgressive property within the work that a writer represents. Such a restoration of systematic practice of transgression creates a danger of writing on one side and puts a benefit of property on the other. Secondly, Foucault explains that the author-function has not been a universal or constant phenomenon in all the discourses. By this he means throughout ages, the author-function has received a different reception among the people, where at times the literary texts which included stories, folk tales, epics were accepted by people alongwith its anonymity by the people but through the Middle Ages the texts which were scientific in its genre was accepted only if the names of the author was indicated. The scientific works by Pliny, Hippocrates were accepted with its entire competency and was able to create a discourse by themselves. But during seventeenth and eighteenth century, a totally new conception was developed where the scientific texts were accepted basing on its true merit and competency. The theorems established by a author was accepted and welcomed when it provided with a coherent truth and proven with verification. But the literary texts on the other hand were not accepted without the mention of its author. Every text published during the period was made to have mentioned the author, place and the circumstances of its writing. The background of the work was as necessary as the owner of the work.

Furthermore, Foucault explains that the author function is not formed merely by the 'simple attribution of the discourse to an individual'. Rather, it is formed through a very complex mode of process wherein there remains a profound endeavor to create a rational entity called "author". The construction of an individual as an author involves many "realistic" dimensions alongwith the incorporation of his individualized creative power. But such aspects of the individual in becoming an author according to Foucault are mere projections of the readers which are psychologically guided, involve the comparisons of various works, the qualities that are deemed important, the various techniques the readers purposely select to continue and also the various exclusions of knowledge and techniques too. Such practices and choices of techniques among the readers varies from one particular time to another. In the same sense, there is a difference between the construction of a poet and a philosopher. Furthermore, there is a vast difference between the constructions of a novel of eighteenth century is different from that of a modern novel, but according to Foucault there remain many "transhistorical" constant reasons for the change of the image of an author in every age. Foucault explains it by giving an example from the traditional Christian methods of defining an author's name which was to derive into an authentic conclusion by referring to already existing texts.

Foucault explains it by giving an example from the traditional Christian methods of defining an author's name which was to derive into an authentic conclusion by referring to already existing texts. Saint Jerome according to Foucault is one of those people who have written in detail on author-function through the various texts and body of work that he has worked on. Foucault through the theologian named Jerome proposes the need of a detachment of the author from the text. He proposes that the text which does not support the general dogma for

which the author is known for should be eliminated from the list of the texts attributed to him. Further, if qualitatively certain text does not live up to the expected level of standard as compared to the other texts must be eliminated. Thirdly, a text should not be accounted if it is written in a different form, styles and phrases not found in other texts. Lastly, the events which show the subsequent ways and possibilities leading to the death of an author must also be omitted.

Although the modern criticism for Foucault does not fully prescribe the same rules but there are several similarities present in Jerome's notion of how an author works. The author through a text describes about the events that have taken place in the past and in certain age many changes have transformed into becoming revolutions. An author tends to become a symbol of Unity, who through his writing is able to produce and write of the various changes and evolutions that occurred throughout society. So, even though Saint Jerome's principles of author function might seem inadequate but it does bring out the modern notions of author functions to an extent. But it would also be false to refer each signs in a text attributing to the author. Throughout a text, many signs are attributed to the author but such signs according to Foucault have a different form of bearing on the texts with the author and the texts without an author. When a text is without an author the signs or the "shifters" refers to a real speaker and to an actual situation of events. It can be explained thus that when a certain discourse is linked to an author the shifters works in a complex way. While reading a novel written in the first person pronoun or various places presented in a localized way do not necessarily underscores the relevance to the writer but rather such details of work stands for itself as a "second self" which is always subjected to various changes and alterations. Thereby there should always exist a form of division between the author and the writer within the novel but there might be difference of opinion when one can

say such difference can only exist within the "quasi-discourses" like novel and poetry. But in fact for Foucault any discourse that supports the "author-function" can be characterized with such multiplicity of egos. Speaking of quasi-discourse, he speaks of the differences that builds up the composition of "I" in the mathematical treatise and the "I" which determines the body of work in the texts as the former "I" implies a certain special and unique individual who completes a certain work given at certain time but the latter suggests an instance and a demonstration that can be performed by any individual provided he or she is following the noted preliminary rules and the symbols are used for its function. Thirdly, there is also a possibility of the formation of a third type of "I" or ego which would encounter the various obstacles and problems faced during a certain investigation. The author-function thus can be carried out through the discussed egos.

After discussing the various forms of author function, Foucault is of the view that the "author-function" although is tied with certain laws and rules but it doesn't operate in a similar way in all the discourses and is subjected to change through culture, times and discourses. It is not defined by a plain subsequent procedure of attributing a work to its writer but it can be defined by a plain subsequent procedure of attributing a work to its writer but it can be defined by following a certain procedure and furthermore, it can be referred not just to a single individual as it can produce various form of "egos" while subjectively producing and referring to individuals coming from any class. Proceeding through the discussion of an author Foucault now terms an author who is the creator of a discourse not of a text or a book but of a theory, a tradition or even a discipline to be in a position that can be called "transdiscursive" position. Such authors are responsible of proliferating many other great texts from their works and contribute to a whole civilization with knowledge and power. Examples of such authors are Homer, Aristotle,

Church Fathers who have manifested knowledge of various kinds through their works. But according to Foucault, nineteenth century saw the coming of a singular type of authors who do not necessarily falls into the generic category of "great" literary authors or religious texts or can be essentially called the founder of science. Authors like Freud and Marx through their works like 'The Interpretation of Dreams' or 'Communist Manifesto' respectively possessed the potential of creating endless discourses. With regard to the literary discourses like novels, Foucault explains novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe do have its own function of presenting its influence to the creation of a genre called Gothic Romance in Nineteenth Century. However, the possibilities contributed by the discursive authors like Feud and Marx are quite different then the literary authors like Radcliffe. In case of Radcliffe, certain similar characteristic signs, figures, relationships and structures could be incorporated into other texts of the same form of genre of Gothic Romance but the work by the initiators of discursive practices tend to clear a space or creates a space where a writer can create elements more than the initiators themselves. They are able establish a paradigm which manifested into creating a genre of itself. Such an established paradigm of school of thoughts Foucault called it as "discursive insaturations". It is able to designate more analysis of various subjects through such discourses. Freud through his work on psychoanalysis not just influenced Karl Abraham or Melanie Klein but he made possible various other discourses through books, concepts and hypotheses into the wider prospects of works based on psychoanalytic discourse.

Freud through his work on psychoanalysis not just influenced Karl Abraham or Melanie Klein but he made possible various other discourses through books, concepts and hypotheses into the wider prospects of works based on psychoanalytic discourse. It might appear

to have a similar form of response that can be seen erupting from a work belonging to the field of science.

For example, the laws that Galileo created was after all later used by other various writers indirectly and it can be said that it is Galileo's unprecedented contribution to the scientific field he worked that was capable of creating many more discourses. But according to Foucault, there are some fundamental differences between the function of discursive practices and of any scientific endeavor. In a scientific program the function act can be said to have an equal position to that of the various transformative changes that may occur later. The initial program in any scientific endeavor is a single instance of a general phenomenon. There exists a form of possible change with regard to the transformations that a certain function act of science can create and can be rechanneled than the way it has been instituted. Owing to the differences, Foucault adds that the discursive practices works in a way which transforms into a many heterogeneous transformation of discourses form its initial discursive practice. It is capable of exploring many other applications and does not limit itself to the generalized view of the inaugurative value but rather possessed a derivative value to itself.

Another important distinction between a discursive practice and scientific program is that the initial aspects of a discursive practice are overshadowed by the various developments and transformations that take place later on. The initial concept of the practice diminishes and the validity of any new development is marked with respect to the initial concept of the discursive practise. But on the other hand, in the scientific discovery the newer developments are based on the structural and intrinsic norms already established in that particular space of scientific subject.

Thus, it can be understood that the various works or developments

of the initiators functions through the science or the certain practices that they tend to produce and it is science or other discursive practice that relate through the works of these initiators. Foucault now focuses on the concept of the "return to the origin" which marks the importance of returning back to the initial conception of any form of discursive practice or science. He introduces to the concepts of "rediscoveries" and "reactivations" where he marks its differences by stating that rediscoveries showcases the flow or analogy of the current concepts by revisiting or allowing the obscured conceptions long forgotten. For instance, Noam Chomsky, an American linguist rediscovered a form of knowledge used through many writers like Cordemoy and Humboldt with respect to the workings or manifesting a form of 'generative grammar' that evolved out by retrospection through the previous established concepts. On the other hand reactivation as explained by Foucault is the re-introduction of a certain discourse into a totally new domain, practice and transformations. An example of reactivation can be shown by the work of Michel Serres who through the history of mathematics have used this phenomenon to produce various other works on mathematical anamnesis. Thereby it can be understood that the term "return to" designates an initiation of many other discursive practices from one single conception. It can also be added that if we return to the initial concept it is not because of the constructive omission and as such the initiation of the concept in its essence is liable to its own distortions. But the distortions according to Foucault should be as such able to return back to the point of initiation. There occurs a barrier due to the omission of many things from the

1.4 The function of the "return to the origin" concept

Foucault speaks of returning or revisiting the initial concepts which seemed to face certain lack of attention. The readers tend to put

focus on the things which have been masked by the omission. In this action of revisiting a certain concept or initiation, two major characteristic can be observed which arises out of the new approach to the topic. Firstly, the changes that can be observed after a revisit is by having a perusal reading or knowing how to read a certain text carefully. Secondly, to understand the meaning of words not directly from the text but rather by observing the relationships of the words and the purpose of the use of the words that separates their meaning from other words. Although here Foucault assures the vantage of returning back to the initiation or discursivity but he directs with the fact that such a return does not follow a mechanical and historical process to make the prior concept seemed redoubled from its original form rather it is an important step to witness a certain transformed discursive branch of knowledge. He gives the example of books by Galileo, Marx and Freud, as such how it may be able to transform the already acquired knowledge of history by reading Galileo or it may help to render more knowledge on the field of psychoanalysis or Marxism by reading Freud and Marx.

Furthermore, Foucault explains that such return to texts imply the rebuilding of the relationship that exist between a text and its author. For instance a sudden rediscovery of a text by Newton or Cantor will not put a question to the established thoughts and ideas on Classical Cosmology but the return would mean the change of our understanding and of appreciation toward these writers. Thus, by reading books like *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* by Sigmund Freud makes the readers shift to a newer discursive study of the branch of knowledge and makes a form of relationship which can be seen between any fundamental concept and the mediate authors. Here mediate authors, refers to the author who has worked on a fundamental concept and have added more to the branch of knowledge through its study making it a discursive practice.

Concluding the essay, Foucault sites the importance of such attention given to the role of discussion of initiation of various discursive discourses. Such a discussion of discourses can lead to forms of 'typology' but such a form cannot be sufficiently discussed by observing the grammatical features, formal structures or certain objects of discourse.

Discourses like these needs wider investigation that would provide with more clear distinction of various discourses that may possibly evolve and the many relationships (or non-relationship) that an author can form remain one of such discursive property and with these investigations a new form of historical analysis of discourse develops. Foucault further talks about the necessary need of the time to investigate discourses based on its existence which is inclusive of modifications, variations that a culture may carry throughout, and its modes of circulation, valorization, attribution and appropriation. In this regard, an "author function" can also be responsible to show how an author through its numerous relationships within a text and outside of it can reveal the functions of the social relationships.

By discussing various other themes and knowledge through internal analysis of a work, Foucault put into representation the possible suspicion of a subject that an author creates and its creative role that it offers for according to him by delimiting psychological and biographical references in a work, it must not entirely evolve out of the subject rather, it must be able to provide the required intervention of the function that the subject can offer and to restore the originating theme of the subject. It must also be made clear thus that the role that a subject play in the course of creating a certain discourse, a subject's position and how does it appear, its functions and the rules the subject has to follow.

Check Your Progress Questions

1. State whether **True** or **False**:

   (i) The 'visuality of character' demanded the characterisation of the author too in earlier times.

   (ii) Foucault's purpose of the essay was not to deviate from emotions while in the act of writing.

   (iii) The concept 'ericture' has transposed the characteristics of an author to a position of anonymity.

   (iv) For Foucault, the name of an author does not come with a preponderance of a function that survives through ages.

   (v) The construction of an individual as an author involves many "realistic" dimensions.

2. Who have written on author-function with regard to the body of work by an author?

3. Which novel contributed immensely to the growth of the genre 'Gothic Romance'?

4. Name the two concepts that were introduced by Foucault within the concept "return to origin".

5. Whose work can be given as an example of 'reactivation' in the field of Mathematics?

6. Name the book written by Sigmund Freud which contributed immensely to the field of Psychoanalysis.

7. How many types of authors does Foucault suggest to exist? Name them.

1.5 Let us sum up:

In this unit, we have discussed the role of an author and how his name functions to contribute to a certain discourse or any branch of

knowledge. We also learn the importance of the relationship that is formed between the author and the text. The seminal work by Roland Barthes named the "Death of the Author" cannot be read in isolation but with connection to this essay by Michael Foucault. . The essay follows an intellectual tradition as shown by Barthes to interpret the work or significance of an author. The author as a figure is established as someone who has particular functional principle to follow within a culture. With the change of time and space an author's function can be seen as changing and the newer and wider knowledge within discourses have been manifested throughout. Positing on the role of the author-function Foucault describes the specific manner in which an author's name functions in a discourse and in a certain culture. Furthermore, Foucault posits that the function of an author changes with respect to the discourses. He argues that the word "author" stands for social and cultural force as the relevance of the writing of any literary works is more prominent to the uses of the society then of the writer himself. The value of any writing by an author becomes the end result of a category of work or sense of a body of work by following a certain literary style or adding to already established literary ideas. Foucault was acting against a formal reading of a literary work and of romanticized thoughts. He emphasized on the fact that Writing must be freed from the need to express and must be able to explain itself. Writing for Foucault possessed the right to kill the author and become its own master.

1.6 Keywords:

[1] Discourse: Foucault defined discourse as ways of constituting knowledge together with social practises, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Foucault adopted the term 'discourse' to denote

a historically contingent social system that produces knowledge and meaning. It is a way of organising knowledge that structures the constitution of social relations through the collective understanding of the discursive logic and the acceptance of the discourse as social fact.

[2] Ecriture: The term was formulated by Jacque Derrida which was the result of a significant binary between speech and writing. He conceptualised it as any system that is characterised by difference and absence. Foucault on the other hand sees ecriture as a way of understanding the concept of author.

[3] Marxist: Marxist is the one who supports the political and economic theories of Marxism propounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism is a form of socio-economic analysis that analyses class relations and societal conflict using a materialist interpretation of historical development and a dialectical view of social transformation.

1.7 Suggested Readings:

(i)   Roland Barthes: New Critical Essays.

(ii) Jane Gallop: The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time.

(iii) Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews

(iv) Michel Foucault: The Order of Things.

Possible Answers to Check Your Progress questions

1.   (i) True; (ii) False; (iii) True; (iv) False; (v) True

2.   Saint Jerome

3.   Ann Radcllife's *The Mysteries of Udolpho.*

4.   Rediscoveries and Reactivations.

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Model Questions:

1. Explain how author as a societal figure is responsible in bringing ideas and culture together.

2. Explain why Foucault puts special emphasis on the "return to origin" as a concept to show the function of an author.

3. Discuss the characteristics that are needed to establish an individual as an "author" as presented in the essay "What is an Author".

4. Discuss critically how the essays of both Barthes and Foucault are relevant at the present context of Contemporary Literary Writing.

Unit - III

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

1.0 Objectives

This unit encompasses a study of Jacques Derrida's essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' which he had presented at the John Hopkins University in 1966. The objectives of the unit are,

- To give an insight into the critical persona of Jacques Derrida as a literary theorist of the Post War era.

- To discuss the tenets of Poststructuralism as a theoretical school.

- To understand the link between the school of Poststructuralism and Derrida.

- To introduce the text 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'.

- To give a critical summary of the text.

- To critically discuss Derrida's ideas as reflected in the text.

1.1 Introduction

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) was a French philosopher who is famous as the pioneer of the theoretical approach called Deconstruction. He is one of the primary figures of the school of Poststructuralism and Postmodern philosophy. His concept of Deconstruction refers to a study of the relationship between text and its meaning. He views language as a complex entity having its own transcendental nature. He looks at language as a basis to arrive at the meaning that a text can convey to its readers. The theoretical approach of Poststructuralism to which Derrida is associated with is considered to be both a continuation and rejection of the approach of Structuralism[1]. The approach argues that knowledge does not come in systematic structures because culture and chronology are subjects to various interpretations of people. Additionally Postmodern philosophy goes against the ideals of the then ongoing

philosophical approaches starting with the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Postmodern philosophy argues that there is no objective reality and grand narratives of it, instead there is the construction of reality and there are increasing role of power relationships in it. Derrida's theoretical ideas are rooted in them.

Derrida's renowned critical works are *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, *Dissemination*, *Speech and Phenomena*, *Positions*, *Acts of Literature*, *Aporias*, *Ethics, Institutions and the Right to Philosophy* and so on. It is notable that most of his works have been translated into English from French. Some noticeable critical ideas of Derrida are deconstruction, differance, freeplay, arche-writing, metaphysics of presence, rupture, aporia and so on.

1.2 Poststructuralism and Its Basic ideas

Poststructuralism is a movement different from Structuralism. It derives from Structuralism—sometimes being a follower of it while at times being its strict opponent. Poststructuralists fall into certain groups—the contributors of the Tel Quel which is a French journal, the group of Gilles Deluze and Felix Guttari and later that of Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard. The Tel Quel group consisted of critics like Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. The primary highlight of Poststructuralism is to break the idea of the reality. It primarily seeks to dismiss the concept called structure journeying from society to culture to the domain of language. Derrida's idea of Deconstruction means to deconstruct the idea of the wholeness of reality and argues to split it into diversified interpretations. Julia Kristeva applied the poststructuralist thoughts into the genres of Feminism, Semiotics[2] and Psychoanalysis. Moreover as a movement in social structure, Poststructuralism views the role of power in the functioning of society. Michel Foucault looks at language as a role player in the exercise of power in society. According to him a text carries discourse which is

constituted by power politics. Additionally Saussure's idea of arbitrariness between signifier and signified is attacked by the Psychoanalytic ideas of Jacques Lacan. According to him language is a signifying chain where there is a play between words and meanings. Critically observing Psychoanalysis he argues that the 'unconscious is structured like language'. Poststructuralism also argued for the death of the author as done by Roland Barthes. He argues that the text does not refer to any specific meaning as soon as it gets published it becomes the property of the readers who are assigned the liberty to interpret it in their ways. Thus Poststructuralism is keen in spreading ideas like plurality, diversity, openness, play, decentering and so on.

1.3 Introducing Jacques Derrida as a prominent practitioner of Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a big umbrella term of which Deconstruction is a small part. It is an important element in Poststructuralism. Deconstruction is a prime concern of Poststructuralist thinkers. It is Jacques Derrida who initiated the term. According to him there is no center of everything. A signifier does not lead to a signified, instead it leads to another signifier which also does the same thing. Thus in place of a sign with the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified there is room for incessant signifiers. According to Derrida there is no specific meaning which is directed by a specific word; rather there is the deferral of meaning. There is a system of differances. Poststructuralism does not argue that all elements of human culture including literary all fall into the system of signs whose construction is structural. Poststructuralism therefore uses Deconstruction as suggested by Derrida to break the structure of society, culture and even literature.

As a Poststructuralist critic Derrida gives an interesting insight into meaning; according to him, meaning is deffered that is meaning is both present and absent at the same time in a text. Hence in his view,

there is always opportunity for multiple understandings or meaning in a text or the reality of the surroundings. Another significant concept while reading Derrida as a Poststructuralist critic is logocentrism which suggests that before the composition of a text there lies certain ideas or conditions or intentions. Arguing against this he says that while reading a text the search for the presence of a definite idea or intention which is supposed to have pre-existed before language and which can lead to meaning making process is intensely flawed.

1.4 Introducing the text 'Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'

Derrida's essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' is a remarkable paper that he had presented at the John Hopkins University on 21st October, 1966. The essay is remarkable because it had launched Derrida's idea of Poststructuralism encompassing decentering, freeplay, rupture and so on. In this essay Derrida concentrates on the traits of Western metaphysics and critically contemplates over the concepts of structure and center. The lecture is highly eulogised to be the fore-runner of Poststructuralist thought. This lecture of Derrida was later published as chapter of his remarkable work *Writing and Difference.*

1.5 A Brief Summary of the text

Derrida's essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' clearly defines and describes many of the remarkable Poststructuralist concepts. His catalogue begins with the idea of 'freeplay'. He argues that the concept freeplay refers to the employment of decentring process on a system without isolating the system from its whole existence. That means freeplay talks about decentring a system within its system. He argues that centering within a system leads it to discard freeplay. It suggests putting a principle on a system by making

it rigid and limited. On the contrary freeplay comes out of the application of desire, not any strict principle. Defining a structure Derrida argues that there are historic patterns and repetitions which have been diachronically there in that structure. However at the same time in these patterns there exist certain entities which can serve as substitutions for the centre of the structure. Herein Derrida presents his concept of 'rupture' or 'redoubling' by which he means that moment when this act of substituting the center of the structure takes place. When this rupture takes place these historic patterns and repetitions re-centers the structure by decentring it and thus paves way for the play of freepaly within the system of the structure. Freeplay thus goes against the conventional historic pattern. Derrida talks about the three major decentering criticism by Freud, Nietzsche and Heidegger and argues that they all use the language of metaphysics while decentering metaphysics itself.

Derrida mentions the theoretical ideas of Claude Levi-Strauss in his book *The Savage Mind*. He says that Levi-Strauss talks about two kinds of things—one that exists necessarily and another that take place contingently. Derrida argues that the events of the world exist contingently. Strauss' ideas of the Engineer and the Bricoleur are brought in by Derrida. He says that the Engineer works with concepts while the Bricoleur with signs. Derrida argues that concepts give transparent ideas about the concerned reality while signs open vistas for the interposition between culture and the surrounding. On the basis of this Derrida gives his insights on the structurality of structure. According to him a structure is neutralized or reduced as soon as it is given a center or a fixed origin. This centring of the structure limits the role of play within its periphery. Consequently the result is a totality oriented organised structure which Derrida disapproves of. He argues that since classical times it has been thought that in the world there is the presence of a center which is solid, static and omnipotent in its own ways. He cites Aristotle's idea of the 'Prime Mover' in this regard—the thought that in the world there is a

static power that is a Godlike entity of orderliness which is present somewhere. This classical concept of structure is called 'contradictory coherence' by Derrida. Contrarily he says that in the genre of decentering there is inherent presence of anxiety and lack of determination which is restrained from the fixity of meaning and interpretation. Derrida argues that totalization is a non-existent entity; and as soon as freeplay takes place the movement of supplementary condition occurs. Towards the end Derrida goes back to the ideas of Levi-Strauss and says that in his *Conversations*, *The Savage Mind* and *Race and History* the tensions inherent in the role of play are focused. In the manner of Nietzsche Derrida argues that there is irreducible plurality in the world and all naming is characterised by 'differance', a process where something is always under erasure. He argues that all men are bricoleurs working on signs and thus carrying the potential to be creative in respective ways. Hence Derrida posits that there are interpretations of interpretation of structure, sign and play.

Check Your Progress Short Questions:

1. Find out the **True/ False** answers:
   (i) Derrida abandoned the idea of Transcendental Signified.
   (ii) Difference is a term by Derrida.
   (iii) *The Savage Mind* is written by Jacques Derrida.
   (iv) Levi Staruss talks about the Engineer and the Bricoleur.
   (v) Free play refers to the free play of signifiers.
2. What is bricolage?
3. What does Derrida mean by erasure?
4. What is Derrida's idea of the structure?
5. What is freeplay?
6. What is Deconstruction?
7. What does Aporia mean?
8. What is arche writing?
9. What does Metaphysics of presence refer to?

1.6 Let us sum up

In this unit we have discussed the basic traits of Poststructuralism and the role of Derrida as a leading figure of the school. We have also got an introduction of the prescribed essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' covering the account behind its presentation and publication. We have also discussed a brief summarising account on the context and ideas in the essay. The unit highlights the critical ideas of the Poststructuralist critic Jacques Derrida.

1.7 Keywords

[1]Structuralism: A critical school in the human sciences originating in Europe during the twentieth century. The school looked at society and culture in terms of sign systems and their signification. The Structuralist view of signification is fixed which Poststructuralism critiqued.

[2]Semiotics: It is a science of signs. It was propounded by philosopher C. S. Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure.

1.8 Suggested Readings

(i) J. A. Cuddon & M. A. R. Habib: *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.*

(ii) Terry Eagleton: *Literary Theory: An Introduction.*

(iii) Patricia Waugh: *Literary Theory and Criticism.*

(iv) Jacques Derrida: *Writing and Difference.*

(v) Donald D. Palmer: *Structuralism and Poststructuralism for Beginners.*

Possible Answers to Check Your Progress

Short Questions:

1. (i) True

(ii) False

(iii) False

(iv) True

2. Bricolage refers to the act of creation from diverse elements which are already existent in the universe.

3. Derrida argues that in the process of reading there is the role of presence and absence. The presence of an entity relates the absence of another. Hence he says that there is always something which is under erasure. This he also calls the process of differance.

4. According to Derrida structure refers to the system in which there is the freeplay of various interpretations. To him, structure escapes the dominance of a fixed center.

5. When in a structure there is no imposition on the presence of a fixed center freeplay is given space in it. Freeplay decenters the system within its system.

6. Deconstruction is an idea which critiques the assumptions of metaphysics regarding the structure of an event or events in a text. It pleads for the decentering of centres in the system and thus seeks to highlight the complex state among various centers with a structure.

7. By aporia Derrida refers to the gap or impasse that takes place while reading a text. He says that when various ideas complicate or create puzzle while reading the same thing a state of aporia occurs.

8. Arche-writing means that language cannot be contained within the parameters of metaphysics of presence. Language carries the play of differences between various forms of it—the presence and absence of the ideas.

9. Metaphysics of Presence refers to the idea that language carries the presence of certain insights within it. Derrida denies it by saying that language at the same time can carry both the presence and absence of certain ideas. And thus meaning or centers can be diversified and open.

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Model Questions

1. "The center is not the center". Comment on Derrida's views on Structuralist limitations in the context of the above statement in his essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.'

2. Discuss how Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' articulates the break between structuralism and post structuralism.

3. Critically comment on the views expressed by Derrida in his essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'.

4. Comment on Derrida's reading of Levi Strauss in his essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the discourse of the Human Sciences.'

Unit - IV

The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious
Jacques Lacan

1.0 Objectives

The focus of this unit is the essay written by Jacques Lacan entitled 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious'. The objectives of the unit are,

- To give an apt introduction on Jacques Lacan as a practitioner of the twentieth century literary criticism.
- To discuss Psychoanalysis or Psychoanalytic Criticism as a literary critical school and its various facets.
- To evaluate Lacan's contribution to Psychoanalysis.
- To introduce the text 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious'.
- To present a critical summary of the text.
- To discuss the Lacanian ideas of Psychoanalysis as reflected in the text.

1.1 Introduction

Jacques Marie Emile Lacan (1901-1981) is a French Psychoanalyst and Psychiatrist of the twentieth century. His association with the school of Psychoanalytic criticism helped in the emergence of new insights into the genre. He was a Post-Freudian critic of Psychoanalysis. Moreover he was a Poststructuralist owing to which center or totality-based ideas of Psychoanalysis are not part of his critical bent of mind. He studies the development of an infant from six to eighteen months. He argues that the Mirror Stage[1] of the infant make his subjectivity grow inside him. His Psychoanalytical idea was directed by his thoughts on lack and desire in the human mind. He talks about three kinds of lacks or orders—the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. This helps in the growth of human as a rational individual. Moreover Lacan also studies the relationship between the unconscious and language and famously argues that the unconscious is structured like

language. It takes part inside the subjectivity of the self which can be called the other. The path breaking works by Lacan are *Ecrits*, *My Teaching*, *The Seminar*, *Feminine Sexuality* and so on.

1.2 The emergence of Psychoanalysis or Psychoanalytic Criticism

The key foundation of Psychoanalysis or Psychoanalytic school of criticism which started in the twentieth century is structured on the theories and writings of Sigmund Freud. This kind of criticisms argues for the perusal of literary texts on the basis of psychological development and conflict. Freudian Psychoanalysis posits that narratives in the texts are revelation of the desires and anxieties of the unconscious mind. According to Freud's Psychoanalysis since childhood humans are into the habit of repressing certain desires of them mostly sexuality because they are part of the society. This censoring leads them to subside certain desires, feelings and thoughts of them in their very tender age and this is how the psychological state of humanity is conditioned. Freudian Psychoanalysis says that literary texts are the expressions of repressed desires of humans, a reader of them might find familiarity in the events which leads them to a sensation which Freud calls 'Uncanny'. In his *The Interpretation of Dreams* he talks about how humans repress their desires and thoughts and studies the relationship between Shakespeare's Hamlet with his parents. Freud was a neurologist and his theorists are based on his studies on his patients. He also talks about the Oedipus Complex and Castration Complex which refers to the conflict oriented psychic relationship between parents and children. In addition to Freud, Harold Bloom also contributed to the genre of Psychoanalysis. In his *The Anxiety of Influence* he argues that every poet is directed by anxiety of his precursor poets who cast influence on him. Additionally Jacques Lacan also hugely contributed to the body of Psychoanalytic Criticism with his respective theories and ideas. His psychoanalytic views are

known as Post-Freudian. In his remarkable work *Ecrits* he offers both Structuralist and Poststructuralist analysis of Freud's Psychoanalytic theories.

1.3 Jacques Lacan and Psychoanalysis

As a practitioner of Psychoanalytic Criticism Jacques Lacan directs his attention to the imaginary which is the elected domain of binary oppositions and of the ego. It is the ideal representation of oneself dogged by three passions—love, hate and ignorance. Lacan argues that a little child after beholding its reflection on the mirror considers that to be the other, but later reveals the fact that it is actually a fake identity of itself. Thus a child learns to imagine things and in his imaginary stage Lacan studies the longing of human beings to identify himself with the mirror image. He discusses another stage— the symbolic stage. This stage means the sense of realization of the actual fact. Despite their longing human beings face the realization of the gap between what they desire for and what they actually are. It is the course of how to make children learn their reality. Here Lacan makes language enter. Human desires can become discourse only through the help of language. For the unconscious to get importance language is the highly essential element however there is one shared reality which helps in making coordination between imaginary and the symbolic stage. This is the real stage. It manifests itself in the unexpected and resists symbolization. Lacan talks about a formation of the unconscious which relates the subject to the inaccessible other through the mediation of the object.

As a practitioner of Psychoanalysis, Lacan lays emphasis on desire. He argues that the human beings inhabit in discourse. The function of desire is both to give a figure to the other's desire and to provide a glimpse at its impossible death end. The crux about desire is

that it is constitutively for nothing namable. Lacan calls it 'power of pure loss'. It is to be linked to the drive toward destruction which Lacan mentions as the death drive. He argues that there is no fixity of desire. The real is the site of missed encounters which Lacan calls 'object a' standing for the other.

1.4 Introducing the text 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious'

Lacan's 'The Insistence of the Unconscious or Reason since Freud' is an essay revealing the Psychoanalytical ideas of the writer. The essay was originally delivered as a paper on May 6, 1957 in Sorbonne. It was later published in Lacan's renowned book *Ecrits*. In the essay Lacan makes an analytical study of the relationship between speech, language and subject. The essay is divided into three parts— 'The Meaning of the Letter', 'The Letter in the Unconscious' and 'The Letter, being and the Other'. In the first section Lacan talks about the concept of the 'letter'; Lacan talks about the letter as a support that language offers to discourse. In the second section he contemplates over the relationship between the unconscious and the letter. He argues that the letter is the production of the unconscious. In the third segment he posits that language that is concretized in the form of the letter is not always successful totally to communicate because the correlation between signifier and signified is not definite and determinate.

1.5 A brief summary of the text

Lacan in his essay scrutinizes the unconscious by equating it with the structural pattern of language. He argues in the very beginning of the essay that the unconscious is wide area having inherent relationship with language. Introducing his key word of the essay 'the letter' as the material support to concretize subjects, he argues that language and its

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structure preexist and humanity enters into it the course of their growth. Thus language or discourse enslaves those who speak them. And though apparently the substance of the discourse appears to be the experience of humanity Lacan posits that the ways of experiencing takes place according to the tradition of discourse. Lacan then cites a formula which he presents to be the foundation of linguistics: S/s. He says that this 'Signifier over signified' formula having been based on the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified and the sign owes its existence to Ferdinand de Saussure. However Lacan doubts the separateness that Saussure assigns the signifier and signified to be and says that meaning is possible by its potential to refer to another meaning either synonymous or antonymous manner. Hence he replaces Saussure's example of 'the tree' and its referring to the physical tree and cites that of the words 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' and argues that both these signifiers can refer to the same signified. Thus Lacan argues that there is always a signifying chain in the structure of language. Depending on the usage of the word the bond between a signifier and as signified can be diversified and varied. He also says that meaning does not consist the chain of signifiers, rather it insists it. He means that meaning is open depending on its application and context. Hence to Lacan signifier and signified are not definitely separated so as to lead to meaning, instead there is the unstoppable sliding between them—the signified slides under the signifier incessantly. Lacan also argues that the signifying chains are both horizontal and vertical in nature. Hence he refers to the concepts of metonymy and metaphor and argues that a signifier makes meaning in these two ways. He says that when in the application of metonymy one thing is substituted by the other the connection between the two entities in the action of substitution lies in the presence of the signifier. Moreover in case of the usage of metaphor two signifies are actualized. Here one signifier stays concealed in the signifying chain. Lacan opines

that it is the letter or the material support which materializes the spirit of humanity. And this spirit refers to the unconscious.

Lacan's analysis of Freud's idea of the unconscious leads him to cite the latter's renowned work *The Interpretation of Dreams* where it is argued that dreams are the royal road to the unconscious. Lacan contends that Freudian analysis of dream allows him to look at it literally. Basing himself on Freud's idea of distortion in the functioning of dreams, Lacan argues that if dream is to be looked at as signifier the presence of two slopes working in this regard can be found—condensation and displacement. Condensation like metaphor refers to the diversified application of signifiers while displacement like metonymy is the substitution of signifier. The unconscious thus works within the ambit of these two slopes. Lacan formulates a new theory here which is similar to S/s, f(S)1/s. This transforms the occurrence of the signifier on the signified. He propounds another symbol which suggests the horizontal relationship between signifiers and signified, $f(S .. . S')$ S= S (-) s. Here the signifier is not definite about its relationship with the object of the world. There is also the lack of specified meaning in the symbol and thus it is suggested by Lacan that even in dreams there is no literal fixity of meaning. Lacan also symbolizes the metaphoric slope, f(S/S)S=S(+)s. This represents the substitution for signifier for signifier which leads to the meaning making process. It is intensely poetic. Lacan also brings in the famous Enlightenment utterance by Rene Descartes, 'I think therefore I am' and gives his psychoanalytical version of it and says, "I think where I am not. Therefore I am where I think not." As he argues that in the signifying chain a man is objectified.

In the third section of the essay Lacan takes Freud's discovery of the unconscious again and argues that to Freud the goal of the unconscious is that of harmony and reconciliation which Lacan challenges. He even in a celebratory manner talks about Freud's

discovery of the heteronymous nature of the human self. However on the basis of this he offers an interesting insight regarding the unconscious. He says that since humans carry heterogeneous nature in their identities, and this heterogeneity takes place nowhere but inside the human self only, the unconscious is nothing but a discourse of the other. Lacan praises Freud for his stupendous discovery of the split of the human self.

Check Your Progress

Short Questions

1. Find out the **True/False** answer:

    (i)   Lacan pursues a reading of Freud in the essay.

    (ii)   "I think therefore I am" is famously said by Rene Descartes.

    (iii) *The Interpretation of Dreams* was written by Lacan.

    (iv)   Lacan argues for a chain of signifiers.

    (v)   'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious' is a chapter in Freud's *Ecrits.*

2. What is Condensation?

3. What do you mean by Displacement?

4. How does Lacan see the letter?

1.6 Let us sum up

In this unit we have studied the features of the school of Psychoanalysis and the significance of Jacques Lacan as a practitioner of it. The unit has given an introductory segment on the prescribed essay 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious' along with a brief summary of it. Moreover the key concerns of the essay are also evaluated for a better understanding of the text.

1.7 Keywords

[1] The mirror stage: The stage in the growth of an infant when he is able to recognize himself in the mirror. The image reflected in the mirror is called by Lacan 'the Ideal I'

1.8 Suggested Readings

(i)   J.A. Cuddon: *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.*

(ii) Terry Eagleton: *Literary Theory: An Introduction.*

(iii) Patricia Waugh: *Literary Theory and Criticism.*

(iv) Jacques Lacan: *Ecrits.*

Possible Answers to Check Your Progress

Short Questions:

1.

(i)   True.

(ii) True.

(iii) False.

(iv) True.

(v)   False.

2.   Condensation is a term of Freudian psychology. It means an object or dream which stands for multiple objects.

3.   Displacement is a Freudian term. It means when an idea or emotion is displaced or transferred to anxiety in the unconscious.

4.   Lacan sees the letter as a material support to concretize subjects.

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Model Questions

1. Write a note on Psychoanalytic criticism with special reference to the insights of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

2. Give a critical overview of Lacan's main arguments in his essay 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious'.

3. Discuss how Jacques Lacan re-reads Freud in terms of his ideas of the unconscious. Give a reasoned answer.

4. How does Lacan present a Poststructuralist insight into language in regard to the ideas of the unconscious? Give a reasoned answer.

Unit – V

Ferdinand de Saussure,
Nature of the Linguistic Sign

Unit Structure

1.0 Objectives:

After going through this unit, you will be able to achieve the following objectives. This unit will help you to

- Understand the nature of linguistic sign.
- Get an idea of what constitutes a linguistic sign.
- The arbitrary nature of linguistic sign and how it is governed by two basic principles.

1.1 Introduction

Ferdinand de Saussure is acknowledged as the founder of modern linguistics and semiology, and as having laid the groundwork for Structuralismand Post Structuralism. His ideas laid a foundation for many significant developments in both linguistics and semiology in the 20th century. Nowadays he has been considered as one of two major founders (together with Charles Sanders Peirce) of Semiotics/Semiology.Here, It needs be noted that his theory of language and how it should be studied played a seminal part in the development of structuralism as a method in the human sciences, and thus significantly affected the course of literary studies in this century.

Saussure's contribution towards the development of study of linguistics is praiseworthy. Simply, Linguistics implies the scientific study of language. It studies the manifestations of human speech and also concerned with the history of languages, and with the social or cultural influences that shape the development of language.

Saussure is credited with the most important work *Course in General Linguistics* (English translation in 1959)). But here it needs to be noted that this book is not written by him. The book whichgoes under his name was compiled by colleagues after his death, based on lecture notes taken down by Saussure'sstudents in his lifetime. In short, it is a posthumous work which is attributed to Saussure. This book mainly discusses the synchronic and diachronic study of language, langue and parole, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, and most importantly the nature of the linguistic sign.Saussure, through his theory of language wants to propose that it is not enough to see only how words acquire

meaning over time (diachronic). We need to see how words mean within a period and as part of general system of language. We should look at the words within the current state of language and not at its history. We understand the meanings of the words as they are in use, as a part of the language system today (synchronic).

1.2 About the essay

Saussure's essay 'Nature of the Linguistic Sign' is extracted from his seminal work *Course in General Linguistics*. It is a kind of summary of the lectures by Saussure at the University of Geneva from 1906 to 1911. In this essay, Saussure primarily examines what constitutes a sign and the arbitrary relationships between the signifier and the signified. He also makes an attempt to investigate language as a structured system of signs.

1.3 Sign, Signified, Signifier

This essay mainly deals with the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Before we proceed to ourdiscussion, first of all we need to understand what language and linguistic sign is all about. Language is a system of signs that evolves from the activity of speech. On the other hand, in simple words,it can be said that the Sign is the combination of concept and the sound-Image.

Saussure says that for some people, a language is a list of terms corresponding to a list of things.This conception is open to number of objections. It assumes that ideas already exist independently of words. It doesn't clarify whether the name is vocal or a psychological entity. Thus a linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a sound, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called as 'material' element only. It is the representation of our sensory impressions.

When we hear a sound, an idea or concept automatically comes into our minds. That particular soundactually creates a concept in our minds. Boththese concepts and the sound image together is called a sign.Through the essay, he wants to say that sound image does not

merely imply the physical or material sound, rather he proposes that it is the psychological imprint of the sound that makes the relationship between signifier and the signified fruitful. For Instance, whenwe utter the sound 'Tree', we have an image of the tree beating in our mind. It's a psychological imprint.Later on, Saussurereplaced the words 'concept' and 'sound image' to Signified andSignifier respectively. To him, the concept is signified and the sound image is the signifier. In short, it can be said that the signifier is the physical existence and the signified is the mental concept according to him.

1.4 Two basic principles of Linguistic sign
(1) The arbitrary nature of the sign. (2) The linear nature of the Signifier.
(1) The arbitrary nature of the sign.

Saussure says that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is purely arbitrary. By 'arbitrary' the author means that 'it is unmotivated, that is arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified. Arbitrariness means there is no logical or natural connection between the sound and the mental concept. The connection between the words that we utter and the object it refers to is not logical. For instance, though we call tree as a 'tree' in English, it is called by different names in different languages. If someone asks as to why this particular word (tree) is used to refer to that object (the image of tree), there is no logical answer. It implies the fact that the nature of linguistic sign is arbitrary. Let us take another example of the four footed animal horse. It should be noticed that the animal horse is called horse in English, Kuthira in Malayalam. Ghoda in Hindi, Kuthirai in Tamil, Pferd in Japan. It seems that Horse is called by different names in different languages. Why do we call the same animal by different names in different languages, we have no answers to this question with us. This is what arbitrariness in language.

Saussure suggests that the relationships between the signifier and the signified is established through convention and repeated use. The 'word' horse does not naturally refer to the four footed animal of a

particular kind. To him, meaning or sound image attributed through its use by a community of language-users. The animal 'horse' does not declare its 'horseness'; we the human beings attribute the 'horseness' to it by giving it a name. In that way it is arbitrary in nature. Together the signifier and the signified constitute a sign.

Saussure argues that language is a structural system of arbitrary signs. Sometimes the word symbol has also been used to designate the linguistic sign, or more specifically, what is here called signifier. On the other hand, a symbol may be a signifier but in contrast to a sign, a symbol is never completely arbitrary, it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. For instance, the symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as chariot. Sometimes, a symbol has a rational relationship with what is signified.

Since a sign is arbitrary in nature, it does not mean that a speaker can choose a name for an object according to his/her wish. A sign becomes a sign due to collective behaviour. Every people or at least group of people who speak that language or significantly large group must voluntarily choose to call any particular object by that particular name. There must be a convention. A sign can become a sign only on the basis of convention. The speaker cannot choose a name for an object according to his/her wish. Linguistic sign is arbitrary; it does not mean that anyone can make up words. It is arbitrary, but is not open for free choice; its meaning is imposed on us by our linguistic surroundings.

(2) The Linear Nature of Signifier

The signifier is of a linear nature because auditory signifiers have at their command only the dimension of time. It represents a span, and the span is measurable in a single dimension—that of time. Saussure says that linguistic signs are by nature linear. This is because they represent a span in a single dimension. Auditory signifiers are linear, because they succeed each other or form a chain. Linguistic signifiers are sounds (spoken words), they are intrinsically sequential (linear). They cannot be perceived simultaneously, the way visual signs are: they

must be perceived one after the other, as a sequence of time. That principle is also carried over to written words, as a visual representation of spoken words. Visual signifiers, in contrast, may be grouped simultaneously in several dimensions.

1.5 Two possible objections to Principle 1
(A) Onomatopoeic Words

Onomatopoeic words refer to the idea that there is one to one connection between the sound it utters and the concept it refers to. There are many onomatopoeic words existing almost in every language. In English also we find many such words. Saussure argues that Onomatopoeic might be used to prove that the choice of the signifier is not always arbitrary. But to Saussure, onomatopoeic words are not organic elements in a linguistic sign. They are smaller in number and at the same time they are approximate and more or less conventional limitations of certain sounds. For example, English *bow bow* and French *Ouaoua*. When introduced into a language, they may evolve at different levels; the same word can evolve phonemically, morphemically at different levels; as a result there can be many variations. In this way the first objection has been refuted by Saussure.

(B) Interjections

The Second Objection is Interjections. He says that Interjections closely related to Onomatopoeia and thus can be attacked on the same grounds and same logic as onomatopoeia. There is no fixed link between exclamatory signal and signification. We need only compare two languages to see how much expressions differ from one language to the next. For example, the English equivalent of French *aie* is *ouch*.

1.6 Let Us sum up

In this unit, we have discussed mainly the nature of linguistic sign, Saussure'sapproach on the notions of the synchronic and diachronic study of language. This essay mainly deals with the relationship between the signifier and the signified and how the concept and the sound image playa significant role in constituting a linguistic sign. This unit examines how the linguistic sign is governed by two basic principles; (A) The

Arbitrary nature of sign and (b) The linear nature of signifier and how the two possible objections on these principles refuted by Saussure.

1.7 Check your Progress

1. According to Saussure the sign is made of
   A. Two Parts: Representament and Interpretant
   B. Three Parts: Sign, Signifier and Signified
   C. Signifier and Signified

2. The arbitrariness of the sign means
   A. There is no one to one relationship between the signifier and the signified
   B. There is an internal link between the word and its meaning.
   C. The result of the relationship between Representament and Interpretant.

3. Name one of the seminal works by Ferdinand de Saussure.
4. When did the English translated version of *Course in General Linguistics* publish?
5. What are the two basic principles of linguistic sign according to Saussure?
6. What is onomatopoeia?

1.8 Answer to check your progress

1. (C) 2.(A)
3. *Course in General Linguistics*
4. 1959
5. (a) The arbitrary nature of the sign. (b) The linear nature of the signifier
6. Onomatopoeiarefers to the idea that there is one to one connection between a particular sound it utters and the concept it refers to.

1.9 Model Questions

1. What are the two aspects of a linguistic Sign?
2. What does Saussure mean by 'arbitrary nature of the sign'?
3. Why was it important for Saussure to show that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary?

4. Why does he argue that Onomatopoeia and interjections are not central parts of language? What do they have to do with his claims about arbitrariness?

1.10 Suggested Readings:

Barthes, Roland. *The Empire of Sign*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

Bingell, Jonathan. *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*.2nd ed. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Cobley, Paul. *The Routledge companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Society, 1959.

1.11 References:

Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. New Delhi: Pearson, 2010.Print.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Roy Harris. London: Duckworth, 1983.

—. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. Colombia University Press: USA, 2011.

Unit – VI
Roland Barthes, *From Work to Text*

1.0 Objectives

This unit will focus upon the essay *From Work to Text* written by Roland Barthes. The objectives of this unit are

- To give an introduction of the literary critic Roland Barthes.
- To introduce the text 'From Work to Text'.
- To prepare a critical summary of the text.

1.1 Introduction

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was born in Cherbourg, northern France. After his father's death in World War I, his mother settled down in Bayonne. In the year 1924 the family moved to Paris, where Barthes studied classics, grammar and philology at the Sorbonne. He taught many lessons in prestigious institute of Paris, Bayonne, France Institute in Bucharest and the University of Alexandria in Egypt. Barthe's works mainly deals with Semiology and structural linguistics. *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) introduced the concept of ecriture, the "written" quality of language. *Elements of Semiology* (1964) and *S/Z* (1970) deal with the structuralist analysis of literary texts. *Mythologies* (1958) is on application of structuralist and semiological methods in non-literary cultural texts. *The Pleasure of the Text*, *Change the Object Itself* and *From Work to Text* are post-structuralist text. In 1966 he published the ground breaking essay on *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative.*

1.2 About the essay *From Work to Text*

Roland Barthes draws our attention to the fact that concept of language has undergone a change over the past years. Through this essay he states clearly his opinion from the perspective of structuralist and post- structuralist approach to language and meaning. According to him now a day's literature has become interdisciplinary. The theory of the "text" was developed by those associated with the Journal *Tel Quel* in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which included apart from Barthes,

Derrida, Julia Kristeva. Although the idea of "text" is implicit in the writings of all these theorists, it derives primarily from a deconstruction of structural linguistics, spelt out most clearly in Barthes' theory of the "text" to which this essay substantially contributes. Barthes begins by speaking of the debt which the notion of the "text" owes to the changing view of language: "A change has been taking place in our ideas about language and as a consequence about the literary work". In order to clarify the main ideas behind the notion of a "text" Barthes offers some propositions to indicate what he has in mind when speaking of a text. Barthes sets on to describe what the notion of a "text" implies and how it has evolved from "work". This is the intention reflected in the title "From Work to Text".

1.3 A Brief summary of the text

A change has been taking place in our ideas about language over past several years because of the current developments in social reforms- Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Anthropology etc. In his essay *From Work to Text* (1971*)*, Roland Barthes argues that the relation of writer, reader and observer has been changing from time to time. In this light we can observe Barthe's propositions of the difference between work and text in terms of method, genres, signs, plurality, filiation, reading and pleasure.

1.3.1 Method:

First of all Barthes said that the text should not be thought as an object that can be computed. It would be futile to try to separate out materially works from texts. Besides we must also avoid the tendency to say that the work is classics and the text is avant-garde. Barthes implies that there is concrete quality to some writing which identifies it as a text and not as a work. When discussing the issue of whether texts can be seen as a product of modernity he comments - There may be 'text' in a very ancient work, while many products of contemporary literature may

not be texts. Barthes thought that the text is a methodological field rather than a portion of the space of books (in a library for example) that is the work. Like Lacan's distinction between reality and real the one is displayed and other is demonstrated. The work can be seen and held in hand while the text is a process of demonstration which is held in language. The text is experienced only in an activity of production. The text cannot be kept in a library shelf because the process of language does not come to an end, the meaning always kept on changing. It is like a chain. One meaning leads us to a different meaning.

1.3.2 Genre:

The second point Barthes discuss here in the essay is that the text cannot be contained in a hierarchy or a simple division of genres. What constitutes the text is its subversive force with regard to old classifications. Here he is trying to give an instance of writer Georges Battaile. He is trying to show us how we describe him…as a novelist, poet, essayist, economist, philosopher, mystic? He further says that it is difficult for us to classify him. "Doxa" refers to a commonly accepted opinion or more simply public opinion. Therefore, paradoxical means something, which goes beyond commonly accepted opinions. By claiming that the text goes beyond the limit of 'doxa', Barthes wants to imply that a text contains numerous interpretations; it always tends to go beyond what is the commonly accepted notion of a division of genre or type of writing. This liberation of the text from a fixed centre, which holds the work together gives it a subversive potential, through which, it continuously challenges all boundaries set up by commonly accepted opinions or theories. The text, in other words, always calls into question all pre-existing assumptions about its meaning. It is on the basis of these facts that Barthes writes that what constitutes a text is its "subversive force with regard to old classification."

1.3.3 Signs:

The third proposition that Barthes put forward is that the text can be approached and experienced in reaction to the sign. The work closes on a signified that falls under the scope of an interpretation. In short the work itself functions as a general sign and it is normal that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the sign. The text, on the other hand practices the infinite deferment of the signified. The infinity of the signifier refers to some idea of the playing-to play with the disconnections, overlappings and variations between signifier and signified. In this respect the work is moderately symbolic and the text is radically symbolic, filled with symbolic texture, like language it is structured but decentred without closure.

The work is tied to one signified. In other words to read a "work" is to practise the Saussurean idea of the signified- fixed meaning. Meaning can be fixed in two ways. On the one hand, one can attribute straight, literal meanings to words. The work would then pose a challenge only to the linguist who would study the production of this simple meaning. On the other hand, we can assume that its meaning is fixed but hidden; that is, there is in it something deeper than the straight and literal meaning. In this case it would interest a school of criticism like Marxism, Freudianism, etc., which would look for a relevant meaning in it. Structuralism practices this purpose of reading a work. The "text" on the contrary practices the infinite deferral of the signified-invites us to defer meaning. Barthes here reminds us of all that we have read while deconstructing the signifier and the signified-that is, the production of meaning through differance. In the context of reading, this perpetual play of signifiers should not be thought of as leading from a surface to a deeper level of meaning, but merely undirected and unpurposive movement. The logic that governs the reading of a text is not that of comprehension-that is, to find out what it exactly means, but, to merely

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revel in the free-play of its signifiers. This free-play is generated by the symbolic rather than referential status of language.

1.3.4 Plurality:

The fourth proposition is the plurality of the text. It is not only that a work can have many meanings, its plurality cannot be limited to a fixed number. In a text many meanings co-exist and each of these meanings is traversed by the others- constituting a part of it and constituted by it in turn-each carrying the traces of others and inextricably linked to them. The text thus becomes a site of various ideas coming out from plural readings. Therefore, Barthes says that the text plurality is not because of the ambiguity of its contents but because of its 'stereographic plurality'. In order to understand the term 'stereographic' you have to first understand the term stereoscope. A stereoscope is something all of us have played with in our childhood. It is an instrument for viewing a pair of photographs, taken at slightly different angles, each with one eye. The two photographs combined create an impression of depth and solidity. A stereograph is the photograph used in a stereoscope. Viewed from this metaphor, each of the plural readings of a text is like a stereograph, similar yet different from other stereograph(s) uniting in the single image or reading of a text. Each text is also the product of many other texts-that is, it is inter-textual. This inter-textuality does not mean that it should be possible at a given moment, or in a given reading, to identify a fixed number of texts out of which the present text is constituted. So, in reading a particular statement in a text we might hear some similarity or resonances of various other texts.

1.3.5 Filiation:

The work is caught up in the process of filiation. According to Barthes, literary science teaches us two things i.e. to respect the work and to respect the author's declared intentions, therefore if we respect

or admire the work we must also respect its author. The text can be read without the inscription of the author who is refuted the father and the owner of his work. Hence no vital respect is due to the text because text can be broken and read without the guarantee of its father. The author who exists in his text is only as a textual element or factor. He is merely a symbol of the function at the level of work. The biography of the author is merely another text, which does not indicate any privilege- it is the language, which speaks in the Text, not the author himself. Also it is the reader who focuses the multiplicity of the text, not the author.

The work is usually considered the product of forces outside it—that is, both its creation and meaning are seen as determined by outside forces such as race, history, tradition of the author. The 'text' on the other hand, is read without the guiding intent of race, history, tradition or the author. All these may affect our reading of a text but not provide any absolute guiding framework for its meaning. The concept of inter-textuality would help the resonance of historical, biographical or other texts in our reading of a given text, but a text cannot be tied to a single or multiple texts as its determined product. So, the author enters into a reading of his / her text, but only as a guest, as one of the texts that will participate in the play of intertextuality - not as the controlling or determining force.

1.3.6 Reading:

The work is normally the object of consumption. We focus on the quality of work rather than reading text as a process. The 'work' is a commodity - an object that the reader tends to be passive and is expected to be fed and entertained when reading. If the reader approaches a text as writing and not as a 'work,' then the reading experience becomes interactive. The text narrows the distance between reading and writing by replacing consumption with the free play of collaborative reading. When interacting with a text rather than a 'work,' the reader questions

and thinks about the writing instead of taking it for granted. If readers passively consume words, they will tire from reading.

The text fills it with play, production and activity. There is no definite meaning that the reader can now consume instead the reader is now actively involved in the production of meaning. Thus, meaning and significance, which had conventionally been assumed to be tied to the author, now come to be associated partly with the reader. It is not that the reader's involvement is intensified in the text. It is rather that the reader now has a more definite involvement. The readers refuse the fixed meaning handed down to them by the author but they try to find out their own sense of meaning by reading a text.

1.3.7 Pleasure:

The final proposition to the text is pleasure. According to Barthes there exists a pleasure of certain works but this pleasure is in the level of consumption. Text is a space of social utopia, which transcends social relations such as author, reader and critic. The pleasure of reading classic literary works may feel like consumption since the reader cannot rewrite those texts and thus a distance is created between the reader and the 'work.' However, a piece of work arouses feelings of pleasure because there is no feeling of separation between the reader and the writer and on the other hand the text transcends any language or social barriers.

The work is linked to a certain kind of pleasure. One can enjoy reading Shakespeare or Milton but this pleasure is the pleasure of appropriation. This pleasure, Barthes says, is one of separation. It is linked to the fact that one cannot write what he or she is reading. The text on the other hand, yields a different kind of pleasure without separation. The play that characterizes a decentered text ensures that there is going to be no stability, which a reader can appropriate and be separated from. Instead, the reader is going to be continuously implicated in producing the meaning that the text approaches.

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Check Your Progress

Short Questions

1. Find out the **TRUE/FALSE** answer:

   I) Text is a methodological field according to Barthes.

   II) Text is caught up in the process of filiation.

   III) Work is a space of social utopia.

   IV) Roland Barthes is the writer of the essay From Work to Text.

   V) The work is tied to one signified.

2. "There may be 'text' in a very ancient work, while many products of contemporary literature may not be texts."-Who said this?

3. What is Doxa?

1.4 Let us sum up

Throughout the essay "From Work to Text" (1971), Barthes provides a brief statement of a poststructuralist perspective. He distinguishes between a 'work' and a 'text'. Whereas a work offers up to analysis a closed signified or definite meaning, a text can never allow investigation to halt at some signified or some concept which represents its ultimate meaning. Barthes states an important feature of poststructuralist analysis when he says that the text is held in intertextuality.

1.5 Suggested Readings

Allen, Graham. *Roland Barthes*. London: Routledge, 2003

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

Culler, Jonathan. *Roland Barthes: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Possible Answers to Check Your Progress

Short Questions:
1. I)   True.
   II) False.
   III) False.
   IV) True.
   V) True.
2. Roland Barthes states the above statement in his essay From Work to Text.
3. Doxa refers to a commonly accepted opinion or more simply public opinion.

References:

Barthes, Roland. and Heath, Stephen. *Image, music, text / Roland Barthes ; essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath* Hill and Wang: New York , 1977. Print.

Habib, Rafey. *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub, 2008. Print.

Nayar, K. Pramod. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism.* Noida: Darling Kindersly (India) Pvt. Ltd., 2010.Print.

Model Questions:

1. What are the main propositions which Roland Barthes put forwarded in the essay From Work to Text? Analyse the points briefly.

2. Why, according to Barthes, can't the text be "held in the hand" or classified firmly as belonging to a particular genre? How does a text subvert such attempts to contain its meaning and classify its content?

3. What do you mean by the term intertextuality? In what purpose did Barthes used this term in the essay.

In the essay Barthes uses the term filiation, what does the term implies? Discuss the term filiation on the basis of the given text.

BLOCK – II

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the second Block of your course on "Critical Theory". In the first Block you may have got a fairly good introduction to Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalytic criticism, etc. The prescribed essays must have helped you figure out the major assumptions and concerns of these theories.

Now, the present Block includes some more theories and elaborates upon the specific essays prescribed for you. Unit 1 introduces you to postcolonial theory, its aims, major concerns and chief exponents. This is followed by an explanation and summation of the ideas and issues in Edward Said's *Orientalism,* considered to be a seminal text in postcolonial studies.

In the next Unit (which is in three parts – 2a, 2b and 2c), you will get to know about Feminist theory. Unit 2a gives an elaborate introduction to the Feminist movement – the history of its development, basic assumptions, major concerns, orientations and various strands. This unit should compliment your study of the next two Units. Unit 2b focuses on Elaine Showalters "Jowards a Feminist Poetics" and Unit 2c deals with Jorie Mois Introduction of *Sexual/ Textual Politics.* These are two significant pieces of feminist criticism which discusses almost all major issues and concerns of this field.

Unit 3 is also divided into two parts – a and b. The first part, Unit 3a is devoted to Reader Response Criticism. It will help you understand this criticism by explaining its major ideologies, leading

reader-response critics and the prominent forms of reader-response criticism. With this background you should be well acquainted to read the prescribed essay "Is there a text in this class ?" discussed in Unit 3b.

In the following Unit you will read about Marxist criticism. The reading of this Unit should enable you to identify the major concerns of Marxist criticism, and its major exponents. This would be of use to you when you read Atthusser's. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

The last Unit of this Block, Unit 5 talks about New Historicism. As you read this Unit you can analyse the theory before New – Historicism, define what new-historicism is and identify its advantages and disadvantages. You can also figure out its major exponents.

This Block, as a whole, should give you enough insight into various twentieth century theories and criticism, which are very essential to build up your critical faculty while reading literature.

Hope this Block interests you and encourages you to read more on theory and criticism !

UNIT – I

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND

SAID'S *ORIENTALISM*

Contents:

1.1 Objectives

This unit will acquaint you with Postcolonial Theory and its implications and lead on towards the analysis of Said's text "Crisis" which is considered to be a seminal as well as the foundational text of postcolonial theory. By the end of this unit, you should be able

- discourse of otherness i.e., Postcolonial theory
- identify the major proponents and their contribution to this field
- relate Said's text "Crisis" to the assumptions underpinning this theory

1.2 Introduction

Postcolonial theory refers to a field of intellectual inquiry that explores and interrogates the situation of colonized peoples both during and after colonization. It is often, but not always, anti-imperialist in character. The prefix, *post-* in *postcolonial* implies opposition as well as chronological sequence; that is, *postcolonial* not only denotes the period after a former colony has become independent but also typically connotes political and moral attitudes opposed to colonization. By extension, works produced during the colonial period can be anachronistically viewed as postcolonial in character if they express, even implicitly, resistance to colonialism and in some way project the potential for independenc, whether utopian or dystopian.

1.3 Aims of Postcolonial theory

The aim of postcolonial theory is to critique the Western project of colonialist expansion that was instrumental in exploiting, misrepresenting, silencing, falsifying the claims of those (the **colonized**) whose legitimate rights and possessions had been usurped upon (by the **colonizers**). It is also considered as a kind of **"revenge historiography"**

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that attempts to give voice to the marginalized. In doing so, it also takes into account the possibility of the **Other** getting ideologically conditioned, and mimicking the ways of the colonizer. Therefore, a related aim of post-colonial theory is to resist the residual ideological effects of colonialism on cultures. It is not simply concerned with salvaging past worlds, but learning how the world can move beyond this period together, towards a place of mutual respect.

Postcolonialist thinkers recognize that many of the assumptions underpinning the discourse of colonialism are still active forces today. Exposing and deconstructing the racist, imperialist nature of these assumptions will remove their power of persuasion and coercion. Recognizing that they are not simply airy substances but have widespread material consequences for the nature and scale of global inequality makes this project all the more urgent.

A key goal of post-colonial theorists is giving way for the articulation of multiple voices. This is especially true of those voices (the **subalterns**) that have been previously silenced by **dominant** ideologies. It is widely recognized within the discourse, that this space must first be cleared within academia. Edward Said, in *Orientalism* provides a clear picture of the ways social scientists, specifically Orientalists, can disregard the views of those they actually study - preferring instead to rely on the intellectual superiority of themselves and their peers.

To the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by them, or as a kind of cultural and international proletariat useful for the Orientalist's grander interpretive activity.

Much debate has since taken place regarding how to effectively and fairly incorporate the subaltern voice into social studies. With such

a huge mass of criticism against the idea of studying "others", many social scientists felt paralyzed, fatalistically accepting it as an impossibility. Gayatri Spivak, an Indian post-colonialist thinker, rejects this outright. She feels that by refusing to represent a cultural Other, one is only salving their own conscience, and allowing them not to do any homework. Spivak recognizes the project is problematic, as recovery and presentation of a subaltern voice would likely essentialize its message, negating the subaltern masses' heterogeneity. Spivak suggests "**strategic essentialism"** - speaking on behalf of a group while using a clear image of identity to fight opposition - is the only solution to this problem.

Some post-colonial theorists make the argument that studying both dominant knowledge sets and marginalized ones as binary opposites perpetuates their existence as homogenous entities. Homi K. Bhabha feels the post-colonial world should enable spaces of mixing; spaces where truth and authenticity move aside for ambiguity. This space of **hybridity,** he argues, offers the most profound challenge to colonialism.

Frantz Fanon offers a less bright and more violent prescription for moving beyond the colonial mindset. He argues that previously colonized peoples would remain hybrids with a miserably schizophrenic identity unless they revolt violently against their oppressors. This collective action would apparently stimulate collective pride, freeing them of their inferiority complexes.

Ultimately, however, Postcolonialism is a hopeful discourse. The very "post" defines the discipline as one that looks forward to a world that has truly moved beyond all that colonialism entails, together. Mbembe finds it gives him hope in the advent of a universal brotherhood of man. Asking what it means to be human together, postcolonialism aims at decolonizing the future.

GLOSSARY

Colonizer: one who establishes his sway over a native through the use of force and hegemony.

Colonized: one who is dominated upon by an external agency (an imperialist, for instance) through sheer use of force

Revenge Historiography: a deliberate process of writing history that is contestatory, emerging from the Other (colonized) and directed against the Dominant (colonizers)

Subaltern: the silenced, marginalized section that is represented by others (primarily the third world metropolitan enlightened intellectuals)

Hybridity: a concept popularized by Homi K. Bhabha. It suggests that the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized should not always be taken to be antagonistic and contestatory, but given space to mingle freely, slide over the binary oppositions, thereby resulting in ambivalence.

1.4 Major Concerns

As already stated, the critical nature of postcolonial theory entails destabilizing Western way of thinking, therefore creating space for the

subaltern, or marginalized groups, to speak and produce alternatives to dominant **discourse**. Often, the term "postcolonialism" is taken literally, to mean the period of time after colonialism. This however is problematic because the once-colonized world is full of contradictions, of half-finished processes, of confusions, of **hybridity**, and **liminalities**. In other words, it is important to accept the plural nature of the word postcolonialism, as it does not simply refer to the period after the colonial era. By some definitions, postcolonialism can also be seen as a continuation of colonialism, albeit through different or new relationships concerning power and the control/production of knowledge. Due to these similarities, it is debated whether to hyphenate postcolonialism as to symbolize that we have fully moved beyond colonialism.

Postcolonialism as a literary theory (with a critical approach), deals with literature produced in countries that once were colonies of other countries, especially of the European colonial powers Britain, France, and Spain; in some contexts, it includes countries still in some kind of colonial hegemony. It also deals with literature written by citizens of colonial countries that portrays colonized people as its subject matter. Colonized people, especially of the British Empire, attended British universities and with their access to education, created this new criticism. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union during the late 20th century, its former republics became the subject of this study as well.

Often, previously colonized places are homogenized in western discourse under an umbrella label such as the 'Third World'. Postcolonialism demonstrates the heterogeneity of colonized places by analyzing the uneven impact of Western colonialism on different places, peoples, and cultures. This is done by engaging with the variety of ways in which relations, practices and representations of the past is reproduced or transformed, and studying the connections between the heart and margins of the empire. Moreover, postcolonialism recognizes that there was, and still is, resistance to the West. This resistance is

practiced by many, including the subaltern, a group of marginalized, and least powerful.

Postcolonial theory, thus, provides a framework that destabilizes dominant discourses in the West, challenges inherent assumptions, and critiques the material and discursive legacies of colonialism. In order to challenge these assumptions and legacies of colonialism, postcolonial studies needs to be grounded, which entails working with tangible identities, connections, and processes. Postcolonial theorist Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism* has been described as a seminal work in the field.

Furthermore, Postcolonialism deals with cultural identity in colonized societies: the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule; the ways in which writers articulate and celebrate that identity (often reclaiming it from and maintaining strong connections with the colonizer); the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized (subordinated) people has been generated and used to serve the colonizer's interests; and the ways in which the colonizer's literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonized as a perpetually inferior people, society and culture. These inward struggles of identity, history, and future possibilities often occur in the metropolis and, ironically, with the aid of postcolonial structures of power, such as universities.

The creation of **binary opposition structures** changed the way we view others. In the case of colonialism, the Oriental and the Westerner were distinguished as different from each other (i.e. the emotional, static, Orient vs. the principled, progressive Occident). This opposition justified the "white man's burden," the colonizer's self-perceived "destiny to rule" subordinate peoples. In contrast, post-colonialism seeks out areas of hybridity and transculturalization. This aspect is particularly relevant during processes of globalization.

The term "postcolonialism", as has already been stated, is frequently misunderstood as a temporal (time-related) concept, meaning

the time after colonialism has ceased, or the time following the politically determined Independence Day on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state. It is, rather, an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies.Colonized peoples reply to the colonial legacy by *writing back to the center*, when the indigenous peoples write their own histories and legacies using the colonizer's language (e.g. English, French, Dutch) for their own purposes.

Postcolonial Theory - as epistemology, ethics, and politics - addresses matters of identity, gender, race, racism and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a postcolonial national identity, of how a colonized people's knowledge was used against them in service of the colonizer's interests, and of how knowledge about the world is generated under specific relations between the powerful and the powerless, circulated repetitively and finally legitimated in service to certain imperial interests. At the same time, postcolonial theory encourages thought about the colonized's creative resistance to the colonizer and how that resistance complicates and gives texture to European imperial colonial projects, which utilized a range of strategies, including anti-conquest narratives, to legitimize their dominance.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Discuss the implications of the term "postcolonialism" when used with a hyphen (post-colonialism) and without it (postcolonialism)? Answer in about 100 words.

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GLOSSARY

Binary opposition: Distinction between two proposition where the first is given value over the other in ideological terms, for instance, light/dark, man/woman, active/passive, West/East etc.

Discourse: a well formulated body of theoretical assumptions pertaining to class, race, gender, episteme etc, which opens up an interventionist space.

1.5 Major Exponents

Edward Said

Said coined the term "Orientalism", describing the binary between the Orient and the Occident. This binary, also referred to as the East/West binary, is key in postcolonial theory. Said argued that the Occident could not exist without the Orient, and vice versa. In other words, they are mutually constitutive. Notably, the concept of the 'East' i.e. the Orient, was created by the 'West', suppressing the ability of the 'Orient' to express themselves. Western depictions of the 'Orient' construct an inferior world, a place of backwardness, irrationality, and wildness. This allowed the 'West' to identify themselves as the opposite of these characteristics; as a superior world that was progressive, rational, and civil.

Furthermore, Said, following Foucault's belief, states that **power** and **knowledge** are inseparable. The West's claim to knowledge of the East gave the West the power to name, and the power to control. This concept is essential to understanding of colonialism, and therefore recognizing postcolonialism.

Some postcolonial writers have critiqued Said's homogeneous binary of Occident and Orient insisting that multiple variations of Orientalism have been created within the western world and are at work. Said believes that Europe used Orientalism as a homogeneous "other" to form a more cohesive European identity.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Spivak's main contribution to Postcolonial theory came with her specific definition of the term subaltern. Spivak also introduced terms such as 'essentialism', 'strategic essentialism'. The former term refers to the dangers of reviving subaltern voices in ways that might simplify heterogeneous groups, creating stereotyped impressions of their diverse group. Spivak however believes that essentialism can sometimes be used strategically by these groups to make it easier for the subaltern to be heard and understood when a clear identity can be created and accepted by the majority. It is important to distinguish that 'strategic essentialism' does not sacrifice its diversity and voices but that they are being downplayed temporarily to support the essential element of the group.

Spivak also created the term **'epistemic violence'** which refers to the destruction of non-western ways of knowing and thereby the domination of western ways of understanding. This concept relates to Spivak's "Subaltern must always be caught in translation, never truly expressing herself" because of the destruction and marginalization of her way of understanding.

Furthermore, Spivak criticizes those who ignore the "cultural others" (the subaltern) and has offered constructive theories for allowing the West to go beyond its current position through self-criticism of western methods and ideals of understanding and exploring the alternatives offered by post-colonialism.

Frantz Fanon

Fanon is one of the earliest writers associated with postcolonialism. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon analyzed the nature of colonialism and those subjugated by it. He describes colonialism as a source of violence rather than reacting violently against resistors which had been the common view. His portrayal of the systematic relationship between colonialism and its attempts to deny

"all attributes of humanity" to those it suppressed laid the groundwork for related critiques of colonial and postcolonial systems.

1.6 Introduction to Edward Said's *Orientalism*

Edward Said's ***Orientalism*** (1978) is considered to be a seminal text in postcolonial studies. Said defines Orientalism as "a constellation of false assumptions underlying Western attitudes toward the Middle East". This discourse is characterized by a long history of Eurocentric prejudice against the Orient, i.e., Arabo-Islamic people and their culture. Said's main argument in the text is that Europe and America (to some extent) had built up a long tradition of romanticized images of Asia and the Middle East that did not have much bearing on reality, was always seen in terms of some lack, and was one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. Said also argues that the Orient had helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. He explored the extent to which colonialism created a way of seeing the world, an order of things that was to be learned as true and proper; but Said paid attention more to the colonizers than the colonized. Said summarised his work in these terms:

My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness. . . . As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge. (204)

Principally a study of 19th-century literary discourse and strongly influenced by the work of thinkers like Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, Said's work also engages contemporary realities and has clear political implications as well. *Orientalism* is often classed with postmodernist and postcolonial works that share various degrees of skepticism about representation itself.

The book is divided into three chapters:

- *The Scope of Orientalism*
- *Orientalist Structures and Restructures*
- *Orientalism Now*

Chapter 1: The Scope of Orientalism

In this section Said outlines his argument with several caveats as to how it may be flawed. He states that it fails to include Russian Orientalism and explicitly excludes German Orientalism, which he suggests had "clean" pasts (Said 1978: 2&4), and could be promising future studies. Said also suggests that not all academic discourse in the West has to be Orientalist in its intent but much of it is. He also suggests that all cultures have a view of other cultures that may be exotic and harmless to some extent, but it is not this view that he argues against and when this view is taken by a militarily and economically dominant culture against another it can lead to disastrous results.

Said draws on written and spoken historical commentary by such Western figures as Arthur James Balfour, Napoleon, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Byron, Henry Kissinger, Dante and others who all portray the "East" as being both "other" and "inferior."

He also draws on several European studies of the region by Orientalists including the *Bibliotheque Orientale* by French author Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville to illustrate the depth of Orientalist discourse in European society and in their academic, literary and political interiors.

Chapter 2: Orientalist Structures and Restructures

In this chapter Said outlines how Orientalist discourse was transferred from country to country and from political leader to author. He suggests that this discourse was set up as a foundation for all (or most all) further study and discourse of the Orient by the Occident.

He states that: "The four elements I have described - expansion, historical confrontation, sympathy, classification - are the currents in

eighteenth-century thought on whose presence the specific intellectual and institutional structures of modern Orientalism depend" (120).

Drawing heavily on 19th century European exploration by such historical figures as Sir Richard Francis Burton and Chateaubriand, Said suggests that this new discourse about the Orient was situated within the old one. Authors and scholars such as Edward William Lane, who spent only two to three years in Egypt but came back with an entire book about them (Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians) which was widely circulated in Europe.

Further travelers and academics of the East depended on this discourse for their own education, and so the Orientalist discourse of the West over the East was passed down through European writers and politicians (and therefore through all Europe).

Chapter 3: Orientalism Now

This chapter outlines where Orientalism has gone since the historical framework Said outlined in previous chapters. The book was written in 1978 and so only covers historical occurrences that happened up to that date.

It is in this chapter that Said makes his overall statement about cultural discourse: "How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the 'other')?" (325).

While there is much criticism centered on Said's book, the author himself repeatedly admits his study's shortcomings both in this chapter, chapter 1 and in his introduction.

1.7 Influence

Orientalism is considered to be Edward Said's most influential work and has been translated into at least 36 languages. It has been the

focus of any number of controversies and polemics, notably with Bernard Lewis, whose work is critiqued in the book's final section, entitled "Orientalism Now: The Latest Phase." In October 2003, one month after Said died, a commentator wrote in a Lebanese newspaper that through *Orientalism* "Said's critics agree with his admirers that he has single-handedly effected a revolution in Middle Eastern studies in the U.S." He cited a critic who claimed since the publication of *Orientalism* "U.S. Middle Eastern Studies were taken over by Edward Said's postcolonial studies paradigm" (*Daily Star*, October 20, 2003). Even those who contest its conclusions and criticize its scholarship, like George P. Landow of Brown University, call it "a major work." Anthropologist Talal Asad argued that *Orientalism* is "not only a catalogue of Western prejudices about and misrepresentations of Arabs and Muslims", but more so an investigation and analysis of the "authoritative structure of Orientalist discourse – the closed, self-evident, self-confirming character of that distinctive discourse which is reproduced again and again through scholarly texts, travelogues, literary works of imagination, and the obiter dicta of public men [and women] of affairs." Indeed, the book describes how "the hallowed image of the Orientalist as an austere figure unconcerned with the world and immersed in the mystery of foreign scripts and languages has acquired a dark hue as the murky business of ruling other peoples now forms the essential and enabling background of his or her scholarship."

1.8 Criticism

In his book *Dangerous Knowledge,* British historian Robert Irwin criticizes what he claims to be Said's thesis that throughout Europe's history, "every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric." Irwin points out that long before notions like third-worldism and post-colonialism entered

academia, many Orientalists were committed advocates for Arab and Islamic political causes.

Another recent critical assessment of *Orientalism* and its reception across disciplines is provided by anthropologist and historian Daniel Martin Varisco in his *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (2007). Using judicious satirical criticism to defuse what has become an acrimonious debate, Varisco surveys the extensive criticism of Said's methodology, including criticism of his use of Foucault and Gramsci, and argues that the politics of polemics needs to be superseded to move academic discussion of real cultures in the region once imagined as an "Orient" beyond the binary blame game.

The notion of Oriental homogeneity will exist as long as prejudice serves political ends, but to blame the sins of its current use on hegemonic intellectualism mires ongoing mitigation of bad and biased scholarship in an unresolvable polemic of blame. It is time to read beyond "Orientalism."

While acknowledging the great influence of *Orientalism* on postcolonial theory since its publication in 1978, George P. Landow finds Said's scholarship lacking. He chides Said for ignoring the non-Arab Asian countries, non-Western imperialism, the occidentalist ideas that abound in East towards the Western, and gender issues. *Orientalism* assumes that Western imperialism, Western psychological projection, "and its harmful political consequences are something that only the West does to the East rather than something all societies do to one another." Landow also finds *Orientalism'*s political focus harmful to students of literature since it has led to the political study of literature at the expense of philological, literary, and rhetorical issues. Landow points out that Said completely ignores China, Japan, and South East Asia, in talking of "the East," but then goes on to criticize the West's homogenization of the East. Furthermore, Landow states that Said failed to capture the

essence of the Middle East, not least by overlooking important works by Egyptian and Arabic scholars. In addition to poor knowledge about the history of European and non-European imperialism, another of Landow's criticisms is that Said sees only the influence of the West on the East in colonialism. Landow argues that these influences were not simply one-way, but cross-cultural, and that Said fails to take into account other societies or factors within the East.

He also criticises Said's "dramatic assertion that no European or American scholar could `know` the Orient." However, in his view what they have actually done constitutes acts of oppression. Moreover, one of the principal claims made by Landow is that Said did not allow the views of other scholars to feature in his analysis; therefore, he committed "the greatest single scholarly sin" in *Orientalism.*

In response to critics who over the years have pointed to errors of fact and detail so mountainous as to destroy his thesis, Said finally admitted that he had no interest in, much less capacity for, showing what the true Orient and Islam really are.

Other critics discuss Said's background when considering his point of view and his ability to give a balanced academic assessment of Orientalism. Edward Said was born in the British Mandate of Palestine to a wealthy family who sent him to the Anglican school of St George in Jerusalem then to Victoria College in Cairo which Said himself referred to as "designed by the British to bring up a generation of Arabs with natural ties to Britain." After studying at Victoria College he went to live in America at the age of 15 and then went on to study at numerous academic institutions, and critics cite this as placing him outside the issues he writes about in his book. Edward Said had an exceptionally privileged upbringing from a financial perspective financed by his father whom Said described as "overbearing and uncommunicative" in his book *Out of Place* (1999). This upbringing would place Said in the

"system" that forms much of the focus of his book and which depicts Orientalism as facilitator of British and French "white man's burden" in the Arab world.

Orientalism included much criticism of historian Bernard Lewis, which Lewis in turn answered. Said contended that Lewis treats Islam as a monolithic entity without the nuance of its plurality, internal dynamics, and historical complexities, and accused him of "demagogy and downright ignorance." Said quoted Lewis' assertion that "the Western doctrine of the right to resist bad government is alien to Islamic thought". Lewis also observed that,

In the Arabic-speaking countries a different word was used for [revolution] *thawra*. The root *th-w-r* in classical Arabic meant to rise up (e.g. of a camel), to be stirred or excited, and hence, especially in Maghribi usage, to rebel.

Said suggests that this particular passage is "full of condescension and bad faith", that the example of a camel is selected deliberately to debase Arab revolutionary ambitions: "[I]t is this kind of essentialized description that is natural for students and policymakers of the Middle East." Lewis' writings, according to Said, are often "polemical, not scholarly"; Said asserts that Lewis has striven to depict Islam as "an anti-Semitic ideology, not merely a religion".

Lewis goes on to proclaim that Islam is an irrational herd or mass phenomenon, ruling Muslims by passions, instincts, and unreflecting hatreds. The whole point of this exposition is to frighten his audience, to make it never yield an inch to Islam. According to Lewis, Islam does not develop, and neither do Muslims; they merely are, and they are to be watched, on account of that pure essence of theirs (according to Lewis), which happens to include a long-standing hatred of Christians and Jews. Lewis everywhere refrains himself from making such inflammatory statements flat out; he always takes care to say that

of course the Muslims are not anti-Semitic the way the Nazis were, but their religion can too easily accommodate itself to anti-Semitism and has done so. Similarly with regard to Islam and racism, slavery, and other more or less "Western" evils. The core of Lewis's ideology about Islam is that it never changes, and his whole mission is now to inform conservative segments of the Jewish reading public, and anyone else who cares to listen, that any political, historical, and scholarly account of Muslims must begin and end with the fact that Muslims are Muslims.

Rejecting the view that western scholarship was biased against the Middle East, Lewis responded that Orientalism developed as a facet of European humanism, independently of the past European imperial expansion. He noted the French and English pursued the study of Islam in the 16th and 17th centuries, yet not in an organized way, but long before they had any control or hope of control in the Middle East; and that much of Orientalist study did nothing to advance the cause of imperialism. "What imperial purpose was served by deciphering the ancient Egyptian language, for example, and then restoring to the Egyptians knowledge of and pride in their forgotten, ancient past?"

1.9 Analysis of The Essay: "Crisis (In *Orientalism*)"

The essay "Crisis" (92) constitutes the section IV of Chapter I in *Orientalism* titled "The Scope of Orientalism." Said begins it by examining the phrase "textual attitude" and stating its implications. He cites the example of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in which the author satirizes the protagonist's attitude to reality formed on the basis of reading texts. It appears to be the motive on the part of Cervantes to show the fallacy of assuming that the complexities of our daily existence can be understood on the basis of what books or texts say. According to Said, it is a legitimate contention, and something that does not need much elaboration. But it is also a fact that people have tried to use texts in this

manner, i.e., believing in the truth of the textual representations and imagining a world into existence through another's (i.e., the author's) eye. Said therefore posits: "It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human "(93). He tries to determine the factors relating to man's propensity towards adopting a textual attitude, and comes to two propositions.

First, when one needs to access information related to distant lands and does not have the means of making a direct encounter, he can hope to know about it from texts pertaining to that region, whether in the form of travel books or guidebooks. The author of such books constructs a version of reality significantly differently from their own. A reader going through this book will imaginatively construe into existence a world that he is not privy to accessing, but one he has interpreted from the descriptions of the author. After a point of time, this book begins to acquire a greater authority, and use. Despite its constructed propositions, it begins to be the site of reference for one interested in exploring the said domain.

Second, the appearance of the claims of truth in representation (made by an author) as felt by one who confronts the scene at close quarters, would further reinforce the value of that text, as well as subsequent texts written by that author. In a way, he begins to be acknowledged as a specialist of that field. In that position of privilege, he can embark upon a project of newer perceptions/ constructions relating to the same domain. According to Said, "such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition...whose material presence and weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it." (94)

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For instance, Napoleon's fascination to subjugate the Orient must have been whetted by his reading of books written by Orientalist scholars who portrayed a mystical side to this far-off realm, a representation that was more constructed than real. But the tendency of man to favour the textual attitude results in the sustaining of the illusions of reality that is generated through the whole corpus of texts written in the said tradition.

According to Said, the question that might arise over here is how is it possible on the part of the Orientalists to go on misrepresenting the Orient, and yet be accepted as specialists in the field. What may be the cause behind the Orientals' silence? Examining this phenomenon in some detail, Said is of the view that the relation between Western writing and Oriental silence is the result of and the sign of the West's great cultural strength, its will to power over the Orient. Allied with it is the vast body of works that attempt to reinforce the Orientalist tradition by encouraging the adoption of a textual attitude. The fact that the Orientals/natives are powerless to do anything about this accumulating corpus of misrepresentation/ stereotyping of the Orient, contributed a great deal to the success of the Orientalist project.

Said categorically posits Orientalism "as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern the Orient" (95). In that sense, it is not merely an epistemological (or knowledge-garnering) project, but subtly associated with the political (imperialist) agenda. Hence, in a way the military supremacy of the West enabled the burgeoning of a discourse that was, most often, factually false, and had nothing to do with the Orientals' reality. But the transformation from being a scholarly discourse to one serving an imperialist agenda (on the ideological level) is what eventually the project led on to. Falsification of the idea of the Orient, according to Said, could be traced even to Dante who, despite having no experience of the Orient, still attempted to "capture it, describe it, improve it, radically alter it" (95).

Said, it has to be said, acknowledges the achievement of the Orientalist project in producing "disinterested" scholarly works, scholars; increasing the number of languages taught in the West, providing the Orient with sympathetic European students genuinely interested in Sanskrit or Arabian poetry, among others. But the overriding consideration was Western projection of the Orient where typecasting or stereotyping became the prevailing norm. For instance, a stray verse from the Koran would be considered the best evidence of an ineradicable Muslim sensuality. Said observes: "Orientalism assumed an unchanging Orient, absolutely different from the West" (96). Insofar as such a constructed view of the Orient has served the political agenda of the West, is a fact that does not need much documented evidence. But such a political strategy, if ethically considered, would surely provoke unrest in one's conscience about cultural, racial, or historical generalisations, their uses, value, degree of objectivity, and fundamental intent. Anwar Abdul Malek has characterised Orientalism as a political master-slave narrative where

a) On the level of position, The Orient and Orientals are the "object" of study, stamped with an otherness. They are stereotyped as passive, non-participating, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself.

b) Thematically, the Orientalists adopt a reductive, essentialist notion of the countries, nations and peoples of the Orient under study. This eventually leads to the construction of a "type" that is fixed and non-evolutive.

Historicizing the rise of Orientalist studies in the nineteenth century, Said feels that towards the last decades of the eighteenth century, England and France dominated Orientalism as a discipline. From the very beginning, Orientalism carried forward two traits:

1. A newly-found scientific self-consciousness based on the linguistic importance of the Orient to Europe, and

2. A tendency to divide, subdivide, and redivide its subject matter without ever changing its mind about the Orient as being always the same, unchanging, uniform, and radically peculiar object.

Frederich Schelegal, for one, was quite categorical in his notion of what stood for a "good" Orient, and "bad" Orient. His partisan views were not substantiated by concrete qualifications, and seemed to advocate a racist agenda. For instance, he held that Sanskrit and Persian, on the one hand, and Greek and German on the other had more affinities with each other than with the Semitic, Chinese, or African languages. The Semitic language, he felt, was unaesthetic, mechanical, inferior, backward. Thus, his idea of a "good" Orient was the classical period somewhere in the long-gone India, whereas the "bad" Orient lingered in present-day Asia, parts of North Africa, and Islam everywhere.

Said then cites instances of various authors from different parts of Europe (nineteenth-century to the present) in whose works the Orientalist discourse was strongly evident. It includes famous names like Goethe, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Kinglake, Nerval, Flaubert, Lane, Burton, Scott, Byron, Vigny, Disraeli, George Eliot, Gautier, Doughty, Barres, Loti, T.E. Lawrence, Forster, among others.

In Walter Scott's novel *The Talisman* (1825), for instance, a Christian warrior engages in conversation with his Muslim antagonist in this manner:

I well thought ... that your blinded race had their descent from the foul fiend, without whose aid you would never have been able to maintain this blessed land of Palestine against so many valiant soldiers of God. I speak not thus to thee in particular, Saracen, but generally of thy people and religion.

Here, the stereotyping of an Oriental is shown, with the authoritative voice showing both condescension and rebuke, a degree of high-handedness that is possible due to his privileged position *vis-a-vis* the Oriental. Said quips thus: "no matter how deep the specific exception, no matter how much a single Oriental can escape the fences placed around him, he is *first* an Oriental, *second* a human being, and *last* again an Oriental." (102)

H.A.R.Gibb, in his *Modern Trends in Islam* (1945) essentializes the Arabs in this manner:

It is true that there have been great philosophers among the Muslim peoples and that some of them were Arabs, but they were rare exceptions. The Arab mind, whether in relation to the outer world or in relation to the processes of thought, cannot throw off its intense feeling for the separateness and the individuality of the concrete events. This is, I believe, one of the main factors behind that "lack of a sense of law" which [can be] regarded as the characteristic difference in the Oriental.

Said contends that the above two examples are instances of "pure Orientalism" (106) as enunciated by Europocentric scholars. Such representations of an Oriental enable in creating a "difference" from the rationally-governed Western culture, making them seem primordial/ primitivistic, or at best, medievalist. But any attempt on the part of the Orientals to bring about reformations in their outlook would again not be accepted; insofar as (to the European mind) the Orient is imagined to be a fixed, static entity without any possibilities of change. Hence, it shares its predicament with the Fool in *King Lear* who complains: "They'll have me whipp'd for speaking true, thou'lt have me whipp'd for lying; sometimes I am whipp'd for holding my peace."

Orientalism taken to the political arena, has served Europe's colonialist agenda. This has been rendered possible through the "civilizing mission" of the Western imperialists who justify their colonial

occupation by positing that the "Orientals have never understood the meaning of self-government the way [they] do" (107). If Arab Palestinians oppose Israeli settlement and occupation of their lands, then it is considered as Islamic opposition to non-Islamic peoples. As anticolonialism sweeps and unifies the entire Oriental world, the Orientalist condemns it as an insult to Western democracies. The Orientalists go to the extent of misrepresenting Orientals (for instance, the Arabs) as "camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization" (108). There is ever the assumption that even though the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled to own or possess the majority of the world's resources. The alibi is that, unlike the Oriental, he is a "true human being."

Said concludes his essay by underlining the limitations of Orientalism that are fundamentally related to disregarding, essentializing, stereotyping, reducing the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region. But Orientalism has not remained content with merely such a form of epistemic violence. It, according to Said, "views the Orient as something whose existence has remained fixed in time and place for the West...The West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behaviour" (109). The crisis that he talks about is thus the disparity between texts and reality. The contemporary intellectual can hope to learn from Orientalism how, on the one hand, he can enlarge or limit the scope of his area of survey/research, and on the other, to see the human ground in which texts, visions, methods, and disciplines begin, grow, thrive, and degenerate. The discourse of Orientalism is a pertinent case-study in this light.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Q.1 What, according to Said, constitutes the "crisis" in Western representations of the Orient?

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....

....

Q.2 What do you understand by the phrase "textual attitude"? Examine how Western perception of the East has been effected/ affected by such a textual attitude?

....

....

....

Q.3 Cite a few pertinent examples from Said's essay regarding how the Orient/Orientals have been misrepresented/ stereotyped by the West as a negative, passive, static other.

....

....

....

1.10 References and Suggested Readings

Foundational texts on postcolonialism

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- Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)
- Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)
- Albert Memmi: *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965)
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- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: "A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present" (1999)

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- Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995)

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UNIT – II (a)

FEMINISMS AND FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Contents:

2a.0 OBJECTIVES

By the study of this unit on *Feminisms and Feminist Literary Criticism*, the students will be able to:

- *Appreciate* the significance and diversity of feminism and feminist movement.
- *Trace* the development of feminist movement in modern times.
- *Understand* the relationship feminism and literary appreciation.
- *Familiarize* themselves with the major concerns, concepts, writers and their works in the area.

2a.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit is the first one in this block on *Feminist Literary Theory and Critical Essays*. Though not a part of your prescribed syllabus this unit is meant to acquaint you with the background of feminisms and feminist literary theory. This unit will allow you to understand the two subsequent units clearly. Not only this, it will also prepare you to read the texts like fictions and dramas, prescribed in you syllabus from a feminist perspective.

This unit shall cover a general introduction to feminism and then will move on to the application of feminist ideals in the arena of literature and literary criticism. Going through the unit will make you realize the diversity of approach and the richness of this school of thought. This is why at times rather than singular feminism, plural feminisms has been used in this study material. It will be better if while reading this unit you try to relate it with the life and circumstances around you. Male or female, all of you are surely going to find relevance of at least some of these ideas in your days to day life. If you do so, this unit will help you not only your academic life but also otherwise.

2a.2 FEMINISMS

2a.2.1 Definitions

Feminism is an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at the place of work and within the family and conscious action to change the situation.

Thus, it is about women's equality, their freedom and rights. However, you must keep in mind that feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities of women's lives. Women all over the world face different levels of oppression (e.g. violence), exploitation (e.g. unequal pay, lower wages) and subordination (lesser power of decision making) depending on their class, socio-cultural background, level of education and consciousness. As the changes that they need for the betterment of their lives are different, feminism can be articulated differently in different parts of the country by different communities.

Following the above definition of feminism, a feminist is one who recognizes the existence of sexism, male domination, and patriarchy and takes some conscious action against it. They believe that all over the world, simply because of their sex, women experience discrimination and unequal treatment in terms of basic food nutrition, ad health care, education employment and participation in decision making in social, cultural, religious, political and economic institutions. Thus, the recognition of sexism in not enough to be a feminist, it has to be accompanied by acts of resistance.

> **Stop to consider:**
> *Sexism* and *patriarchy* are two interrelated terms that are frequently used in feminisms. Patriarchy, the word means the rule of the father, that is, the patriarch. In feminism, it has wider implications. Here it refers to a social system where men control members of the family, property and other economic resources, and make major decisions. Linked to this social system is the sexist belief that men are superior to women, and that women are and should be controlled by men, and that they are a part of men's property. This thinking forms the basis of many of our religious laws, social practices and legal positions. It explains the practices, which confine women to home and control their lives.

2a.2.2 The History of the Feminist Movement

The term feminism is a relatively new one. Firstly used in 1870s, it came in vogue in the present sense in the late 1960s only. However, well-organized women's empowerment movements now also called feminist movements stated as back as in the late nineteenth century. This does not mean that women never thought of their rights earlier. In fact, as discrimination against and restrictions on women have always been here in history, so have been the resistances to these. The only difference lies in the fact that while earlier the voice was raised mostly by one individual or against personal injustices, since t elate nineteenth century it started taking an organized shape in the form of movements.

For the sake of convenience, the history of feminist movement in the western world is divided into three waves, likening the ebb and flow of the movement's mass appeal to that of a cresting wave.

➢ The First Wave

The first wave feminism refers to the period starting from 1880s till the 1920s. The origins of these movements lie in the transformations that the western society was undergoing around that time. Liberal democratic ideologies, evangelical protestant Christianity, socialism, social reform movements inspired a wide spectrum of women to challenge the double standards of the society and their exclusion from the public realm. The major concerns of the various women's movements in the beginning were- equal status for women within marriage, dress reforms, equal property and legal rights, higher education of women, better conditions and wages for working women, etc. by the beginning of the twentieth century, it was realized that the key to all these reforms lie in greater political leverage, and thus the right to vote emerged as a unifying objective for feminists of various persuasions. The second decade of the twentieth century witnessed many victories in this regard. Due to the efforts of the supporters of women's suffrage, in 1917 Soviet Union, and in 1920, the USA women got the right to vote. However, Britain took time (1928) to give this right to all the women irrespective of differences.

➢ The Second Wave

Second wave feminism began with the resurgence of prominent feminist activities in the late 1960s and continued till 1990s, broadening the area of focus to family, sexuality and work. Feminists of this period encouraged women to understand that their personal struggles stemmed form social, not individual problems, thus, popularizing the phrase 'personal is political'. It differed from the first wave feminism in many ways, despite sharing the same goal, i. e. betterment of living conditions for women. Most significant of the difference was the demand greater sexual freedom for women. Legalized birth control and abortion, legal

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reforms of the victims of sexual violence, liberalized divorce laws were some of the key elements of women's campaigns to control their own bodies. Feminist of this period also sought recognition for works conventionally done by women such as domestic work, child care, etc and demanded equal participation from men in these works. However, slowly the consensus among feminists regarding issues ceased to exist. Questions of differences among women demanded new answers. By 1980s, organizations of non-western, non-white, visible minority, refugees aboriginal women complicated and diversified the notion of one and similar female condition or experience or problem. Thus, 1990s saw the so-called end of the second wave of feminist movement and the beginning of the post-feminist age or third wave of feminism.

> ➤ **he Third Wave**

This is a term for a wide body of both popular and academic works of the 1990s and onwards such as Naomi Woolf's *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women (1991),* Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War against America Women (1991)* etc. Written by young women in their late twenties or early thirties, the third wave of feminism represented a generational challenge to first and second wave feminism. These feminists were especially concerned with the issues faced by adolescent girls and young women. They demanded for more inclusiveness, flexibility and practicality in feminist theories and definitions as to who could be a feminist and how. Inspired by the several strands of already existing feminisms, the third wavers tried to formulate feminist practices, inclusive of race, class, gender and sexuality. One more prominent feature of third wave is the centrality of anger, used as a mechanism to provide voice to girls who had been silenced in the society and within feminism.

2a.3 FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

2a.3.1 Feminisms and Literature

By now you know that feminism is a practice that tries to bring real life changes in the society. To bring changes, feminist have invariably made study of the socio- cultural practices and ideologies around to see if they are patriarchal in nature and if yes, how these institutions, practices and norms marginalize confine and misinterpret women and their lives. Thus feminist have *critiqued* law, religion, philosophy, political systems, science, social systems and the similar institutions across cultures and thereby, raised voice for the transformation of the biased values. Feminists believe that women are not naturally inferior to men. They are *socialized* in such a way from their early childhood, surrounded by various socio-cultural institutions, that their personalities emerge as weaker than their male counterparts. In the context of socialization, literature, according to feminists, plays a very significant role. This is so, because it provides the role models that indicate both to men and women, what constitutes the accepted norms of femininity and what should be proper feminine goals and aspirations.

Though as a distinctive and concrete approach to literature, feminist literary criticism emerged in late 1960s only, the close relations ship between the two, i. e. feminism and literature has always been recognized in feminist movements and the individuals seeking women's empowerment. Thus long before the formal launch of this school of criticism, Mary Wollstonecraft's more socially oriented treatise for women's development *A Vindication for the Rights of Women* (1792) discussed male writers like Milton, Pope and Rousseau and the gender bias of their writings, Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* (1929) vividly portrayed the unequal treatment faced by women seeking education and a place in the artistic world. Similarly Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) has an important section on the portrayal of women in the novels of D. H. Lawrence.

2a.3.2 Some Basic Assumptions of Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism that stated in late 1960s and continues till date has not been unitary either in theory or practice. Feminist literary critics have tried to explore the factors of sexual difference and privilege in the production, the form and content, the reception and the critical analysis an evaluation of the literary works. Just as the wide area of work, these practitioners of feminist literary theory have manifested a great variety of critical perspectives, procedures and influences (such as of Marxism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, etc). However, some of the common assumptions and concerns they all share are:

1.   Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically; patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which they are kept so.

2.   In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is *Other*: she is marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values.

3.   Most of the critics believe that while biology determines our sex (male or female), attributes such as femininity and masculinity are for the most part constructed by culture. From the early life boys are trained and encouraged to inculcate masculinity, which

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is identified with being active, dominating adventurous rational and creative; and girls are expected to be feminine , which means being just the opposite of masculine, i.e. passive, submissive, emotional, timid and conventional.

4. In the patriarchal cultures masculine values are given more value and importance than the feminine attributes and accordingly men are placed in the important sphere of the outer *world* and women are relegated to the limited and less important domain of household.

5. The whole western civilization is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology. It is structured in a way to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains. Not only men believe in this system, women are also socialized in such a way to as to internalize faith in their inherent inferiority.

6. Gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of literature, whether we are consciously aware of these issues or not.

7. They claim that until recently, the most highly regarded literary works/ classics have always been by men and for men. Patriarchy pervades through these writings. These works give very little space to female characters and thus mainly speak to male readers. Under such conditions, the female reader either is unable to relate with the text, or has to identify with the male protagonist, assuming male values and male ways of perceiving the world. Thus, they claim that the canon is gender biased.

8. All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, aims at changing the world by prompting gender equality.

Stop to consider

Binary opposition: It is a practice that that runs through western thought of arranging conceptual/ theoretical system in opposed, contrasting pair. For example, the idea of *good* or *light* can be understood only in contrast to *bad* and *dark*. The two terms are supposed to be radically separate from one another. This apparently neutral way of classifying the attributes of the world, is not so in reality. Feminists say that these binaries are not only descriptive but also evaluative and one term/ concept is privileged at the cost of the other. The binaries between man and woman, masculinity and femininity, culture and nature is no exception where the first term is invariably has got positive value and the latter negative. Feminists want these binary oppositions to be questioned and subverted in their mission to dismantle patriarchy.*Canon:* It is a term that is used generally for a set of literary works, which by cumulative consensus have come to be recognized as masterpieces/ classics and serve to be the chief subject of study of literary history, criticism, scholarship and teaching. Feminists argue that the canon is sexist as it has given place to very few women writers. Hence, they doubt the evaluative process of traditional literary criticism. Feminist studies have served to raise the status of female authors hitherto, more of less scanted by scholars and critics(like Elizabeth Gaskell, Elizabeth Barrett Browning etc) and t bring to purview other authors who have been largely of entirely overlooked as subjects of serious consideration (like aphra behn, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

2a.3.3 Major Concerns of The Feminist Critics

Based on the major assumption feminist critics also share certain common goals and objectives despite their differences. Some of their major concerns are:

1. Revaluing women's experiences which have been marginalized and ignored in patriarchal culture and literature

2. Examining the representation of women in literature by both women and men.

3. challenge the representation of women as *Other*

4. Examining power relations that exist in texts and in life, with a view to breaking them down, seeing reading as a political act and showing the extent of patriarchy.

5. Recognizing the role in making what is social and constructed seem transparent and natural.

6. Re-reading psychoanalysis to further explore the issues of male and female identity.

7. Exploring the question of whether men and women write differently, if there is something called female language and if this is available to men also.

8. Exposing the ideological base of supposedly *neutral* or *mainstream* literary interpretations.

2a.3.4 Two Major Orientations of Feminist Literary Theories

A major concern of most of the feminist literary critics has been to reconstitute the ways we deal with literature in order to do justice to female points of view, concerns and values. In attempts to do so, these critics have focused mainly on two literary practices- reading and writing, in other words they aim at altering the ways women read, and discovering *how, what* and *why* women writer/ do not write. Historically speaking, feminist critics first stated with re-reading, revaluing and critiquing the

canonical literature that is mostly male centered from women's perspective and then a specific branch called gynocriticism was launched that focused on women writers. Thus, we have two major orientations in this field which can termed as *feminist critique*, dealing with reading and *gynocriticism* dealing with writing.

> ➤ **Feminist critique**

As pointed out earlier, canonical literature has mostly been gender biased, but this bias was hardly ever noticed or criticized. The negative or marginalized representation of women as other seldom bothered readers, whether men or women. These representations were regarded to the following the natural order of things. Thus literature by men about men and for men was passed off as having universal significance and value. Feminists have tried to expose this seamless practice. In this particular strand of feminism feminists have insisted that women must read literature not as submissive readers, who accept the textual ideology without ever questioning it, but as *resisting* ones. As resistant readers women must re-read critically and question the author's intentions and design so as to bring to light and counter the implicit sexual biases of working in a literary text. The aim was constantly to relate literature with the lived experiences real life and thus raise consciousness. Some major works in this field have been Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1968), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and *The Resisting Reader* (1978) by Judith Fetterley. Mentioned may also be an anthology of twenty one articles titled *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives* (1972), that like other works in this area emphasized on how writers, both men and women, have created "unreal" female characters. The frequent criticism had been that literature has never quite managed to convey the complexity of "real woman'" to its readers. An important procedure had been to identify recurrent and distorting images

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of women frequently found in mainstream literature. These images are often resented as tending to fall into two antithetical patterns. On the one hand we have idealized images like Madonna, Dante's Beatrice, the Muses of the arts, Penelope and the Angel in the House, and on the other hand we have the demonic projections whoa re the source of all evil, such as Eve, Pandora, Medusa, and Lady Macbeth. Thus women were found to be projected in extremes, thus unable to do justice to women's experiences. Besides, while there were so many ideal role models for men to be found in literature, there were hardly any women role models who were strong and self achieving and whose identity did not depend on men and thus instill a positive sense of feminine identity among the readers. Thus, this strand of feminism looked at who women have been projected in literature, how gender biased stereotypes of women characters have contributed in perpetuating the marginal position for women in literature as well as life. Though criticized for their naïve and simplistic equations of literature and real life, and lack of theoretical backup, the contribution of these writers in highlighting the political nature of any critical discourse can not be overstated.

> **Gynocriticism**

As the images of women criticism of early 1970s began to seem simplistic and uniform, several works appeared which promoted both the study of women writers and a feminist critical discourse in order to discuss them. Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) are significant works in this area. Focused on women writers, Elaine Showalter termed this orientation in feminist criticism as *gynocriticism*. According to her, gynocriticism is concerned with- "woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, genes and structures of literature by women. It includes the

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psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual and collective female literary career; literary history; and, of course, studies of particular writers and works."

In simple words this is a school that concerns itself with developing a specifically female poetics dealing with the works written by women in all its aspects such as- the motivation and inspiration behind it, the way it gets written, the form and content of these works, the way it is received by the readers and the critics, etc. Thus it deals with the works of women writers in all its three stages- pre- writing, writing and post writing. Some of the major concerns of gynocritics have been-

- To identify the distinctive feminine subject matters in women's writings, like- the worlds of domesticity, or the specifically feminine experiences like- gestation, child birth, nurturing, or even the cases of female bonding
- To uncover in literary history a female tradition and revive the sub communities of women writers so as to establish a genealogy that would in turn provide models and emotional support to their own readers and successors.
- To establish that there is a distinctive feminine model of experience or subjectivity in thinking, valuing feeling and perceiving oneself and the outer world and this has and must get an implicit or explicit expression in women's literature.
- Some gynocritics have also emphasized on a distinctively feminine style of speech and writing. They claim that women's writing has distinctive sentence structures, different symbolism imagery, word choice narrative structures and all these are more flexible, accommodating and open ended.

SAQ

1. How do the stereotypical images of women perpetuate patriarchy?

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2. Do you think women write differently from men? In what ways is their writing different?

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A check list of feminist theory questions

1. To what extent does the representation of women (and men) in the work reflect the place and time in which the work was written?

2. How are the relations between men and women, or those between members of the same sex, presented in the work? What roles do men and women assume and perform and with what consequences?

3. Does the author present the work from within a predominantly male or female sensibility? Why might this have been done, and with what effects?

4. How do the facts of the author's life relate to the presentation of men and women in the work? To their relative degrees of power?

5. How do other works by the author correspond to this one in their depiction of the power relationships between men and women?

2a.4 VARIOUS STRANDS IN FEMINIST CRITICISM

Besides the two major orientations, feminist criticism has developed its distinctive forms based on the place of inception, influence of other theories, or even political goals. These various strands mark the diversity and differences within the feminist positions. Some of the major strands with which you must be familiar are:

2a.4.1 Anglo American Feminisms

Anglo American feminist literary criticism refers to the theories and critical practices that came to the fore I the 1960s and 70s in America and Britain. The discussions till now that you have come across such as the major orientations, concerns and assumptions of the feminist critics mainly pertain to Anglo American feminist critics only. These white middle class materialist and empirically oriented feminists are invariably contrasted to their theoretically oriented and idealist counterparts, French feminists. Their early works focused on women's absence from the literary canon and strove to recover and promote female literary tradition. The broad practice of critiquing and deconstructing representations of women in male authored texts followed. And ultimately they wanted to find more accurate representations of women that would allow for women's reconstruction. A major contribution of these critics has been anthologizing the works of mostly forgotten or neglected women writers.

Quite suspicious of the abstract theorization, these critics have mainly been concerned with the thematic study of the women by and about women and their results have been quite demonstrable and concrete. These critics have been mainly interested in the sociological dimension of women's literature and the analysis if the social construction of female gender roles. Some of the major works and their major contentions may be mentioned here. The famous English novelist and feminist writer Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) for example,

focused on the various cultural economic and educational hindrances for women within patriarchy which do not allow women to develop their productive and creative energies. In *Thinking about Women* (1968) Mary Ellman propounded her theory of two modes of writing- masculine mode assuming a voice of authority and feminine mode taking a more playful approach. Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) studied the literary reflection of women according to patriarchal norms in the works of D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer. In *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979), Gilbert and Gubar made a study of female creativity in the nineteenth century England where they focused on how female productivity was hindered because of the prevailing myths that reserved artistic creativity to the masculine sphere only. Adrienne Rich in her *Of Women Born* (1976) focuses on the issues of motherhood and female sexuality. For her it is on the terrain of women's body that patriarchy is erected and criticized compulsory heterosexuality as an imposition that forces subordination by forcing women to relate with men. Thus, the Anglo American feminists gave great deal of emphasis on the critique of existing social institutions.

2a.4.2 French Feminisms

French feminist criticism refers to the varied body of thoughts that while being heterogeneous has several themes and areas of investigation in common; that appeared in France, Quebec and Belgium. French feminist theory is often seen against Anglo-American criticism. Unlike their Anglo-American counterpart, their stance is idealist rather than materialist. These theorists heavily influenced by the poststructuralist ideas of Derrida and Lacan, firmly believe in the contingent and constructed nature of any reality. And in this constructed world and reality they feel that the role of language is paramount. Rather than inquiring into the historical and material conditions of women, French feminists are more concerned with the construction of women's

identity in language and locate both women's oppression and potential for resistance in it. The major figures in this strand of feminism have been Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Monique Wittig. These critics have suggested various ways of resisting patriarchal such as by revaluing the feminine, and reclaiming the body, both of which have been marginalized by the phallocentric order.

These critics believe that the Anglo American attempts to broaden the canon, recovery of the lost women writers and their works are misdirected, as these activities can very easily be appropriated by the patriarchal culture. In contrast they want to dismantle the binary opposition and unsettle the hierarchical power relations between them by privileging the feminine previously regarded to be inferior qualities of unreason, formlessness, darkness, fluidity etc.

However French feminists have also been criticized for being highly theoretical and therefore not paying attention to the ground realities of women's lives and their political needs. Besides, it at times becomes essentialist and seems to assert that certain absolute, biological, innate qualities that women possess.

2a.4.3 Third World/ post colonial Feminisms

In the late 80s a need was felt to insert the divisions among the women along the lines of nationality, race, caste, religion and sexual orientation into women's experiences of oppressions as dealt in feminism. By the mid 80s white middle class feminists' universalizing and homogenizing discourses came under heavy attack. The challenge came from various fronts, one being the third worlds women from the post colonial societies in Asia and Africa. C. T Mohanty in her 1986 article "under the western eyes" theorized the location of third world women. The writings of Gayatri Spivak, Trinh T. Minh- ha and Gloria Anzaldua powerfully critiqued the hegemonic conceptualization of feminism and feminist struggles.

As a result if such voices a remapping of feminism started. Histories of women were made consciously more inclusive. Thus feminism was strengthened by the voices from the margins, and location and identity became key issues in the feminist discourses.

Post-colonial feminisms broadly characterize and address feminist preoccupations with race and gender that focus on the formerly colonized societies of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. These feminist engagements have revolved around crucial issues of cultural identity, language, nationalism and the position of women within newly emerging nation states, female self representation and critical interrogation of white bourgeois western feminism.

Postcolonial feminism explores women's racialized and sexualized otherness by locating their marginality and oppression within a three tiered structure of discrimination maintained by colonial and neo-colonial indigenous patriarchies and the academic and cultural hegemony of western feminism. While women's participation is highly solicited in the nation-building process for their capacity as mother or reproducers of nation, their commensurate recognition, right to equal citizenship has been neglected.

2a.4.4 Black Feminisms

Black feminisms refer to a variety of feminisms that are identified by their opposition to the racism and sexism encountered by black women. It came as a critique of the Eurocentric white middleclass feminism and challenged white women's ability; in fact right, to speak for black women. Their main emphasis is on the intersection of race and gender in the lives of black women.

Politically the term black is primarily associated with pan African black identity in Africa and its Diasporas, but for a long time black feminism has served as a generic term for non – white feminisms. Some

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of the major figures have been Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Alice Walker and bell hooks. They have developed theories which meet the needs of black women by helping them to mobilize around issues that they perceive to have a direct impact on the overall quality of the lives of black women. Black women and other women of color have pointed out the insensitivity of white feminists in assuming that white experience could speak for that of all women.

SAQ

1. How does French feminism differs from Anglo-American feminism?

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2. What are the common areas of concern between postcolonial feminism and black feminism?

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Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gibs me any best place! And ain't I a woman! Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seem 'em mos' all sold into slavery, and when I cried out my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

— Sojourner Truth (1797–1883)

Check your progress

1. What are the major concerns of feminist literary critics?
2. Point out the major orientation of gynocriticism? Do you think that their approach is a limited one?
3. Try to approach one of the classics prescribed in your syllabus from feminist perspective.
4. Do you think that some common ground exists between white middleclass feminism and the urgent feminist concerns of our contemporary Indian society?
5. Make a list of the major Anglo-American feminist critics along with their major works.

2a.5 SOME MORE TERMS AND CONCEPTS

1   *Androgyny*: derived from Greek words andro (male) and gyn (female) androgyny refers to a psychological and psychic mixture of the traditional masculine and feminine virtues and values. Many feminist philosophers claim that androgynous personalities are holistic and have a capacity to experience the full range of human emotions and thus represent an adequate moral ideal.

2   *Androcentrism/ phallocentrism*: derived from Greek word for male, androcentrism literally means a doctrine of male centredness. Androcentric practices are those whereby the experiences of men are assumed to be generalisable, and are seen to provide objective criterion through which women's experiences can also be organized and evaluated. Some writers, particularly influenced by psychoanalytic theory prefer the terms phallocentric or phallocentrism, in order to dram attention to the way penis (phallus) acts as the symbolic representation of male centredness. In androcentric tendencies whereby their culture, knowledge, organization and institution s reflect and reproduce

the dominance and power of men. A simple example can be given of the use of androcentric language. For quite a long time in the English speaking world the terms men or mankind were used in generic ways, instead of more gender neural terms like humankind or even people. Similarly he used to be used universally. Feminist analyses have problematised the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns, arguing that such linguistic practices both reflect and contribute to the marginalisation of women.

3   *Body*: feminism has a deep history of ambivalence towards the female body, which has figured alternately as the source of women's oppression and as the locus of specifically female powers. Both the approaches focus on the reproductive body of women and female sexualities. While many feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and Susan Bordo find that the corporeal aspects of women's body, like menstruation, pregnancy lactation etc, make women vulnerable to male power and dominance, others (Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva) celebrate female body as the source of power, valorizing its unique reproductive qualities. In the wake of the poststructuralist theories since 1980s, there has been a virtual resurrection of the body in the social and philosophical theories. So far as feminism is concerned, it seeks to challenge the traditional association between body, women and weakness in contrast to that between mind men and power.

4   *Eco-feminism*: A contemporary radical school of environmental philosophy. It emphasizes the similar ways nature and women have been conceptualized, devalued, and oppressed. It also asserts the close interrelationship between environmental and social issues. Androcentrism (male-centredness, masculinism) is a fundamental problem that must be addressed if we are to end the subjugation of nature and women. The ideal involves recognition of the value of the individual as part of a community, in which great value is placed on diversity, equality, and interrelatedness. The self is seen as embedded in a community, place, and the body.

5   *Sisterhood*: The term refers to s sense of solidarity among women across the boundaries of class, caste race religion and geography.

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It played a very important role in mobilizing women to fight against general patriarchal oppression during the second wave of feminism. However, as pointed out earlier in this unit, the differences among women started coming to the forefront and the ideal of universal sisterhood cam under attack. However, the very slogan of radical feminist movement "personal is political is based on this concept only.

6   *Sexual Politics*: coined by Kate Millett in her book of the same title the term became a central concept of second wave of feminism. The phrase draws attention to how the division of sex and gender structure every aspect of the social organization of patriarchy- from economy to family, from politics to myths, literature and religion. The concept also at times refers to how patriarchy has constructed female sexuality in a very limiting and dangerous manner and that "feminist should speak to sexual pleasure as a fundamental right".

2a.6 SUMMING UP

Thus, in this unit we came to know about some of the basic ideas and issues in feminism and feminist literary theory. This unit aims at making you appreciate the rich variety within feminism and understand the relevance of feminist literary criticism in today's context. This unit shall help you to grasp the two essays prescribed in your syllabus, by Toril Moi and Elaine Showalter.

2a.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit – II (b)

"Towards A Feminist Poetics" (1979)

-Elaine Showalter

Contents:

2b.0 Objectives

After reading this unit on "Towards a Feminist Poetics" by Elaine Showalter, the students will be able to:

- *Appreciate the contribution of Elaine Showalter in the development of feminist literary criticism*
- *Understand the underpinnings of gynocriticism*
- *Comprehend the three phases of women's writings in England*
- *Grasp the way Anglo American feminist literary criticism works*
- *Link this unit with the earlier one which introduced them with the basics of feminist literary criticism*

2b.1 Introduction

This is one of Elaine Showalter's most important articles on feminist literary theory, the other being "Feminist Criticism in Wilderness" (1981). This particular piece of critical practice is aimed at introducing the students with the basic workings of feminist literary criticism. An example of Anglo American feminist literary criticism, this essay includes both theoretical and practical aspects of criticism- by referring both to the foundations of literature and literary criticism and specific literary writers. You will find a close relationship between the unit which you have already read, this one and the one which follows. While in this unit you read a piece by Showalter, the next unit is devoted mainly to critique the position taken by Showalter and the like critics, as Moi is oriented more towards the French feminist position. After reading these units you will be in a position to understand the basic points of similarity and differences between the two major schools of feminist criticism in a better way.

2b.2 About the Author

American cultural and feminist critic Elaine Showalter was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1941 and got educated at Bryn Mawr College and the University of California. She got her Ph.D. award on the thesis called *The Double Critical Standard: Criticism of Women Writers in England, 1845–1880* (1969) which was later turned into the book *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1978), the most famous of her works. Here she reconstructs a tradition of women's literature in English which she plots in terms of *feminine, feminist* and *female*. Showalter argues that women's literary subculture like those of other minority groups has evolved through three major phases- imitation, revolt/protest and self discovery. You shall get the details of these concepts in "Reading the Text" section of this unit.

Elaine Showalter is seen as the founder of the second wave of feminist criticism in America. She is credited with putting feminist literary criticism on the map and having coined the term gynocriticism. She emphasizes the importance of studying the female writers, bringing women into the canon and analyzing in terms of gender roles.

Showalter's work as a feminist critic has had *three continuing emphases:* recovering a women's cultural and literary history, charting the evolution of feminist literary criticism and calling for far ranging cultural and pedagogical reforms. All these projects are founded upon the idea of women's culture as muted in relation to the dominant masculine culture. Showalter rejects the notion of an innate female literary imagination or style, emphasizing instead women's shared cultural and socio- historical experiences.

Her major works:

The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980 (1985) discusses hysteria, which was once known as the

"female malady" and according to Showalter, is called <u>depression</u> today. Showalter demonstrates the ways in which female insanity has been defined, detected and treated in the 19ᵗʰ and 20ᵗʰ century England, and of the long cultural associations between femininity and madness.

Sexual Anarchy: Gender at Culture at the Fin de Siecle (1990) outlines a history of the sexes and the crises, themes, and problems associated with the battle for sexual supremacy and identity. Just like the earlier work here also she continues her interdisciplinary investigations of female experience in the modern period. In both these books, she extends her concerns beyond women writers and looks at the contradictions and tensions that shape women's social, psychological, and sexual development. Besides, as in *A Literature of Their Own*, in these cultural studies also Showalter seems to suggest that attention to gender and sexual difference reveals another plot another/ alternative cultural history hitherto submerged in that of the dominant masculine culture.

In the field of literary criticism, after *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter turned her attentions to charting the relationship between both feminist and other modes of criticism and between varieties of feminist criticism. "Towards a feminist poetics" (1979) responds to charges that feminist criticism lacks rigour and a clearly articulated theory by outlining taxonomy of feminist criticism which distinguishes between feminist critique and gynocritics. Feminist critique is concerned with women as reader, specially the male authored texts and is 'political and polemical', because of its dependence on existing male texts and critical models, the potential for feminist critique to produce a feminist literary theory is limited. Gynocritics, on the other hand, is concerned with women as writers, and seeks to construct a female framework for analysis of women's literature. In its emphasis on a female culture, gynocritics has much in common with feminist research in the fields such as anthropology, history and sociology.

"Feminist criticism in wilderness" (1981) further distinguishes between four models of gynocriticism, listed in order of their perceived values: biological, linguistic, psychological, and cultural. She argues that feminist examinations of the wild zone or un- chartered spaces of a female culture, muted in relation to the dominant culture, offer the greatest promise of the construction of a women's liberty, canon and the evolution of feminist literary theory.

As mentioned earlier, her interests are also in pedagogical and curricular issues. In "women and literary curriculum" (1970), she emphasized the importance of women's studies courses, which would serve as the academic equivalent of "decontamination chambers". More recently, Showalter has argued for the need to institute curricular changes which would incorporate 'gender as a fundamental category of literary analysis' (The Other Bostians), not only by installing woman writers, but also by defamiliarizing and problematizing masculinity; that is by showing how masculinity, like femininity is socially constructed.

To refer to her recent contributions, In *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997) Showalter argues that hysteria, a medical condition traditionally seen as feminine, has persisted for centuries and is now manifesting itself in cultural phenomena in the forms of socially- and medically-accepted maladies. Psychological and physical effects of unhappy lives become "hysterical epidemics" when popular media saturate the public with paranoid reports and findings, essentially legitimizing, as Showalter calls them, "imaginary illnesses" (*Hystories*, cover). Showalter says "Hysteria is part of everyday life. It not only survives in the 1990s, but it is more contagious than in the past. Newspapers, magazines, talk-shows, self-help books, and of course the Internet ensure that ideas, once planted, manifest themselves internationally as symptoms".

Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage (2001) surveys feminist icons since the 18th century, situated mostly in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Showalter covers the contributions of predominately intellectuals like Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Camille Paglia. Noting popular media's importance to the perception of women and feminism today, Showalter also discusses the contributions of popular personalities like Oprah Winfrey and Princess Diana.

Teaching Literature (2003) is essentially a guide to teaching English literature to undergraduate students in university. Showalter covers approaches to teaching theory, preparing syllabi and talking about taboo subjects among many other practical topics. Showalter says that teaching should be taken as seriously and given as much intellectual consideration as scholarship.

Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents (2005) is a study of the Anglo-American academic novel from the 1950s to the present.

A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx (2009) makes a claim for a literary tradition of American women writers.

A doyenne of Anglo-American feminist criticism, Showalter's earlier theoretical works like *A Literature of Their Own* faced much criticism from a generation of younger feminist critics who were schooled in French-influenced post-structuralist theory. Representative of these critics is the Duke-University based Toril Moi; whose 1985 book *Sexual/Textual Politics* accused Showalter of having a limited, essentialist view of women. In an academy more and more influenced by post-structuralism through the 80's and 90's, it is arguable that Showalter's sterling reputation lost a little of its lustre after Moi's attack.

SAQ:

1. What are the major concerns of Elaine Showalter as a feminist critic?

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2. Write a brief note on the foremost ideas developed in *A Literature of Their Own*.

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2b.3 Reading the Text:

2b.3.1 The Need for Theorization

Showalter begins by offering the example of a 'London symposium' of 1977 at which Leon Edel, biographer of Henry James, poses the situation of three scholars, Criticus, Poeticus and Plutarchus who stand on the steps of the British Museum discussing 'why femininity requires brainwork' (125). Showalter is concerned by stereotypes of feminism and the way critics and scholars think about feminist literary criticism, its nature, objectives and strategies. While some critics like Pattowe feel that feminist criticism would naturally be "obsessed with the phallus", others like Robert Boyers believe that it will be "obsessed with destroying great male artists".

According to Showalter such reductive and misleading attacks on feminist literary practices have been possible only because of the absence of a clearly defined and articulated theory of feminist criticism. Showalter is more concerned over the fact that even the feminist critics hardly seem to agree on what it is that they mean to profess and defend.

The second obstacle regarding developing the precise form of feminist poetics has been the activists' suspicion of theory. Conventionally, too many literary abstractions and claims which posed to be universal, have described only the male point of view, only their experiences and have "falsified the social and personal context in which literature is produced and consumed. According to many feminist writers and critics, theory or theorization is based on precision, rationalization and systematic structuring of ideas. And it is this aspect of theory of which they are apprehensive. Whether we talk o novelist like Virginia Woolf, or George Eliot, or feminist critics, most of them have expressed their dissatisfaction over the so called "reason" or "objectivity". Adrienne Rich, for example, in *Of Woman Born*, in fact, observes that the term "rational" relegates to its opposite term all that it refuses to deal with and thus ends by assuming itself to be purified of non rational. Others have expressed their doubts regarding fixed methodology and assumptions of any theorization. Critics like Mary Daly feel that

methodology in itself is an intellectual instrument of patriarchy, a tyrannical apparatus, which sets implicit limits n what can be questioned and discussed and what can not be. Thus, these feminist critics find the academic demand for theorization, a threat to the feminist need for "authenticity".

The questions of "authenticity" and "experience":

The questions of "authenticity" and "experience" and "authenticity of experience" are heavily debated ones in feminist theory and criticism. While in the second wave of feminism and its consciousness raising programmes, these two terms were the "in" ones and ensured that feminist politics is not getting trapped in verbose and abstractions. These are the terms which form the base of gynocritics, which believes that women's experiences which have been denied due status till now are the authentic ones and only women can express these genuinely. However, with the third wave of feminism these have come under surveillance.

Another major fear has been of assimilation and loss of identity or difference. Looking at theory and practice, activism and theorization as binary opposites, these critics dread the demise of even the feminist movement itself, if pushed to rigidity of theory.

However, Showalter finds that such defensive position may be has been responsible for the marginal position women critics and thinkers have in literary scholarship. She feels that theorization to some extent or outlining the taxonomy of feminist literary criticism shall help in consolidating the positive image of feminist criticism. To quote her "it will serve as an introduction to a body of work which needs to be consolidated both as major contribution to English studies and as a part

of an interdisciplinary effort to reconstruct the social, political and cultural experiences of women".

2b.3.2 Two Distinct Varieties of Feminist Criticism

In her attempt to develop a clearly articulated feminist literary theory, Showalter has proposed a separate and independent model of feminist literary theory by rejecting the inevitability of male models and theories. She divides her female model in to two types:

1) Feminist critique exposing woman as a reader , and

2) Gynocritics presenting women as a writer.

The feminist critique focuses on the woman as a reader, a consumer of male-produced and male-oriented texts. As "a historically grounded inquiry," the feminist critique probes the engendered "ideological assumptions" of literature. Its subjects include "the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism and the fissures in male constructed literary theory". It evaluates the "sexual codes" of the literary text and explores how "the hypothesis of a female reader" effects an assessment of meaning.

On the other hand, "gynocritics," "is concerned with woman as writer – with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women." Its subject includes the "psychodynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problems of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history; and of course, studies of particular writers and works.

According to Showalter, Feminist critique "is essentially political and polemical," and is metaphorically similar to the "Old Testament, 'looking for the sins and errors of the past;'" gynocritics, according to Showalter, "is more self-contained and experimental," and, to extend

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the earlier metaphor, is like the "New Testament, seeking 'the grace of imagination.'" Thus, she is more inclined to gynocritics in order to develop a literature of their own.

Female language:

In the early part of 20th century Virginia Woolf had suggested that women authors are forced to use the male language as they have none of their own. In fact, since then quite a few feminist writers and philosophers have tried to explore the alternative forms of language that would be feminine and female. In the context of gynocritics, female language is one that is used by women writers to express their experiences and emotions as authentically as possible to the readers.

2b.3.3 Feminist Critique: Some Limitations

After establishing the differences between feminist critique and gynocritics, Showalter moves on to highlight some of the limitations of the traditional feminist criticism, i. e. feminist critique. To do this she gives the example of Thomas Hardy's famous novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and the way the critics and feminists have read the text. In her delineations she exposes that a couple of problems with this type of criticism: it is male-oriented, meaning that, in some sense, every feminist critique, even when criticizing patriarchy, is focused toward the male. She says, "if we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt or experienced, but what men have thought women should be". Besides, in order to do this type of criticism one may need years of apprenticeship in a male-created critical tradition, which may in turn develop resistance among the feminist critics also, to question it, and expose its historical and ideological boundaries. Moreover, the critique tends to naturalize women's oppression by focusing on it; and it gives victimization an allure, by making it the inevitable and obsessive topic of discussion.

> **Stereotypes:**
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> These are preconceived ideas about individual, groups or objects. The feminist critics feel that sexist stereotyping is very much prevalent in not only culture at large, but also its various agencies like literature. Desirable traits representing competence are most commonly associated with men, while the emotive and inferior ones are with women. These stereotypes do harm to the complexity of individuals or groups and limit the way they perceive themselves are perceived and recognized by others. In a patriarchal society, it is women who have to pay the price dearly most of the time.

2b.3.4 Gynocritics and the Female Culture

As an alternative, Showalter presents gynocritics as a way "to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather that to adapt to male models and theories." Gynocritics has a certain sociological and ethnographic aspect to it, and this is where it gains both strength and weakness. Showalter writes,

Gynocritics begins at the point where we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture…. 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 ascribed status and the internalized constructs of femininity, but also the occupations, interactions, and consciousness of women.

Showalter also finds a similarity between women's culture in general and their literature. She quotes Michelle Rosaldo who wrote in *Women, Culture and Society,*

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The very symbolic and social conceptions that appear to set women apart and to circumscribe their activities may be used by women as a basis for female solidarity and worth. When men live apart from women, they in fact cannot control them, and unwittingly they may provide them with the symbols and social resources on which to build a society of their own.

According to Showalter, in some women's literature, as in their subculture, feminine values penetrate and undermine the masculine systems that contain them. And this is why many women writers have imaginatively engaged the myths of the Amazons, and fantasies of a separate female society, in genres from Victorian poetry to contemporary science fiction.

She goes on to argue that attention to women writers of the past means attention to the sociological sub-structures that they inhabited, the economic, moral and psychological pressures they faced, and the strategies for survival and for self-expression which they adopted: only then can women's literature of the past be read clearly. In this regard, she praises the pioneering work of four young American feminist scholars, which are:

1. Carroll Smith- Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual" which examines several archives of letters between women and outlines the homosocial emotional world of the nineteenth century.

2. Nancy Cott's *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women's Sphere in New England 1780-1835* explores the paradox of a cultural bondage, a legacy of pain and submission, which none the less generates a sisterly solidarity, a bond of shared experiences, loyalty and compassion.

3. Ann Douglas' *The Feminization Of American Culture,* boldly locates the genesis of American mass culture in the sentimental literature of women and clergyman, two allied and disestablished post-industrial groups.

4. Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* surveys female bonding in women's literature, ranging from the matriarchal households of Louisa May Alcott and Mrs. Gaskell to the women's schools and colleges in Dorothy Sayers, Sylvia Plath and Muriel Spark.

Tasks to do:

Using the library and internet, try to gather some more idea about these four works to which Showalter has referred. This activity will acquaint you will the practical aspect of gynocritics and make you appreciate their various concerns and richness of approaches. You must also notice that these works do not deal only with the standard fictions written by women, but also with other genres like pulp fictions letters, memoirs, diaries etc.

She then moves on to an engaging discussion of the experiences of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and other female authors to show the need for "completeness" in discussing women authors' work way in which "it is necessary to leave oneself room to deal with other things besides [women writers'] work, so much has that work been influenced by conditions that have nothing whatever to do with art." According to her, without an understanding of the framework of the female subculture, we can miss or misinterpret the themes and structures of women's literature, and may fail to make necessary connections within a tradition.

Treading through an assorted group of writings, Showalter then prepares a rough sketch of some of the elements that have characterized women's writing. Awakening is one such recurring theme in these writings by women, be it by Florence Nightingale, George Eliot, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton or the like. According to Showalter's reading, this awakening from the drugged sleep of *Victorian womanhood* was more likely to end in drowning than in discovery. The works of the above mentioned writers give testimony to this. Thus a related and consistent element of women's writing was the mental suffering of women in inhospitable social environments. Another has been matrophobia, in other words "the alienation from and rejection of the mother that daughters have learned under **patriarchy"**. In recent years, however, the evolution of the female subculture has noted that "the death of the mother as witnessed and transcended by the daughter has become one of the most profound occasions of female literature".

These recurring patterns of women's literature establish the fact that a tradition, an alternative tradition has existed in the literary world besides the dominant male one, and which need too be given its due position. Showalter argues that the focus of feminist criticism should not be delineated by male perceptions and assumptions. Rather, it should

be on the woman's experience. Literature written by women inevitably contains just that. Because of their "educational, experiential, and biological handicaps," women develop their "sympathy, sentiment, and powers of observation" to bring the substance and significance of the female experience to readers. In women's literature, these qualities become what Virginia Woolf termed the "'precious specialty,' [of] a distinctly female vision". The "precious specialty" of feminist criticism is in part a result of the relationships that women have with one another. By describing and evaluating this female subculture, a framework for the new models of analysis can be built.

2b.3.5 Feminine, Feminist and Female

Showalter believes that before we go on to ask how women's literature would be different and special, gynocritics must take up the task of the recovery of a female literary history and tradition. Rather than just reading the *Great Women Writers*, Gynocritics must try "to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets, and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time, and to establish the continuity of the female tradition" (1383). Recreating the chain of women writers, the patterns of influence and response from one generation to the next would enable us to challenge the periodicity of orthodox literary history, and its enshrined canon of achievements. Showalter here refers to her seminal book, *A Literature of Their Own*, where she established that the patterns and phases in the evolution of a female literary tradition have been like that of any other sub-cultural art. She calls these phases- feminine, feminist and female.

Showalter sees the first phase taking place from roughly 1840 to 1880; she calls this the **Feminine phase** and declares that it is characterized by "women [writing] in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture. One sign of this stage was the popularity among women writers of the male pseudonym. Female

English writers such as George Eliot used masculine camouflage beyond the name itself. The tone, diction, structure, and characterization and other literary elements were also affected by the method of dealing with a double literary standard. American writers, too, used pseudonyms. These women, however, chose super-feminine names, such as Fanny Fern, in order to disguise their "boundless energy, powerful economic motives, and keen professional skills". In this phase, the feminist content of feminine art is typically oblique, displaced, ironic and subversive. One has to read in between the lines, in the missed possibilities of the text, and absences in order to decipher it. (This phase she dates till 1880 or so, but it is important to remark that women have been, and still are, writing as if they are in this phase.)

The second, **Feminist phase** follows from 1880 to 1920, wherein "women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood." This phase is characterized by "Amazon Utopias," visions of perfect, female-led societies of the future. Writing from this period often dramatizes the social injustice suffered by women. Writers of this phase include Elizabeth Gaskell, Francis Trallope, Charlotte Gilman Perkins and others.

This "Feminist Socialist Realism" with a vengeance, has given way to the Female phase in progress since 1920. Writers of the **Female phase** reject what those of the Feminine and Feminist stages promote because these both depended on masculinity and were ironically male-oriented. Literature of the Female phase turns "instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature". In other words, they have tried to develop the idea of female writing and female experience. They differentiate female writing and male writing in terms of language. Their effort to identify and analyze the female experience

leads them to this phase of "self discovery". The writers such as Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield, and Dorothy Richardson came under this phase. According to Showalter, this is the most advanced and desirable of the three phases of the evolution of women's writings in English.

Check your progress:

1. What are the main points of difference between feminist critique and gynocritics, as established in this essay?

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2. According to Showalter, what are the major limitations of feminist critique?

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3. Do you think that gynocritics is a better feminist literary practice? Justify your answer.

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4. What are the three major phases of the evolution of women's writing in English?

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2b.3.6 Feminist Criticism, Marxism and Structuralism

In discussing these three phases, Showalter notes that some feminist critics have tried to adopt and adapt the methods of Marxism and Structuralism to accommodate their own needs, "altering their vocabularies and methods to include the variable of gender" (1384). Showalter, however, seeks to steer feminist criticism from this path. According to her, "feminist criticism can not go around forever in men's ill- fitting hand-me-downs". It must emancipate itself from the influences of accepted models and guide itself by its own impulses. Showalter feels gynocritics have stated doing so.

The new sciences of the text based on linguistics, computers, genetic structuralism, neo formalism, psycho-aesthetics, etc have made literary criticism too scientific and manly- strenuous, rigorous, virile and impersonal. It is no longer intuitive, expressive and feminine. And it is this type of criticism which is regarded as "higher" type of criticism in the academic and scholarly world. In contrast to this criticism dealing with form and structure, "lower" type is concerned with the humanistic problem of content and interpretation. And these types have developed gender affinities in the present situations.

While Marxism and Structuralism label themselves as "sciences" and "see themselves as privileged critical discourses" and try to purge themselves of the subjective, mature feminist criticism, on the other hand, explores experience. Indeed, feminist criticism asserts "*The Authority of Experience*". And here lies the most significant problem in the path of syntheses between these two types of approaches. "The experience of woman can easily disappear, become mute, invalid or invisible, lost in the diagrams of structuralism or the class conflict of Marxism".

According to Showalter, the questions that feminists need to ask and answer go beyond those that science can answer. Feminist must

seek the repressed image of women in history, in anthropology, in psychology and in ourselves, by probing the fissures of the female text.

Showalter believes that the current theoretical impasse in feminist criticism is more than a problem of finding exacting definitions and suitable terminology. She says, it comes from own divided consciousness the split in each of us. The women writers are both daughters and sisters of male tradition and of a new women's movement, which demands to renounce the pseudo success of taken women hood. "The task of feminist critics," then, is to bridge this female self-division by finding "a new language, a new reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision" (1386). In order to find this new language, both the feminist critique and gynocritics are needed, "for only the Jeremiahs of the feminist critique can lead us out of the 'Egypt of female servitude' to the promised land of the feminist vision". Finally she concludes her essay by saying that feminist criticism is not visiting. It is here to stay and we must make it a permanent.

2b.4 Critical Evaluation of the Text

While Showalter's text is intelligent, largely devoid of rhetorical extremities, and confidently provocative, and served an urgent need to give solid and clear foundation to feminist poetics in the early 80s, it has faced severe criticism as well. Much of the criticism of Showalter's position comes from the critics who are suspicious of liberal humanistic positions. The most devastating criticism, of course, came from Toril Moi in her famous book Sexual/ Textual Politics. In the next unit which you are going to read, you will find what issues Moi has with Showalter. In fact, the other critics of Showalter also seem to be heavily influenced by Moi and at times repeat her charges. The extracts given below will make it clear to you:

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Gayle Green and Coppélia Kahn writing from a 'critical' or Marxist position in their introductory essay in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* say:

> Showalter's argument is compelling, and gynocriticism may be a necessary stage in redressing the imbalances of a male dominated tradition. But in referring to the "feminist critique" as "ideological," "essentially political and polemical" for its "affiliations to Marxist sociology and aesthetics," Showalter implies that gynocriticism is somehow less ideological, more value-free. Feminist criticism should avoid representing its own ideals as politically neutral, for if a feminist approach has taught us anything, it is that all critical stances are ideological...moreover, the assumption that women's experience is "directly available in the texts written by women" and that "the more 'authentic' the experience is felt to be by the critic, the better and more valuable the text will be," leaves unquestioned the view of "the text as the transmitter of authentic 'human' experience" (Moi 1985). Implicit in Showalter's argument—as in much Anglo-American criticism—is the assumption that the text, and the language itself, are transparent media which reflect a pre-existent objective reality, rather than signifying systems which inscribe ideology and are actually constitutive of reality. But this is precisely the view of literature on which the canon has been predicated; and it is a view that conceals assumptions—concerning epistemology, language, "objectivity" and subjectivity-which feminists would do well to question.

Sydney Janet Kaplan, in the same book in an article titled "Varieties of Feminist Criticism" suggests a problem with Showalter's model of feminine/feminist/female writing:

Showalter's paradigm, while useful for organizational purposes, may actually distort the individual achievements of particular authors. Since she tends to measure her authors against an ideal of self-development and sexual awareness that belongs to the late twentieth century, nearly all women who wrote earlier than the 1960s fail to achieve success in her terms. She appears to assume that history moves towards greater and greater improvements and more intense consciousness. But are the "female" novelists of our time really more successful in attaining their own goals as women than were the less evolved "feminine" and "feminist" novelists?

Both these limitations of Showalter's work are, no doubt, true. Besides these, post- structuralist feminists and black feminist critics have their own issues with gynocritics. Post-structuralists argue that by grounding feminist criticism in women's writing and culture, feminists reinforce the belief that 'woman' is an identity that pre-exists discourse, rather than a product of discourse and culture. Black feminist critics have criticized gynocritics for mistakenly assuming that women share a common identity and experience as women, which transcends differences of culture, class, color race and sexuality. Yet these limitations do not and have not made this seminal text on Feminist Poetics an obsolete and irrelevant one.

2b.5 Summing Up

Putting a strong case for gynocritics, this is an important contribution of Elaine Showalter in the field of feminist literary criticism. In a very compact manner, here she has presented and developed her ideas as expressed earlier in *A Literature of Their Own*. While some see gynocritics' popularity within feminist literary criticism as short lived, others argue it offers a political agenda establishing praxis through which silenced voices become heard. Difficult to settle on any one of these positions, it is a fact that as an example of Anglo American School of feminist practice and sharing a second wave approach to literary criticism, the essay has found place in several anthologies of feminist theory and criticism.

2b.6 Conclusion

To conclude, you must remember that feminist literary criticism is always an ideological position and like every other ideology will have its own limitations and loopholes. Besides, you must read this essay and try to apply the ideas expressed here in the reading of the texts prescribed in your syllabus.

2b.7 References and Suggested Readings

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Unit – II (c)

Introduction (*Sexual /Textual Politics*)
<u>Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf?</u>
<u>Feminist Readings of Woolf</u>
- Toril Moi

Contents:

2c.0 Objectives

After reading this unit on Introduction (*Sexual /Textual Politics)* by Toril Moi, the students will be able to:

- *Understand the various feminist readings of Virginia Woolf*
- *Relate Woolf's ideas to contemporary feminist theory*
- *Appreciate the feminist concerns of Woolf's writings*
- *Decipher how the same text can generate contradictory meanings, and, thus, relate this essay with reader response theory and Stanley fish's essay "Is There a Text in this Class?"*
- *Link this unit with the previous unit that, in brief, introduced what feminist criticism is all about and referred passingly to Virginia Woolf and Elaine Showalter and their important position in English feminist literary criticism.*

2c.1 Introduction

After reading the first unit on feminism and feminist literary criticism, by now you must be familiar with the major concerns and debates of feminist literary criticism and theory. In this unit you are going to read an essay by a very well known feminist critic Toril Moi on yet another famous feminist English critic and writer Virginia Woolf. In this article Moi has tried to defend Woolf from the criticism of many other feminist critics who have blamed Woolf for not being sufficiently politically oriented in terms of women's empowerment. Moi's major problem is with Elaine Showalter also, of whom your have already read an essay titled "towards a feminist poetics". The present essays is from her path breaking book *Sexual Textual Politics(1985)*, whereby Moi has tried to familiarize the readers with different facets of feminism-starting from Virginia Woolf till the recent times. However, the essay prescribed concerns itself only with the evaluation of Woolf who has been widely regarded as the first feminist literary citric of the English

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speaking world. However, not less is the number of critics and thinkers who have found her lacking in commitment to the women's cause. One such writer has been Showalter. However, before we enter into the reading of the essay prescribed, I would hereby like you to just recall a few things we learnt in the last unit-

- There is a difference between sex and gender
- Nor all women writers are feminist writers
- Feminists doffer widely in their approaches and perceptions
- The same text or statement may be read differently even in contradictory ways depending on the orientation of the readers/ critics.

In this essay Moi has tried her best to establish the feminist orientation of Virginia Woolf's writings and open up new ways of looking at the sometimes marginalized and misunderstood grandmother of feminist literary criticism.

2c.2 About the Author

Toril Moi (1958- , Norway) is a famous figure in the field of feminist literary criticism. After receiving undergraduate (1976) and graduate (1980) degrees in Comparative Literature from the University of Bergen in Norway, Moi pieced together lectureships at Cambridge and Oxford until 1985, when she became director of the Centre for Feminist Research in the Humanities at the University of Bergen. In 1989 she moved to Duke University as a professor in the Literature Programme. At present she is at present the Director of the Center for Philosophy, Arts, and Literature, Duke University. To give you a brief idea of her versatile interests it will not be out of place to give briefs on some of her major works which include *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, (1985), *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman (1994), What Is a Woman? and Other Essays (1999),*

Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy(2006)

In fact, it was in 1985 that Toril Moi caught the attention of the theory world with her brief, pointed, and bestselling *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (Methuen). Although a comparative study assessing key figures of French and American feminisms, the book became known for criticizing the essentialism of the American wing and for bringing news of post structuralism to Anglo-American readers. Complementing that effort, Moi also edited *The Kristeva Reader* (Blackwell, 1986) and *French Feminist Thought* (Blackwell, 1987).

Simone de Beauvoir has been a central figure for Moi, and her next book, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Blackwell, 1994), is a rich study of the social and institutional contexts that Beauvoir traversed to become an intellectual when there were almost no other women in that position. Following from some of the philosophical questions that Beauvoir raised about the status of women, Moi subsequently published a set of essays, collected in *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford, 1999)

Over the past decade, Moi has progressively moved from working with poststructural texts to those of "ordinary language" philosophers, such as Stanley Cavell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Her new book, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford, 2006), exemplifies, in part, "ordinary language criticism" and proposes a major revision of the genealogy of modernism. It recovers the idealist tradition in literature that dominated through the nineteenth century, argues that idealism rather than realism was the formative antecedent to modernism, and casts Ibsen as a central modernist figure.

In her various other writings and speeches, she has repeatedly called for a clarification of the often conflated terms 'feminine', 'feminist' and 'female'. She criticizes some of the feminist critics for

privileging 'feminine' style at the expense of all other feminist positions. She has urged all the feminists to write paradoxically from three historical and political fronts; those of equality (the claim to the same rights, opportunities and recognition as men); difference (the claim to uniqueness and specificity) and the abolition of differences (the struggle to dissolve the binary oppositions and its hierarchies, and view identity as a construct)

2c.3 Sexual /Textual Politics: Major Issues and Concerns

Sexual/Textual Politics the first study to chart the contemporary feminist criticism on both sides of the Atlantic, considers the major attitudinal phases of American feminist literary criticism since Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), before proceeding to outline the different textual strategies of contemporary French feminist theorists in order of their patriarchal subversiveness. American feminist theory, notes Moi, has become more sophisticated in its approach to its approach to the English canon, but without producing an adequate theory of canon formation. Conversely, French feminists have no lack of anti-patriarchal theory, but fail to mobilize pro-feminist thought and action. Thus here we find Moi arguing provocatively for a commitedly political and theoretical criticism as against merely textual or apolitical approaches.

While some of the readers of the book perceived her to be attacking Anglo-American feminism for its essentialism and waving a banner for French feminism, In one of her interviews she explained- "The argument in the book wasn't actually "Anglo-American feminism is bad, French feminism is good"; the argument was that the great thing about the Americans was their strong and explicit political allegiances, and that the actual politics of the French were often incredibly vague."

This book emerged as a result of necessity as there were no such books available at that time, and to quote Moi again- "I thought we

needed a book like *Sexual/Textual Politics*, and I thought it could help other people who wanted to do feminist criticism." One important aspect of the book is that it is not just about literary criticism. Though the first part of the book is devoted to literary theory, in the sense of theories about texts and relations between writer and text, or between text and reader, but then when, Moi starts talking about the French feminists in the second half, it's quite obvious that for them, theory is about language and really general things, like sexuality and creativity.

Moi started working on the book in the early 80s, and this was a time when feminist debates and movements were at its peak around the academic circles. While some of the feminists were against theory because they thought that what we needed was a political practice based on respect for women's experiences, Moi's point in the book was precisely that that one cannot just go from experiences to politics, because unless one has some kind of awareness of theory she is not going to know what her politics are.

Stop to consider:

By now, you have got the preliminary ideas about the author's interest and political position. At this point it will serve you good to go to the first unit of the block and relate some of Toril Moi's ideas to the basics of feminism and feminist literary theory. Here we have a feminist reviewing the work of other feminist writers and critics. The debate between *theory and experience*, of which Moi is also talking about needs to be related to the first part of the essay you have read in the last unit, Elaine Showalter's "Towards a Feminist Poetics".

2c.4 About Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941, England) has widely acclaimed reputation not just as a novelist, but also a literary critic and feminist. Deprived of formal university education she was taught by tutelage at

home. Yet coming from a well renowned family of Leslie Stephen, she had open access to the extensive home library. Well aware of the effects of exclusion from formal higher education, she from the very childhood had a mind of her own. After marrying Leonard Woolf in 1912, she along with her husband founded the Hogarth press. As a novelist she was noted for her innovations in narrative techniques and modernist themes and as a theorist and critic she has been considered in relation to her Victorian heritage and other embers of the Bloomsbury group. To study Woolf as a critic may be regarded as going beyond the traditional categories of genres, as much of her fiction conveys literary theory, while her nonfiction employs fictional techniques. And so far as her feminist position is concerned, Woolf was a pioneer of feminist literary criticism, raising issues such as *the social and economic context of women's writings, the gendered nature of language, the need to go back through literary history, and establish a literary tradition, and the societal construction of gender-* that remain of central importance even for today's feminist studies. In the first unit of this block you came across these issues. Woolf's most statements impinging on feminism are contained A Room of One's own (1928) and *Three Guineas* (1938).

Bloomsbury Group:

 A loose association of writers, artists, and intellectuals that was a distinctive force in British cultural life during the early decades of the 20th century. Leading members of the group included the writers E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, and Virginia Woolf, and the economist John Maynard Keynes; among the artists and critics were Clive Bell, Vanessa Bell, Dora Carrington, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, and Henry Lamb. They frequently met and had informal discussions on literature, philosophy, and art in the Bloomsbury district of London, which had long been a favourite area for artists,

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musicians, and writers. The association stemmed mainly from student friendships formed at Cambridge University; most of the 'Bloomsberries' had been at either King's College or Trinity College. However, the Bloomsbury Group had no formal membership and no common social or aesthetic ideology. The members were united mainly by their belief in the importance of the arts and—in revolt against the restrictions of Victorian society—by their frankness and tolerance in sexual matters. A key book for them was Principia Ethica (1903) by the Cambridge philosopher G. E. Moore. Their work deeply influenced literature, art, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality.

By the early 1930s the Bloomsbury Group had ceased to exist in its original form; the death of Lytton Strachey in 1932 is sometimes taken as a convenient terminus, although it was perhaps the suicide of Virginia Woolf in 1941 that really marked the end of an era.

A Room of One's Own is mainly on the topic of women and fiction. The room of the book's title is a skillfully used metaphor around which the entire text is woven; Woolf's central claim is that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she wants to write fiction." In this text Woolf situates literature in the context of a materialistic framework- economic, social and political, as literature does not exist in vacuum. According to Woolf economic independence is very important for the blooming of women's creative faculties, as financial security enables and facilitates the psychological stability, intellectual freedom, the 'power to think for oneself' and the liberty to 'think of the things in themselves'. Along with material conditions the attitude of the society and culture towards women endeavour, which is mostly cynical and dismissive, has done great harm to their surfacing in the

canon. Another important point that Woolf raises in the book is that traditionally most of the books on women have been written by men, defining women in such a way so as to protect their own image of superiority. Conventionally, woman "never writes about her life and scarcely keeps a diary." What is needed according t o Woolf is a rewriting of history by women so as to present a more accurate account of the conditions in which women lived. In the work, Woolf also points out the possibility of writing in a *female language.* According to her women should not write like men because the male language that is prevalent in the society cannot express the female experience and it only represents women in relation to men.

> You may be surprised to notice that when women started writing, the genre they chose for themselves was mostly fiction, not poetry or drama. They expressed themselves largely in the form of novels- "which alone was soft enough in their hands. Moreover , the domestic situations of middle class women, obliging them to write in the common sitting room, was more conducive to writing novel than poetry; and the only literary training that such women had 'was training in the observation of characters, in the analysis of emotions".

However, when Woolf is calling on women to write as a woman, she wants the women to write without consciousness of there sex occluding their creative vision. Indeed, the mental state that Woolf sees as he most creative is what she calls "the unity of mind" a unity, in which the sexes are not viewed as distinct, and this is her theory of androgyny. In her words' in each of us two powers reside, one male, one female…the normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating"

She has consistently claimed that the values of life are inseparable from the values of art; prevailing values influence a critic's response to both the subject matter of a literary work- we have taken for granted "what is commonly thought big and what is small and their relative importance- and to the style- facts have been privileged over feelings, logic over the unconscious, linearity over pluralism". It is in this context that Woolf's position comes near the poststructuralist feminist critics advocating "ecriture feminine", that is the feminine mode of writing. In

Ecriture Feminine:

It is a term for women's writing in French feminist theory. Heavily influenced by poststructuralist ideas, this notion was developed by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. It describes how women's writing is a specific discourse closer to the body, to emotions and, to the unnamable, all of which are repressed by the social contract. These French feminists postulated and practiced a fluid, non linear, elliptical, part mythic, mystical way of writing. The aim was to upset the notions of proper language, tight form, narrative order and organization- all feature of male phallocentric writing. It identifies mother figures and refuses to privilege the male. In addition it experiments with typography itself- visual and graphic alterations to fonts, blanks, parentheses, breaks, hyphenated words and altered punctuation. This experimental writing wanted to inscribe femininity, for which till now there was no space in the patriarchal language and culture. It was intended to produce the discursive spaces, in and from which feminine difference and desire may be creatively articulated.

fact, Woolf's own works exemplify her ideal/ her fictions as well as non fictional writings challenge the authoritative patriarchal traditions

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such as – authoritative writer, univocal text, etc. In contrast, her writings are characterized by stream of consciousness, experimental treatment of time. Rather than the authority of the writer, the active role of the reader marks her feminine art. She defends the writers portraying the inconclusive world of the consciousness.

In *Three Guineas*, another major feminist text, Woolf ponders on the issues at the heart of a modern liberal democratic bourgeois state: the nature of education, the ethics underlying professions, and the attributes of both the spheres- grounded on an unequal distribution of property and wealth- that fosters a mentality leading to war and imperialism. Woolf is in no doubt that the ruling values of such a state are male values; the entire ethos of war is exclusively male. Traditional education, she urges has not fostered freedom or peace; on the contrary it has taught the arts of competition, domination, killing and the acquiring of land and capital. The professions too are infested with the same tendencies that can lead o nothing but war. In this work Woolf ponders on the position of women in this context and what role can they play. Wolf wants women to take a more disinterested view of culture than man, and to initiate new schemes of education that will not breed fruitless individualism and competition, and develop new ways of participating in public life based on common interests rather than self interest. She, in fact, rejects the whole ideology of patriotism, in favour of a more tolerant humanitarian approach.

A writer acutely aware of the close relationship between literature and ideology, her readings and writings both have political implications. She espoused the ideal of freedom in opposition to fascism, imperialism and indeed all totalitarian and totalizing regimes. So far as her position as a feminist is concerned, her statement that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" is a fitting comment on her significance for feminist literary criticism. Her essays on various women writers

charted a female literary tradition, and in turn she herself has become a generative mother figure for contemporary feminist thought.

However, Woolf's feminism has sometimes been viewed as problematic. Feminists have criticized her support of androgyny and her advice to women writers. In the section **Reading the Text** we shall discuss these issues in details. Nonetheless, the importance of Woolf's work for feminism cannot be overestimated. The issues she raises, such as female tradition and language, the need for a broad critique of education and the professions, the core values of modern nation, and the reflections of gendered disposition in the very definition of reality and history, are still very much alive and still mark the sites of fierce political, economic and intellectual debates.

Many feminists have also doubted Woolf's commitment to women's cause because of her some premature comments, like in *Three Guineas* (1938), where she famously declares 'feminist' a 'vicious', 'corrupt' and 'obsolete' term, which:

> According to the dictionary, means 'one who champions the rights of women.' Since the only right, the right to earn a living, has been won, the word no longer has a meaning. And a word without a meaning is a dead word . . . Let us therefore celebrates this occasion by cremating the corpse. Let us write that word in large black letters on a sheet of foolscap; then solemnly apply a match to the paper. Look, how it burns! (1938: 184)

Given that even some seven decades later women still do not actually enjoy equal representation in most professions in Britain (as well as in most of the world's other nations and cultures), Woolf 's observations on the achievement of the right to work remain ironical, to say the least.

2c.5 Reading the Text

"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf"

2c.5.1 Introductory Note

The question that Moi had posed in the very title of the article is answered also by her in the first sentence of the same, and the answer is "quite a few feminist critics". According to Moi while quite a few male critics have dismissed Woolf just as a frivolous bohemian and negligible Bloomsbury aesthete, her rejection by many Anglo American feminists needs to be pondered upon seriously. In the very first section of the essay Moi makes the design of her argument clear: first part dealing with the rejection of Woolf, second one concerned with how Woolf can be read from a more positive feminist point of view and lastly the salient features of the feminist response to Woolf's writing. And very plainly Moi wishes "to illuminate the relationship between feminist critical writings and the often unconscious theoretical and political assumptions that inform them".

2c.5.2 The Rejection of Woolf

In this section Moi has concentrated on how Elaine Showalter, an Anglo American feminist has posed a negative attitude towards Virginia Woolf in her famous book *A Literature of Their Own*(1977), were a complete chapter has been devoted to the study of this writer titled "Virginia Woolf and the flight to androgyny". Moi has reservations regarding Showalter's observations. The first problem she points out is Showalter's limited framework, for concentrating only on her biography and *A Room of one's Own.* In her discussion Showalter blames Woolf for using the myth of androgyny to help her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enable her to choke and repress her anger and ambition. Thus the blame is of escapism. Another problem Showalter has with Woolf is her stylistic and structural experiments.

According to her, the features such as "repetition, exaggerations, parody, whimsy and multiple viewpoints" often blunt the political edge of *A Room.*

For Showalter, the only way a feminist can read the book properly is by remaining "detached from its narrative strategies"; and if she manages to do so, she will see that *Room* is in no way a particularly liberating text: "If one can see *A Room of One's Own* as a document in the literary history of female aestheticism, and remain detached from its narrative strategies, the concepts of androgyny and the private room are neither as liberating nor as obvious as they first appear. They have a darker side that is the sphere of the exile and the eunuch". For Showalter, Woolf's writing continually escapes the critic's perspective, always refusing to be pinned down to **one unifying angle of vision**. This elusiveness is then interpreted as a denial of authentic feminist states of mind, namely the "angry and alienated ones", and as a commitment to the Bloomsbury ideal of the "separation of politics and art". This separation is evident, Showalter thinks, in the fact that Woolf "avoided describing her own experience". Since this avoidance makes it impossible for Woolf to produce really committed feminist work, Showalter naturally concludes that *Three Guineas* as well as *A Room* fail as feminist works.

But for Moi the situation is completely different. For her reading Woolf's text without reference to their narrative strategies is not reading them at all. She finds Showalter intolerant of the stylistic features of Woolf's texts and tries to highlight the relationship between aesthetics and politics in her text. In the essay It ended Moi tries to identify the not so explicitly theoretical framework of Showalter's position. As Showalter defines effective feminist writing as one that offers a powerful expression to personal experience in a social framework, implicitly her preference is for realism as against Woolf's modernism or feminine writing.

In the last part of this section Moi pointedly states that feminist critics who have rejected Woolf this way, fail to understand that their ideology is traditional humanism, which is in alliance with the patriarchy. At the centre of their ideology is a seamlessly united self- the man, who will allow space or voice to no one else. This integrated self is based on the model of self contained powerful phallus that negates all conflicts, contradictions and ambiguities. The text, written in his mode, becomes nothing but an expression of this unique individual and thus reduced to a passive feminine reflection of an unproblematic 'given' masculine world. And this seems to be the position of Showalter in her dealings with Woolf. Showalter here manifests her alliance with the Marxist writer Lukacs- a great supporter of realism and humanism. For him realistic writing only can serve the purpose of the proletarians and free human society from the effects of class society. Realism is based on the idea of objectivity of the representation of human subject. In art, the human subject must be represented as a type, having the qualities of both a private unique individual and a public citizen, and thus only the depiction can be alive and full. And such works only can serve any fruitful political purpose. According to him other representations do not do justice to the very rationale of art. This humanist position seems to have influenced quite a few feminists as well. For Showalter, rather than Lukacs's capitalism, patriarchy is her enemy. Fro her art must be bluntly and openly political and must question sexism. Her disinterest in other social problems such as –fascism and capitalism, render her unable to appreciate the relations between fascism and sexism as depicted by Woolf in *Three Guineas*. Moi refers to Patricia Stubb also another feminist who fails to see the feminist politics in Woolf because of her humanistic alliances. As per Stubb's version, there is no coherent attempt to create new models, new images of women in Woolf's fictions and she hold her aesthetic theories responsible for it.

Thus for both Showalter and Stubb, realism only can serve the purpose of feminist writers and in doing so they associate with Lukacs who believed that the modernist features of playfulness, flexibility, subjectivity and fragmentation are typical of oppressed and exploited subjects of capitalism and can serve no good.

SAQ:

1. In what ways do you think Virginia Woolf's feminist ideas are still very relevant?

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2. Do you agree with Moi that reading a text without considering its stylistic features is doing injustice to the text and the author? Why ?

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3. Do you also think that the playfulness of a text blunts its political edge? Justify your answer, by referring to both Showalter and Patricia Stubb.

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4. To what extent do you think Showalter and Stubb are influenced by the Humanist ideology of Lukacs?

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Check Your Progress:

1. What are the major concerns of Toril Moi's *Sexual/ Textual Politics*?

2. What are the implications of Woolf's idea that a woman should have a room of her own if she wants to be a writer?

3. What are the major problems that Showalter has with Woolf's writings, so far as feminist commitment is concerned?

2c.5.3 Rescuing Woolf for Feminist Politics

Before moving towards the alternative readings of Woolf Moi starts with the major drawbacks of the usual approach of feminists towards Woolf. According to her the major drawback of this approach is surely signaled in the fact that it proves incapable of appropriating for feminism the work of the greatest British woman writer of this century, despite the fact that Woolf was not only a novelist of considerable genius but a declared feminist and dedicated reader of other women's writings. She argues that if feminist critics cannot produce a positive political and literary assessment of Woolf's writing, then the fault may lie with their own critical and theoretical perspectives rather than with Woolf's texts. Thus, in this section Moi hints at some points towards an alternative reading, a different theoretical approach that might rescue Virginia Woolf for feminist politics.

According to Moi, while Showalter is for security and firmness of perspective, Woolf practices the "deconstructive" form of writing. Here she engages with and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse. As a forerunner of Derridean deconstruction, Woolf makes it very visible how language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning.

Stop to Consider:

By now you are familiar with Derrida's ideas of deconstruction. Just to refresh you memory in brief, according to the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, language is structured as an endless deferral of meaning, and any search for an essential, absolutely stable meaning must therefore be considered metaphysical. There is no final element, no fundamental unit, no *transcendental signified* that is meaningful *in itself* and thus escapes the ceaseless interplay of linguistic deferral and difference.

It is in the context of these theories that Woolf's texts must be read. Through her sportive language Woolf rejects to be seen as the fixed entity and refuses the essentialist patriarchal ideology. Not only does she practices non-essentialist forms of writing, Woolf is also skeptical of a unified human identity. In this field she seems to be the contemporary development in psychoanalytical theories, especially of Sigmund Freud.

Moi also points out how for Woolf, as for Freud, unconscious drives and desires constantly exert a pressure on our conscious thoughts and actions. The psychoanalytic concept of the *fragmented self* is incompatible with humanist ideal of a unified subject. And once accepted, this belief, though, does not of course render the individual's experiences in any sense less real or valuable; but it does mean that such experiences cannot be understood other than through the study of their multiple determinants—determinants of which conscious thought is only one, and a potentially treacherous one at that. If a similar approach is taken to the literary text, it follows that the search for a unified individual self, or gender identity or indeed "textual unity" in the literary work must be seen as drastically reductive. Thus unlike Showalter, Moi believes that a thorough and detailed examination of the narrative strategy of the text at all the levels is necessary to uncover some of the conflicting and contradictory elements that make the text what it is. The humanist desire to find a unified meaning is reductive.

Now Moi shifts her attention to Julia Kristeva and applies her ideas to justify wool's practices and value. Kristeva, the French philosopher heavily influenced by Lacan believes that language is mainly symbolic in our societies at present and it helps in maintaining the status quo of the society. It works on the basis of logic, rationality and reiterates conventional social meanings. To transform the society, we need a specific practice of writing that is revolutionary in itself. She finds that

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many modernist writings, especially poetry exemplify this revolutionary form of writing with its abrupt shifts, ellipses, breaks and apparent lack of logical connection, and thereby challenge the settled norms of the symbolic order. Moi finds a similar sort of revolutionary quality in Woolf's writing, which have the capacity of sexual and political transformation.

According to Kristeva, in the pre-oedipal phase, which she calls imaginary on the mother child association is very strong and this is the phase of pleasure and oneness. The post oedipal one initiates thee child into the realm of the father, the symbolic order – the order of rules and regulations, mind and logic, and with this mother association is relegated to the unconscious mind. For Kristeva as women have a stronger link with the pre-oedipal mother figure, it may help them to disrupt the symbolic order in a more easy and emphatic manner. But this imaginary stage with its chaotic nature may interrupt the mental equilibrium of the individual. And Moi suggests that this is how may be we can interpret Woolf's mental illness and relate it to her feminism, i. e. breaking the rules of the Father through her unconventional textual strategies.

As Moi asserts, for Julia Kristeva it is not the biological sex of a person, but the subject position she or he takes up, that determines their revolutionary potential. Her views of feminist politics reflect this refusal of essentialism. The feminist struggle, she argues, must be seen historically and politically as a three-tiered one, which can be schematically summarized as follows:

(1) In this level women demand equal access to the symbolic order. This may also be called liberal feminist position.

(2) In the second level women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference, a stage of Radical feminism when femininity is celebrated.

(3) In the third one and this is Kristeva's own position, women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical.

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The third position is one that has deconstructed the opposition between masculinity and femininity, and therefore necessarily challenges the very notion of identity. Kristeva writes:

> In the third attitude, which I strongly advocate—which I imagine?—the very dichotomy man/ woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*. What can "identity," even "sexual identity," mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged? ("Women's time", 33-4)

Here Moi clarifies that though Kristeva's position is one of deconstruction, it must not be seen as apolitical. She believes that these three stages as propounded by Kristeva are not exclusive of each other. As it still remains *politically* essential for feminists to defend women *as* women in order to counteract the patriarchal oppression that precisely despises women *as* women. But an "undeconstructed" form of "stage two" feminism, unaware of the metaphysical nature of gender identities, runs the risk of becoming an inverted form of sexism. Adopting Kristeva's "deconstructed" form of feminism therefore would mean to understand the constructed nature of femininity and masculinity, but also man and woman, but leaving our positions in the political struggle unchanged, and only radically transforming our awareness of the nature of that struggle.

Moi finds Woolf taking up such a Kristeva like position some sixty years back. In *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf, in fact, created a character Lily Briscoe who could resist this binary dichotomy between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and lived life on her own terms. And according to Moi, this is what Woolf's concept of androgyny is. Rather than being a flight from gender identities, as Showalter thought, it is"recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature". Here Moi refers to another feminist critic Carolyn Heilbrun who also found Woolf's

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concept of androgyny to be an unbounded and indefinable and hence lacking any solid ground for political activism. But Moi finds that Woolf was much advanced in her feminist ideas and this surely did not stop her from taking part in active politics. Thus, though in her three guineas, she shows her awareness of the dangers of the essentialist feminist positions of equality and difference, yet she firmly did favour women's rights to financial independence, educational rights and entry into all professions.

In the last part of the essay Moi also refers to a host of feminist critics like- Nancy Topping Bazin, Herber Marder Kate Millett, who have not only misinterpreted her concept of androgyny and her political liability, but also her fictional characters. And in such an atmosphere, Moi believes that a combination of Derrida and Kristeva's theories only could rescue Woolf for future. However, she is also aware of the political limitations of Kristeva's arguments which thoroughly avoid the role of the other ideological and material structures, while emphasizing on the revolutionary potential of language. To solve the problem, Kristeva's ideas must be integrated with a larger feminist theory of ideology. Moi also expresses her dissatisfaction with the fact that till now Marxist critics also have not been able to do justice to Woolf and have mainly concerned themselves with her non fictional writings, deliberately avoiding the fictional ones. The probable reason being that they think the fictional works are more influenced by her aesthetic theories and especially androgynous art and thus resist materialist analysis. However, Moi firmly wants to deconstruct this binary between aesthetics on the one hand and politics on the other.

In conclusion Moi observes that till now the approaches of Anglo American feminist critics to Woolf have been liberal humanist. In opposition she suggests an anti- humanist position would yield a better understanding of the political nature of Woolf's aesthetics. Then, only this *generative mother* of feminist criticism would be given her dues.

SAQ:

1. What is Woolf's concept of androgyny? How does Moi defends it?

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2. What is the three tiered stricture of feminist struggle according to Kristeva? Can you relate this idea with the three waves of feminism?

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Check your progress:

1. Based on you reading of the text, make a list of the critics of Woolf to whom Moi has referred?

2. What are the major stylistic features of Virginia Woolf's writings?

3. Do you agree with the major contentions of Woolf in *A Room of One's Own?*

4. Do you think that Woolf' thinking and writing style was much ahead of time? Do you consider this to be a reason of the misinterpretations she has faced?

> ***In Moi's own words: (Extract from an interview)***
>
> One important point for me was that if you don't know what your theory is, you won't know what your *political* effects are either. That's why I read Showalter's account of Virginia Woolf, for example, to show that she was imposing a feminist version of Lukácsian theory onto Virginia Woolf, and that the effect is an authoritarian straitjacket for women writers, incompatible with what I thought feminist utopia should be about, namely freedom. The idea of laying down requirements for what women *must* do just because they are women has always been anathema to me.
>
> In *Sexual/Textual Politics* I say that Kristeva's theory is more interesting than say Cixous and Irigaray, although she's not strictly speaking a feminist. Some reviewers thought that was bizarre. The whole point for me was that her way of talking about marginality was more applicable to women's situations than a theory that talks about women in an essentialist way.

2c.6 Critical evaluation of the essay

Written in a fiercely argumentative style, this essay by Toril Moi, tries its best to point out the limitations of the contemporary approaches to the work of Virginia Woolf, and suggests better ways of approaching and appreciating her. Though Moi refers to most of the feminist reading of Woolf in this essay she seems to be unaware of Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak's groundbreaking feminist deconstructionist reading of Woolf in her essay 'Unmaking and Making in To the Lighthouse'. However, when she argues with Elaine Showalter's critique of Woolf's theory of androgyny, and claims androgyny and textual experimentalism as the basis for understanding Woolf's radical sexual, textual politics, one can hardly doubt Moi's convincing assertions.

2c.7 Summing up

This essay has given you yet another taste of contemporary literary critical practices. An example of rigorous evaluation of not just a woman writer's works, but also of her critics, it is one of its kind in the field of gynocriticism.

2c.8 References and suggested readings

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UNIT - III (a)
READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

Structure:

3a.0 Objectives

In this unit you are going to study another type of criticism, called reader-response criticism, which was in vogue during the 1960s and 1970s. After going through this unit you will,

- *Understand* what reader-response criticism is.
- *Relate* its development in relation to other trends of literary criticism and literary theory.
- *Classify* the prominent forms of reader-response criticism.
- *Comprehend* the major views of different reader-response critics.

3a.1 Introduction

By now you must be fairly clear about what literary criticism is. To describe it in brief, literary criticism can be viewed as a mode of enjoying literature where you attempt an answer trying to rationalize your perception of a literary work. When somebody asks you, "Do you like this poem?"; and you say "yes" or "no", signals your entry into literary criticism. And when you try to fully account for "why yes?" or "why no?", you are doing literary criticism, although at the rudimentary level. Literary criticism is thus, not an abstract, intellectual exercise; it is a natural human response to literature.

You must have become familiar with many trends of literary criticism since the classical times. Classical literary criticism focused on questions as – Does literature refer or correspond to an external reality? What sort of "truth" does literature aim at? What psychological responses are evoked in a reader and how it relates to the reader's moral or social development? What are literature's links with history? English literary criticism also developed on the classical lines. Generally, each age in literary history will be found to have its own critical standards, and each critic his own individual approach. One will look for morality

in literature, another for aesthetic pleasure, a third for both. Or, one will advocate conformity to the rules of the Greek and Latin classics, another a reasonable deviation from them, a third a complete freedom of action. And so on. There are, thus, no fixed principles of criticism to be applied indiscriminately to the works of all ages and writers.

However, a general overview reveals that traditional scholarship laid its emphasis mainly on the author. It was the 'authorial intention' that was the source and guarantee of meaning in literature. The advent of New Criticism in literary studies, in the 1940s, shifted the focus of scholarly attention from 'author' to 'text'. The notion of 'authorial intention' was effectively challenged and superseded by the notion of 'textual autonomy', with its insistence on the close relationship of form and meaning.

With the explosion of new theoretical interests and procedures from the late 1960s onwards (feminism, psychoanalysis, structural linguistics, cultural materialism), the focus of interest shifted decisively towards the role of reader or audience in the process of interpretation. The various approaches to literature that explore and seek to explain the diversity and often divergence of readers' responses to literary works come under reader-response criticism.

In the sections to follow, we will first put a glance on the position of readers or audience in the act of literary criticism before the 1960s. This background will aid your understanding of reader-response criticism, its prominent forms, and the major views of prominent reader-response critics in the sections to follow.

3a.2 The Background

Reader-response criticism, in one respect, can be called as old as the foundations of Western culture. The reader or audience of a literary work or performance has always played a crucial role since the classical

times. The ancient Greek and Roman scholars have viewed literature as a branch of rhetoric, the art of persuasive speaking or writing, to make the audience react in a certain way. Although their focus was more on rhetorical strategies and devices than on the reader's responses to those methods, the ancients by no means left the audience out of the literary equation.

The great classical scholar, Plato, has talked about the disturbing power of poetry to affect people's passion and morality. He condemns poetry fro being a product of inspiration which affects the emotions rather than reason, the heart rather than the intellect. He also indicts poetry for its lack of concern with morality. Even Aristotle, in his famous definition of tragedy, talks about the distinctive effects of tragic emotions on the reader or the audience. He calls tragedy as involving, "incidents arousing pity and fear, wherein to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions." This catharsis implies the "purgation" or "purification" that the audience achieves – the tragic representation of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed, but relieved, or even exalted. Aristotle has called this effect on the reader as "the pleasure of pity and fear". As such, literature of the classical times had to be highly aware of the composition and expectations of its audience.

Subsequent English critics also followed the classical masters. Several Romantic theories stressed the powerful emotional impact of poetry on the reader. For the Romantics, the ultimate test of literary excellence lay in the healthy pleasure it afforded to the reader. Various later nineteenth-century theories such as symbolism and impressionism stressed the reader's subjective position to literature and art. There are also theories like feminism, Marxism and post-colonialism, which are always oriented towards a certain kind of audience. Not only these, but the hermeneutic and phenomenological theories also examine the ways in which readers engage cognitively and historically with literary texts.

Stop to Consider:

1. In our discussion so far, we have seen that the various critical approaches have put some emphasis on the effect produced on the reader, but none of these focus on the reader as the producer of meaning of the text.

2. Before we proceed, let us recall what hermeneutics and phenomenology are:

Hermeneutics: It refers to a theory of interpretation in general. It considers the interpretive methods leading to the perception, interpretation, and understanding of texts. The hermeneutic theories were developed by Friedrich Schleirmacher, Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer. Schleirmacher developed the idea, later expanded by Dilthey, that we can arrive at a legitimate interpretation of a work only by a mutually qualifying interplay between our evolving sense of the whole and our retrospective understanding to its component parts. Dilthey regarded interpretation as the understanding of "the inner life of man" that literature intelligibly expresses. Another line of hermeneutics was that proposed by Heidegger and Gadamer. According to them the genuine understanding of a literary text consists in the reader's re-experience of the "inner life" that the text expresses. This "inner life" and its re-experience is based on a "pre-understanding" – of a history that is past and of a future yet to come – that is shared by the reader and the producer of the text. Thus, interpretation involves a sense of time and meaning is uncovered by the reader.

You will find that Gadamer's theory is closer to that espoused by the reader-response critics in the 1960s.

Phenomenology: The study of structuires of experience as they appear to consciousness. The German philosopher, Edmund Husserl is widely regarded as the originator of phenomenology. Phenomenology postulates that objects attain meaning only as they are perceived in someone's consciousness. Ingarden, who incorporated phenomenology into literary theory, argued that a literary work – i) has its beginnings in the intentional acts of its author's consciousness; and ii) represents those conscious acts of the author, so that the reader apprehends them by experiencing them both as an object, and as his/her own consciousness. For Ingarden, then, readers are not passive receptacles of an author's perceptions but active partners in realizing the work in their own consciousness.

However, you will find that during the 1940s and 1950s there emerged many theories which totally negated the role of readers in the determination of meaning of a literary text. These critical approaches like Russian Formalism, the New Criticism and the first part of French Structuralism, focused on the 'text'. They saw the study of literature as an objective activity and the literary object itself as the repository of meaning. The New Critics believed that the proper task of the literary critic is to attend to the text, not to the matters of history, psychology, autobiography or philology. To such critics, relying on readers as a source of meaning – precisely what reader-response criticism does – is to fall victim to subjectivism, relativism, and other types of critical madness. For them, relying on the psychological responses of the readers for getting to the meaning of a text was a fallacy, the "affective fallacy". Not only the readers, these critics also disputed the critical relevance of attention to the authorial intention motivating a work. The New Critics discarded this notion as the "intentional fallacy."

Stop To Consider:

Affective Fallacy: The term used by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in an essay, "The Affective Fallacy" (1946), refers to what they regarded as the erroneous practice of interpreting texts according to the psychological responses of readers.

Intentional Fallacy: The term was proposed by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in, "The Intentional fallacy" (1946), reprinted in Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon* (1964). It refers to the error of interpreting and evaluating a literary work on the basis of the expressed or implied intentions of authors.

Reader-response criticism arose in large measure as a reaction against the New Criticism, or formalist approach, which dominated literary criticism for roughly half a century. Of course, at another level,

the growth of reader-response theory can also be justified as a renewal of a long and diversified tradition that had acknowledged the important role of reader or audience in the overall structure of any given literary or rhetorical situation.

Let us now try to understand the basic premises of reader-response criticism in the following section.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1 Do you think that before the emergence of modern reader-response theory readers or audience were acknowledged an important role in the overall structure of any given literary situation? Explain.

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Q.2 In reaction to which literary traditions or critical movements did reader-response theory basically emerges?

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3a.3 Reader-response Criticism

As you have seen, literary criticism has long paid some attention to the reader's role in creating the meaning and experience of a literary work. However, modern reader-response criticism began in the 1960's and 70's. Reader-response Criticism cannot be called one theoretical movement. Rather, it is a focus on the process of reading a literary text, a set of critical modes which have come into prominence since the

1960's. in America, this kind of criticism is associated with the works of Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, David Bleich, and others, though it overlaps significantly with the concerns of structuralist critics such as Jonathan Culler and Michael Riffarterre. In Germany, however, there exists a much more rigorous, and well-established philosophical tradition of reader-centered criticism. A number of critics at the University of Constance in Germany formulated a systematic reader-response theory, which is usually referred to as reception theory or reception aesthetics. The leading members of this school are Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Georg.

Stop To Consider:

<u>Reader-response Criticism and Reception Theory</u>

Within more traditional Literary Studies, so-called 'Reader-response theory' is often compared with the parallel movement in European-based 'reception theory'. But it should be noted that there are differences of emphasis between these tendencies: the reader-response theory is less concerned with aesthetic value or the process or reading, for example, than with the production of meaning; on the other hand, reception theory is concerned with both the aesthetic and the historical aspects of reading, i.e. the ways in which readers use texts for pleasure, and how readings alter and shift through history. Also, in terms of their general philosophical orientation, reception theory belongs to a tradition of hermeneutics (the philosophy and practice of interpretation) while reader-response theory is more indebted to Structuralism and Post-structuralism. For all this, they are fundamentally alike in considering the activity of reading in terms of what can be called 'notional' rather than actual, empirical readers.

Reader-response Criticism, as the name suggests, is a mode of literary interpretation in which the role of the reader is seen as particularly crucial. Every work of literature is aimed at an audience or a reading public. The reader-response critics recognize that like writing, reading is a creative process. They attempt to describe what happens in the reader's mind while interpreting a work of fiction. For them, a text is not complete until it is read and interpreted. They believe that no text can provide self-contained meaning.

The popularity of formalism and New Criticism had enforced the idea that meaning is 'contained' in the words on the page. Reader-response Criticism replaces this idea by a more dynamic model in which the 'process' of meaning requires the active participation of the audience or the reader. Let us relate it to the common experience of re-reading a favourite book after many years. A book one read as a child might seem shockingly different when re-read as an adolescent or as an adult. The character once remembered favourably might seem less admirable while another character becomes more sympathetic. The book has not changed. However, our life experiences between the first reading and any subsequent re-reading can affect the way we respond to a story.

Reader-response Criticism explores how different individuals see the same text differently. It emphasizes how religious, cultural, and social values affect the way we read and respond to a work of fiction. Of course, no two individuals will necessarily read a text in exactly the same way nor will they agree on its meaning. Rather than declare one interpretation correct and the other mistaken, reader-response criticism recognizes that different insights are inevitable. Instead of trying to ignore or reconcile the contradictions, it explores them.

While reader-response criticism rejects the notion that there can be a single correct reading for a literary text, it doesn't consider all readings permissible. Each text creates limits to its possible

interpretations. The obvious difficulty with reader-response criticism is in ascertaining the extent of the reader's freedom in realizing the potential meanings of the text. According to these critics, the meaning of a text can never be completely formulated, but rather 'activated' or 'realized' through the reader's involvement. When a reader's eyes follow the text on the page, a mental operation goes within him, which determines his response. Texts have gaps or blanks which the reader must endeavour to fill. Almost every reader's interpretation differ to some extent from the another, as the evolving mental process of the reader consists of his diverse kinds of expectations and the violations, deferments, satisfactions, and restructuring of expectations, in his experience. As such, the reader- response critics maintain that there is no one "correct" meaning of a literary text.

By this point of your study, you must have been able to figure out the basic premises of the reader-response criticism. You should also keep in mind that reader-response theory is by no means a monolithic critical position. Those who give an important place to readers and their responses in interpreting a work come from a number of different critical camps. As such, individual reader-response theorists differ on a given point. In the section to follow, you will be acquainted with the key reader-response theorists and some of the more prominent forms of reader-response criticism.

Stop To Consider:

Before we go to study individual reader-response theorist and the prominent forms of reader-response criticism, let us have a recap of what we have already learnt:

Reader-response critics of all theoretical persuasions are principally concerned with:

o   The kinds of readers that various texts seem to imply.

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o The codes and conventions to which readers refer in making sense of texts.

o The mental processes that occur as readers move through a text.

o The sociological and historical differences that might distinguish one reading from another.

These critics differ from one another in the following points:

o The primary factors that shape a reader's response.

o What they take to be "objectively" given in the text, and where they find the "subjective" responses of an individual reader.

o Their conclusion about the extent, if any, to which a text controls, or at least constrains, a reader's responses, so as to authorize us to reject at least some readings as misreading.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1 Individual reader-response critics differ from one another in one point or the other; but they do share questions, goals and strategies. Try to find out these shared questions and goals.

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Q.2 How important is the role of the reader in determining the meaning (or meanings) of a literary work? Is 'meaning' to some extent created by the reader? In answering these questions, try to refer to specific novels, poems or plays.

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3a.4 Leading reader-response critics and the prominent forms of reader-response criticism

3a.4.1 Wolfgang Iser

Wolfgang Iser is a German critic who builds up his theories of reader-response on the ideas of the phenomenological analysis of reading process proposed by Roman Ingarden. His theories of reader-response were initially presented in a lecture of 1970 entitled, "The Affective Structure of the Text," and then in two major works, *The Implied Reader* (1972) and *The Acts of Reading* (1976). In *The Implied Reader*, he applies his theory to the analysis of many individual works of literature, especially prose fiction. His major ideas are outlined in a section of this book entitled, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach."

Phenomenology, as you know, takes as its starting point the world as experienced in our consciousness. It rejects the possibility of considering the world independently of human consciousness, but seeks rather to get back to concrete reality through our experience of it. Iser proposes what is essentially a phenomenology of reading, insisting that the study of literature should be concerned not only with the text but equally with the consciousness of the reader in responding to the text. He suggests that literary works can have two poles: the "artistic" pole – the text created by the author, and the "aesthetic" pole – the realization accomplished by the reader. And to realize a literary work one has to converge these two poles.

Iser advocates that the text can be seen as a framework of schematized aspects or schemata that must be actualized or concretized by the cognitive activity of the reader. He refers to the literary work as a virtual work, in the sense of its unrealized potential for meaning. A literary work can lead to innumerable reading experiences; resulting not only out of reader's 'pre-intentions' (the consciousness of the reader with what he/she goes to the text with), but also from the intentions

awakened by the reading process itself (and, indirectly, by the text). One of the best known of Iser's arguments involves the literary work's 'gaps'. It is the gaps and blanks of the text that give rise to communication in the reading process. As Iser puts it – the "unwritten aspects" of a story "draw the reader into the action" and "lead him to shade in the many outlines suggested by the given situations". Such "outlines" influence how the implied reader subsequently reads the text. This does not mean that any reading will be appropriate. The text uses various strategies and devices to limit its own unwritten implications, but the latter are nonetheless worked out by the reader's own imagination.

Stop To Consider:

As you have already read, the reader always go beyond the text, drawing inference, and evaluating the text in terms of their own experiences and thereby fills up the 'gaps' in the text to get a whole. Let us take up an example to understand it better:

In the *Old Testament*, for instance, in *Genesis*, the author tells us (Chapter 22) that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Issac, and then says that "Abraham rose up early in the morning" and prepared to fulfill the command. We are not explicitly told why Abraham "rose up early in the morning" or how he spent the intervening night, but some readers take "early in the morning" to signify (reasonably?) that Abraham has had a sleepless night. Others take it to signify (reasonably?) that Abraham is prompt in obeying God's command. And of course some readers fill the gap with both explanations, or with neither. Doubtless much depends on the text, but there is no doubt that readers "naturalize" – make natural according to their own ideas – what they read.

Another important concept elaborated in *The Acts of Reading* is of the implied reader. Iser distinguishes between the implied reader, who is established by the text itself as one who is expected to respond in specific ways to the "response-inviting structures" of the text, and

the "actual reader", whose response are inevitably coloured by his or her accumulated private experience. He has posited an implied reader, one with "roots firmly planted in the structure of the text". Thus, we find that the author's intentional acts establishes limits, as well as incentives to the reader's creative additions to a text; and helps to reject some readings as misreading. His phenomenological beliefs prevent him from proposing that interpretations should try to agree on one essential meaning. The text can prompt its readers to new levels of awareness, but in another way it also constrains its readers; it both allows the reader an active role in producing meanings and ultimately restricts the range of different interpretations.

3a.4.2 Hans Robert Jauss

Hans Robert Jauss propose another kind of reader-oriented criticism, known as reception theory. Like all other reader-response criticism, it focuses on the reader's reception of a text, but its main concern however is not the interpretation of an individual reader but the altering responses, interpretive and evaluative, of a reading public over a period of time. In the work of Jauss, the relationship between literature and history provides the very core of a new understanding of how readers make sense of texts.

Jauss seeks to bring about a compromise between that interpretation which ignores history and that which ignores the text in favour of social theories. He notes the increasing gap in criticism between historical and aesthetic considerations; typified for Jauss, in the opposed theoretical interests of Marxism and Formalism. Marxism, he claims, seeks to understand the literary work in relation to some pattern of social process or artistic evolution, but has a limited sense of the aesthetic possibilities of form, with its emphasis being predominantly mimetic or representational. Both of these approaches, according to Jauss, are

limited to aesthetics of production and of representation. They leave out the important dimension of literary reception and influence. In both of these literary theories, extremely limited role is provided to reader, listener and spectator.

According to Jauss, the reader's participation in the interpretive process is "unalterable for aesthetic as for historical knowledge" because the reader is "the addressee for whom the literary work is primarily destined…". He has proposed the term 'horizons of expectations' of a reading public. By this he implies what emerges from a reader's pre-understanding of the genre, form and themes of already familiar works, and from an awareness of the differences between poetic and pragmatic language uses. The characteristics of an age play a crucial role in defining the horizons of expectation for the public of its age. Thus, for Jauss, the response of a particular reader which constitutes for that reader the meaning and aesthetic qualities of a text, is the joint product of the reader's 'horizon of expectations' and the confirmations, disappointments, refutations, and reformations of these expectations when they are challenged by the features of the text itself.

In his essay, "Literary History as a challenge to Literary Theory", Jauss opines thus:

> …A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the materials of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence…

This central, defining statement of Jauss's essay provides a striking and dramatic contrast with those theoretical percepts (typified by the New Critics) which would approach the text in terms of its

autonomous existence and its timeless, universal appeal.For Jauss too, there is no one meaning of a text, rather it is a "dialectic" or a "dialogue" between a text and the horizons of expectations of successive readers.

3a.4.3 David Bleich

David Bleich is the proponent of yet another form of reader oriented criticism, known as Subjective criticism. In his book, *Subjective Criticism* (1978), he tries to show on the basis of classroom experiments that the reading of a text yields as many interpretations as there are readers. He refutes the New Critics claim that a literary text is a self-sufficient object invested with publicly available meanings, arising solely from the text. Bleich denies that the text exists independent of readers.

The New Critics attempt was to show that knowledge about literature is really knowledge and not merely a record of fleeting personal observations. Bleich is of the view that the knowledge derived from literature is interpretive knowledge, different both in its origins and its consequences from the formulaic knowledge of physical sciences. This interpretive knowledge is derived not from any finite rules of construction but from the uncontrolled experiences of the interpreter, and hence the result of interpretation is also infinite. He states that – "The way we actually treat interpretive knowledge … shows that it is subjective, that it is not a formulation of some unchanging 'objective' truth, but the motivated construction of someone's mind." He thus denies that objective facts exist.

Bleich claims that individuals everywhere classify things into three essential groups: objects, symbols, and people. Literature, a mental creation (as opposed to a concrete one), would thus be considered a symbol. A text may be an object in that it is paper (or other media) and print, but its meaning depends on the symbolization in the minds of readers. Bleich explains this with the help of an example – a table or a

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car or an apple doesn't have any function beyond its material existence. Hence, they can be termed as material object or as "objective" object. In the case of a book, its existence depends upon the writer as well as the reader. Hence. It is a symbolic object, and wholly dependent on a perceiver for its existence.

Thus, Bleich opines that meaning is not found, it is developed. The meaning of any literary piece or art cannot proceed independently of the study of the people involved in the artistic transaction. It is the "subjective process" determined by the distinctive personality of the individual readers, which yields satisfying new understanding.

3a.4.4 Norman Holland

Norman Holland is one of those reader-response critics who focus on the unconscious of readers. His psychoanalytic analysis of reading is built upon the concepts of Freud. He argues that all people inherit from their mother an identity theme or fixed understanding of the kind of person they are. This core identity theme gives that individual a certain style of being and reading. In "The Miller's Wife and the Professors: Questions about the Transactive Theory of Reading," Holland asserts that whatever a person reads is processed to make it fit his/her identity theme.

Holland's theory, with all its emphasis on the reader and his psychology, does not deny the independence of the text. This is because the text exists as an object and as the expression of another mind, something different from readers themselves, something they can project onto. The text, according to him, is a projection of the fantasies that constitute the particular "identity" of its author; though at times his fantasies are modified by the unconscious needs and defenses. When a reader reads a text, his "subjective" response is shaped by a "transactive" encounter between the fantasies projected by its author and the particular

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defenses, expectations, and wish-fulfilling fantasies that make up the readers own identity. Thus, the readers understanding of a literary text is a transactive process, in which the reader transforms into a unity the fantasy content, "which he has created from the materials of the story his defenses admitted."

Holland's theory also advocates that there is no universally determinate meaning of a work. Readers interpret texts as expressions of their own personalities or psyches and thereby use their interpretations as a means of coping with life. Two readers will agree in their interpretations only in so far as their "identity themes" are sufficiently alike to enable each to fit the other's re-creation of a text to his or her own distinctive responses. Holland's major ideas are illustrated in his essays – "*Hamlet* - My Greatest Creation" and "Recovering 'The Purloined Letter': Reading as a Personal Transaction."

3a.4.5 Stanley Fish

Stanley Fish is one of the most important figures in reader-response criticism. He calls his technique of interpretation affective stylistics. He also took issue with the tenets of formalism; especially against the tenet that a poem is a single, static object, a whole that has to be understood in its entirety at once. In "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" (1970), he opines that the force of literature is an affective force; literature exists and signifies only when it is read. His theory of affective stylistics suggests that meaning is an "event" that takes place in the mind of an individual reader during the act of reading. The process of reading is dynamic and sequential; and hence a reader's understanding of a work is continuously modified with each succeeding word, sentence, stanza, paragraph and so on. In formulating his theory, Fish however insists that the reader should be "informed" reader, i.e. one who is familiar with literary conventions and has acquired a "literary competence".

You will be interested to find that Fish substantially modifies his reader-response theory in the latter half of the 1970s. in his early claims, Fish had asserted that texts control the readers by the rhetorical strategies used in the text. In his modified view, he attributes more initiative to the reader and less control by the text in the interpretive act. In this latter half of Fish's career, we also find him shifting his focus away from the individual reader. Here he came up with the idea of multiple and diverse reading groups (which he called interpretive communities), each of which is composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy" or "set of community assumptions". The interpretations arrived at by readers within a given community are more alike, whereas those across different reading communities may differ sharply. As such, he modifies his earlier claim – that affective stylistics is a universal process of the competent reading of literary texts – with the view that affective stylistics is one of several possible reading strategies.

Fish's conclusion is that there can be no universal "right reading" of any text. The validity of any reading, however obvious it may seem to a reader, will always depend on the assumptions and strategy of reading that he or she happens to share with other members of a particular interpretive community.

You will read in more details about Stanley Fish and his theories of reader-response criticism in the following unit.

Stop to Consider:

To widen your horizon of knowledge on the reader-response criticism, you can read about some more reader response critics like:
- Harold Bloom
- Jonathan Culler

A few reader oriented feminist critics like:
- Judith Fetterley
- Patrocinio Schweickart

- Monique Wittig

Critics exemplifying contemporary version of reader-oriented criticism:

- Mailloux
- Peter Rabinowitz

Louise Rosenblatt and Walker Gibson are two of the earliest influences in the field. They not only insisted on the importance of the text in the act of interpretation, but also insisted that the reader be taken into account; not to do so will, they maintained, either impoverish the interpretation or render it defective.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1 Both Norman Holland and David Bleich have developed theories of reader response which are indebted to psychoanalysis. Justify.

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Q.2 How has Jauss challenged objectivist views of both literary texts and literary history?

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Q.3 What shifts do you find in Stanley Fish's views about readers and the process of interpretation?

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31.5   Summing Up

We have examined in this unit some basic premises of reader-response criticism. I have also given you the context in which this approach to criticism developed. Though, reader-response criticism is by no means a monolithic critical position, I have tried to generalize and simplify some of the more prominent forms of reader-response criticism. But if you try to read some more on each of these forms of reader-response criticism, you will find it easy t grasp the critical position or theory among the various branches of reader-response criticism.

I hope, with this short introduction to reader-response criticism, you are in a comfortable position to read the next unit on Stanley Fish and the essay prescribed for you – "Is there a text in this class?"

3a.6 Suggested Readings

Abrams, M.H. (2001) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, New Delhi: Harcourt India Private Limited.

Murfin, Ross and Ray, Supriya M. (2003) *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Habib, M.A.R. (2008) *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory*, Hongkong: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Newton, K.M. (1997) *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*, Palgrave Macmillan.

UNIT – III (b)

STANLEY FISH,
"IS THERE A TEXT IN THIS CLASS?"

Structure:

3b.0 Objectives

After going through this unit, you should be in a position to:

- *Outline* Stanley Fish's life and his major works.

- *Infer* Fish's views about the reader, the reading process and the process of meaning making.

- *Assess* the evolution and changes in Fish's views throughout his career.

- *Explain* Fish's ideas incorporated in his essay – "Is there a text in this class?"

3b.1 Introduction

In the previous unit you have been introduced to the critical approach called reader-response criticism, which views the reader as an active recipient and an active producer of meaning of a literary text. You have also got an insight into the various branches of reader-response criticism. In this unit, you are going to read about the reader-response critic, Stanley Fish and his major works and ideas. The latter part of this unit takes you to the study of Fish's essay prescribed for your study – "Is there a text in this class?"

3b.2 Stanley Fish – an introduction

3b.2.1 His Life

Stanley Eugene Fish was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on April 19, 1983. He was from a middle class family and grew up in a working class neighborhood. His father was a plumbing contractor. His family moved to Philadelphia, where he attended the University of Pennsylvania and received his BA in 1959. He was the first in his family to go to college. After graduation, he married Adrienne A Aaron, with whom he had a daughter. However, they divorced in 1980. He went to do graduate work at Yale University, where he completed his MA and

PhD in 1960 and 1962 respectively. His doctoral thesis was on the English poet John Skelton. He taught English at the University of California at Berkeley and Johns Hopkins University before becoming Arts and Sciences Professor of English and Professor of Law at the Duke University from 1986 to 1998. While working in the Johns Hopkins University, he married his second wife, Jane Parry Tompkins, also a Professor, in 1982. He became the executive director of the Duke University Press and served in this position till 1998. Since 1999 he held the position of dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Stanley fish is one of the most provocative contemporary literary theorists. Coming from a very modest background, he has shown his proficiency in various fields of learning. He has earned distinction for his investigations into the subjectivity of textual interpretations, particularly his analysis of interpretive communities – an offshoot of reader-response criticism. He is the leading critic of John Milton of his generation, a pioneer of critical legal studies, and also a spirited defender of the humanities amid public attacks over political correctness.

3b.2.2 His Works

Fish's writings cover a wide range of subjects. Before he was thirty he wrote two influential books. His first book, *John Skelton's Poetry* (1965) grew out of his doctoral thesis. It takes a radical perspective in interpreting Skelton's work. He contends that Skelton was basically a private poet and that his implicitly Christian verse serves as a record of the poet's religious development; at the centre of Fish's argument is the "psychological (spiritual) history" of what he refers to as the "protagonist". His next book, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (1967), was most notably a touchstone of Milton criticism. Here, Fish focuses on the experience of the reader as he or

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she encounters Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He argues that meaning in a literary work is not something to be extracted, but it must be negotiated by the reader at the time of reading the text; in the process of struggling through the grammar and rhetoric of the work. Fish's next venture – *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth century Literature (1972)* – reveals his preference for the literature that makes readers work at making meaning. He identifies two types of literature: rhetorical, which confirms and reinforces the author's position, therefore affirming the reader's expectations and "self-esteem"; and dialectical, which undermines, or "consumes", the reader's self-esteem by challenging assumptions and subverting expectations. A dialectical text, or self-consuming artifact, rather than presenting an opinion as the truth, forces the readers to discover the truth themselves.

A major portion of his publishing career explores the role of the reader in determining the meaning of a text. His essay "Interpreting the Variorum" (1976) introduces his concept of "interpretive communities". The essay attacks accepted beliefs in authorial intention and textual autonomy, and propose the provocative thesis that texts are empty and made only by the reader. Fish examines how the interpretation of a text is dependent upon each reader's own subjective experience in one or more communities, each of which is defined as a 'community' by a distinct epistemology. This concept of "interpretive communities" is explored more fully in Fish's book *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980), where he addresses the important question of the role of institutions. In particular he discusses the literary institution and the role they play in the construction of meaning. In a later book, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (1989), Fish analyses, and defends, the role of the professional "interpretive community" of academic critics in literary studies; he also extends his views of literary interpretation into the domain of legal interpretation.

3b.2.3 His Major Views and Concepts

From your study of the previous unit you already know that the formative factor of Fish's works on reader-response was his response to the New Criticism. He rebelled against the so called rigidity and dogmatism of the New Critics, chiefly against the iconic status of the text and its sole focus on literary form and language. He emphasized on the central role played by readers in the production of meaning of a text and also talked about the rhetorical force of texts and their effects on readers.

Interestingly, Fish's ideas about reader-response have been repeatedly modified since the 1960's. His pronouncements came in stages. In this sub-section, we will try to understand some of his chief ideas and concepts.

Affective Stylistics and the Informed Reader

Stanley Fish's earlier works were representative of his technique of interpretation, which he calls affective stylistics. He suggests that literature exists and signifies only when it is read by a reader; its force is an affective force. To a reader in the act of reading, the meaning of the text evolves as his eyes follow the text; being moved or affected by each word as he turns the pages. He stands against the central assumption of the formalists that: "there is a sense, that is embedded or encoded in the text, and that it can be taken in at a single glance." In his view, the idea of a single undisputed meaning embedded in a text, is "positivist, holistic, and spatial."

In his important essay of 1970, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics", Fish emphasizes the temporal nature of the reading process and argues that the meaning of a literary text cannot be seen as separate from the reader's experience of it. The temporal dimension of the reading process allows for modifications and shifts of viewpoint in

the process of creation of the meaning. The activity of reading, according to him, was one that converts the spatial sequence of printed words on a page into a temporal flow of experience in a reader. The reader discovers the meaning of a text bit by bit, moment by moment as he progresses in his reading. Fish finds the meaning of the work to reside in this bit by bit knowing, the experience that an "informed reader" has as he reads, rather than from anything imbedded in the actual text. In other words, the process of enchantment or disenchantment occurs continuously throughout the reading experience. He defines his informed reader as having the following properties:

> [t]he informed reader is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of 'the semantic knowledge that a mature … listener brings to his task of comprehension, including the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, and so on; and (3) has literary competence. That is, he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalized the properties of local discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, and so on) to whole genres.

Fish's theory rejects the claims of New Critics like Cleanth Brooks who view literary texts as "well wrought urns"; rather asserts that texts are "self consuming artifacts". In his works like *Surprised by Sin* and *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, he shows how the difficult grammar and rhetoric of a text could lead readers on, even set them up, to make certain interpretations, only to undercut them later and force readers into new and different readings. The reader's experience of a text is,

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thus, temporal and contains modifications and shifts in viewpoint. Fish emphasizes on the temporal dimension of the reading process and the creation of meaning.

Interpretive Communities

Through the late 1970s and 1980s, Fish is seen engaged in broader theoretical speculations on interpretation and rhetoric. In the works written during this period, like "Interpreting the Variorum" (1976; rev. 1980) and *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980), Fish distances himself from simple, subjectivist views of reader-response. What lies behind Fish's thinking at this point is a strong view of the social construction of reality. He tries to account for the stability of interpretations, at least among certain groups at certain times. There are many possible interpretations, but, as he observes, agreement for the most part prevails. Fish's explanation is that we derive our interpretations not from texts but from the codes and protocols of "the interpretative community".

In his modified approach, Fish attributes more initiative to the reader and less control by the text in the interpretive act. In "Interpreting the Variorum", he proposes the provocative thesis that texts are empty in themselves and made only by the reader. He holds that readers actually create a piece of literature as they read it. For Fish, interpretation is a communal affair. Every reader is informed by the common assumptions and strategies of a particular interpretive community. He proposed that each communal strategy in effect "creates" all the seemingly objective features of the text itself, as well as the "intentions, speakers, and authors" that we may infer from the text. The result is that there can be no universal "right reading" of any text; the validity of any reading, however obvious it may seem to a reader, will always depend on the assumptions and strategy of reading that he or she happens to share with other members of a particular interpretive community.

Thus, you find that Fish's concept of interpretive communities are composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy", or "set of community assumptions". These interpretive principles or strategies are derived from the educational and professional communities in which one receives training and has membership. The strategies of an interpreter are:

> Community property, and insofar as they at once enable and limit the operations of his consciousness, he is too [community property] … Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but fro writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions.
>
> {Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* }

Fish believes that interpretive communities, like languages, are purely conventional, that is, arbitrarily agreed upon constructions. They are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned. By asserting that interpretive strategies are learned, Fish, however, doesn't imply that there is any such point in which an individual has not learned any. Because, the ability to interpret is not acquired, it is constitutive of being human. What happens ids that the ways of interpretation can be acquired, and the same can also be forgotten or supplanted or complicated or dropped from favour. This ultimately leads to changes in the interpretation of a text.

To sum up, Fish's position seems to be composed of the ideas that 1) reading is an activity, 2) rather than being imbedded in formal features, the meaning of any text is brought to it by the reader's interpretive strategy, 3) interpretive communities make it possible for

there to be some agreement on the meanings of texts, 4)all acts of interpretation occur in some context or other. These seem to be straightforward and even obvious assertions, yet they seem to frighten many critics. They apparently feel the same way that Wimsatt and Beardsley do, that Fish's method leads to a lack of certainty. Fish himself does not try to argue against this claim directly. In fact, at the end of *Interpreting the Variorum* he himself admits this uncertainty when discussing how one can know to which interpretive community one belongs. He says, "The answer is he can't, since any evidence brought forward to support the claim would itself be an interpretation . . ." All one can have as far as proof of membership is a " . . . nod of recognition from someone in the same community . . ." He ends this essay with the only words that someone who speaks from his viewpoint can truly maintain with any certainty: "I say it [we know] to you now, knowing full well that you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me".

Check Your Progress

Q.1   What is affective stylistics?

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Q.2   What is Fish's notion of an "informed reader"?

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Q.3   How has Fish addressed the important question of the role of institution, and in particular the literary institution, in the construction of meaning?

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3b.3 Reading the essay, "Is there a text in this class?"

The essay prescribed for you, "Is There a text in This Class?" has been anthologized in Stanley Fish's 1980 volume, *Is There a Text in This Class, The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. The volume comprises of a number of his most important essays and articles which attempt to chart the progress of his evolving interpretive method. These essays were originally delivered as the John Crowe ransom Memorial Lectures, and were given at the Kenyon College from April 8 through 13, 1979.

By this time you must have gone through the text yourself and have come to your own understanding of Fish's views on "system of intelligibility", "situation", or "interpretive community". Now to try to offer you meanings of Fish's views incorporated in this essay would be against the principles of reader-response criticism. However, here is a summary of the essay to assist your own understanding of the essay.

The essay describes an incident between one of Fish's colleagues at John Hopkins University and his student of the new semester, who enquired of him – "Is There a text in This Class?". The essay is also an answer to the objections raised by Meyer Abram's in his paper "How To Do Things with Texts" against the so called 'New Readers' – Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, and Stanley Fish. In a way, you can also read the essay as a defense of reader-response criticism against the charges of relativism and solipsism.

The incident described here – a dialogue between a professor and a student – runs thus:

Student: Is there a text in this Class?

Professor: Yes; it's the *Norton Anthology of Literature*.

This seemingly straight-forward question, coming from a new semester student and that too on the first day of the semester, leads the professor (without much thinking) to apprehend it to be the enquiry about the text to be followed in the class. But the student interrupts:

Student: No, no. I mean in this class do we believe in poems and things, or is it just us?

On being corrected, the professor recognizes that the question is really about the theory of interpretation that will guide the course. The professor is put into trap because of the infinite capacity of language, of having more than one correct answer or meanings. Now this incident can raise many questions about meanings and responses in communication. Taking this incident as the premise, Fish builds up a defense of reader-response against other disciplines like New Criticism and Formalism.

Meyer Abrams has accused the New Readers (Derrida, Bloom, Fish) of overriding the literal or normative meanings of words or sentences. Abrams in his "The Deconstructive Angel" has remarked that the New Reader's preach the instability of text and the unavailability of determinate meanings and invite the readers to abandon their ordinary realm of experience in speaking, hearing, reading and understanding for a world in which "no text can mean anything in particular" and where "we can never say just what anyone means by anything he writes". Fish, with the help of the above example, illustrates how the possibility of more than one meaning does not always reflect instability; or that the meaning of a text is not always determined by the normative or literal or linguistic meaning of individual words.

In the context of the said incident, you will find that the line "Is there a text in this Class?" has got two literal meanings: the first meaning being the query about the particular text to be followed in the class; and the second meaning being the question about the disputed issue of 'text' in contemporary literary theory. But we don't have here a case of indeterminacy or undecidability. None of the interpretations seem imposed by the actions of willful interpreters. Rather, both the meanings arise from the public and constituting norms of language and

understanding. The meanings are an outcome of the particular institution of which the professor and the student are a part. Thus, their understanding is constrained by "the understood practices and assumptions of the institution and not the rules and fixed meanings of a language system." Both the meanings are equally valid and arise from the academic institutions of which both the professor and the student are a part.

An utterance can have different meanings under different situations. We already have two instances for "Is there a text in this Class?", which Fish for convenience, labels as "Is there a text in this Class?"$_1$ and "Is there a text in this Class?"$_2$. Now he has for you a third instance, "Is there a text in this Class?"$_3$. This third situation can be like someone inquiring about the location of an object, "I think I left my text in this class; have you seen it?", giving rise to the third "Is there a text in this Class?". This implies that meanings arise from situations and the perceiver already has some access to the particular situation. Of course, some meanings seem more normal and natural above the others: "one of those contexts is surely more available and therefore more likely to be the perspective within which the utterance is heard, than the other." In the given instance meaning 1 is more available than meaning 2.

An utterance or a sentence cannot arise without a context. Sometimes it may happen that no context has been specified for an utterance. In that case, to provide it a meaning we automatically attribute to it the context in which it has been most often encountered. Here, Fish cites an example of E D Hirsch's three instances of the utterance, "The air is crisp." When the context is not specified, almost all readers / hearers understand the utterance as a rough meteorological description predicting a certain quality of the local atmosphere. But under specific contexts, it can mean different things: sometimes the memories of childhood – "Crisp air reminds me of my childhood in Vermont"; or sometimes the musical atmosphere created by a musical instrument –

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"When the piece is played correctly the air is crisp". As such, you will find that though a reader is not constrained by the meanings words have in a normative linguistic system, he is neither free to confer on an utterance any meaning he likes.

Fish further elaborates to show that the same sets of words can mean differently and clearly in different situations. That is why you have seen that the same sets of words "Is there a text in this Class?" has got two different but clearly recognizable meanings in two different circumstances. The student's added words, "No, No, I mean…", does not have any inherent relationship to the second situation; but they help the professor to self-consciously figure out the other possible circumstances of utterance. That is why, he is not "free" even if he is unconstrained by determinate meaning. Had the student's added words got an inherent relationship to the second circumstance, then it could imply that any reader having knowledge of the first circumstance but totally ignorant of the second, would have got the meaning. But you will know that this is impossible. To an ignorant reader, the student cannot explain the second situation by varying or adding her words. Rather, she will have to explain elaborately about texts, the different approaches to the understanding of text or the ongoing critical debate about it; only when the hearer would have imagined this situation and his own position in it, he can address the words within the same system of intelligibility from which they issue. The identification of the context and making sense of it occur simultaneously. The professor, who already has the knowledge of Fish's views, on being recalled by the students added words, could immediately identify them as "Ah, there's one of Fish victims!" as well understand the import of the students words. Moreover, though the professor's understanding of the circumstance is transformed in the course of the conversation, the circumstances are still understood to be academic ones, and within that continuing (if

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mopdified) understanding, the directions his thought might take are already severely limited.

With the help of these examples, Fish opposes the formalist notion that there is a sense, that is embedded or encoded in the text, and that it can be taken in at a single glance. Fish opines that there are no determinate meanings and that the stability of the text is an illusion. This is because the meaning of a text is determined by its context. The same text can mean differently with the changing context. However, the identification of the context of utterance and the making of sense occurs simultaneously. That is, the listener or the reader must recognize the system of intelligibility from which a text has been uttered or written. The meaning of a text cannot be constrained by the meanings words have in a normative linguistic system. The shift of structure of understanding doesn't follow a random path, but is always constrained by tacitly known purposes and goals of one situation which has an elaborate relation (of contrast, opposition, expansion, extension) to that of another. From the incident cited (between the professor and the student), Fish illustrates that the shift from one system of intelligibility to another is not determined by words. With the addition of the words – "No, no. I mean…" – the professor could identify the system of intelligibility because that system was already available in his categories of understanding. Otherwise, to bring someone previously unaware of that context into it, the student would have to begin with the shape of his present understanding, and through an elaborate explanation bring the new context to his understanding.

Throughout the essay Fish has been arguing that meanings are determined not because of the norms embedded in language but because language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. This structure of norms is not an individual's creation nor is it abstract; rather it is social. And communication always occurs within

situations. To be in a situation is to be in possession of a structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purposes and goals that are already in place and within the assumptions of these purposes and goals an utterance can be immediately heard. And in the process of communication when there is a shift from one situation to another, the structure of norms changes with its assumed background of practices, purposes and goals. Fish therefore concludes that Abrams is wrong in contending that in the absence of a determinate core of meanings, interpretations becomes a matter of individual and private construing, none of which is subject to challenge or correction.

Fish agrees that at one level, his conclusion that – "the positing of context-or institution- specific norms surely rules out the possibility of a norm whose validity would be recognized by everyone, no matter what his situation", — can be criticized as a sophisticated version of the relativism. But he then justifies his conclusion saying that every individual is situated in a particular situation and he takes the norms and values that enable his consciousness as authoritative for him. When his belief in those norms and values are displaced by a new set of norms and values, the latter set rules as the unexamined and undoubted authority as those they displaced. And there can be no moment when an individual is asituational of he is innocent of any and all categories of thought.

Now, another criticism against Fish's position raised by people like Abrams and Hirsch is that of solipsism. But Fish rules out any possibility for solipsism even when one resorts to individual categories of assumptions and opinions. This is because, in truth none of an individual's assumptions and opinions can be called "his own"; they are shaped by the society and the situation he is in, and as such the paths that his consciousness can possibly take are already delimited. Fish again turns to the professors incident – in the situation described, the interpretative strategies that the professor uses to understand the

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implications of his student's words are already constrained by the situation in which he and his student are into, that is, the institution of academic America. The shared understanding that they come to is based on the confidence with which they speak and reason with one another. The arguments and opinions they put forth are their own only in the sense as actors within an institution, and they automatically fall heir to the institution's way of making sense, its system of intelligibility.

Finally Fish sums up his essay with the following points:

1. Communication does occur, despite the absence of an independent and context-free system of meanings.

2. Those who participate in this communication do so confidently rather than provisionally (they are not relatives).

3. While their confidence has its source in a set of beliefs, those beliefs are not individual-specific or idiosyncratic but communal and conventional (they are not solipsist).

Check Your Progress:

Q.1   Do you agree with Fish that the incident between the professor and the student illustrates that understanding is always "specific" to particular "system of intelligibility" and never "operates above or across situations".

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Q.2   What are the charges levied by Meyer Abrams against the New Readers (Derrida, Bloom, Fish)? Is Fish able to give proper justification for those charges in this essay?

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3b.4 Critical Reception

Stanley fish has been one of the most cited literary critics of his generation. The nature of his claims has promoted both admiration and wide-ranging criticism. Traditionalists have denounced him as a relativist who believes in nothing. Leftist critics have attacked him for espousing a circular position that makes principled political action impossible. His first major scholarly work, *Surprised by Sin*, was praised by reviewers for its consideration of *Paradise Lost*, particularly in illustrating how the poem forces a sense of guilt upon the reader to open the reader to the work's instructive aims. This idea of the "guilty reader," however, was also criticized for rendering the reader incapable of forming a critical judgement and thus precluding criticism of the work. Critics began to take serious note of Fish's ideas with *Is There a text in This Class?* Fish's enervating writing style apparently played a significant role in the book's success in winning critics over to his argument that, even more so than the text itself, the reader's response creates the meaning of a text.

Throughout his career Fish has remained the target of critics. Terry Eagleton excoriates Fish's "discreditable epistemology" as "sinister". According to him, " Like almost all diatribes against universalism, Fish's critique of universalism has its own rigid universals: the priority at all times and places of sectoral interests, the permanence of conflict, the a priori status of belief systems, the rhetorical character of truth, the fact that all apparent openness is secretly closure , and the like." The philosopher, Martha Nussbaum argues that Stanley Fish's theoretical views are based on extreme relativism and even radical subjectivism." Another prominent critic, David Hirsch, censured Fish for "lapses in logical rigor" and "carelessness toward rhetorical precision." He argues that Fish, in his arguments, "had not managed to rid himself of the shackles of New Critical Theory." Even within the

reader-response camp itself, Wolfgang Iser poses the question: "It is quite true that membership of the community helps to prevent arbitrary ideation, but if there is no subjectivist element in reading, how on earth does Professor fish account for different interpretations of one and the same text?" Despite all such criticisms, Fish remains an insightful critic of contemporary culture.

3b.5 Summing Up

In this unit, I have tried to present before you a short summary of Stanley Fish's life and works. I have also tried to outline the major ideas incorporated in his essay, " Is there a text in this class?". Hope, by now you are in a position to understand and argue for yourself the critical arguments of Stanley Fish.

3b.6 Suggested Readings

Abrams, M.H. (2001) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, New Delhi: Harcourt India Private Limited.

Murfin, Ross and Ray, Supriya M. (2003) *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

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UNIT – IV
MARXIST CRITICISM AND ALTHUSSER'S "IDEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES"

Contents:

4.0 Objectives

This unit will acquaint you with the central assumptions of Marxist Criticism and enable you to relate Althusser's text "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" with this materialist theory. By the end of this unit, you should be able

- To make an assessment of Marx's materialist philosophy
- Get acquainted with the prime postulations of this school of thought
- Understand Althusser's revision of the Ideology critique as formulated in his essay

4.1 Introduction: Marxism

A school of thought founded by Karl Marx, a German philosopher of the nineteenth century, renowned for his epoch-making works such

as *Das Kapital* (1867), *Thesis on Feuerbach* (1845), two collaborations with Friedrich Engels — *The German Ideology* (1846) and *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), among others. Marx, after examining social organization in a scientific manner, began to perceive human history as a series of struggles between classes – between the oppressing and the oppressed. The role of the State fundamentally comprised of exercising its power to oppress and subjugate the labouring class, in order to serve the vested interests of the ruling class. In capitalist social formation, this oppositional relationship was denoted as that existing between the ***bourgeoisie*** (the owners of the means of production) and the ***proletariat*** (the working class). Marx thereby proposed a model of history in which economic and political conditions determine social conditions.

Taking a point of departure from Hegel who posited that the world was governed by **thought**, that the process of history was the gradual **dialectical** unfolding of the laws of Reason, Marx argued that all mental systems were the product of real social and **economic** existence. The **material interests** of the dominant social class determine how people see human existence, both individual and collective. Thus, all our notions of reality, truth, morality etc., are products of the socio-economic conditions of our time and place. Human history is therefore a result of **dialectical materialism** – the idea that all change is the product of the struggle between opposites. For example, in capitalist social formation, human history is the story of the ongoing struggle between the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*.

A central concept of Marxism is related in terms of an architectural metaphor – the **base** and the **superstructure**. The base is the **economic system** on which the superstructure (the systems and institutions of the society, example, religion, art, politics, law etc.) rests. The dominant class control both the base and the superstructure of society

and uses its power to manipulate the working class into believing that the prevailing system is the logical and natural one through a process called **interpellation**. It results in division of the society on class lines. The crucial element here is which class is able to own and manipulate the forces of production. In capitalist formation, it has been found that the forces of production are controlled by a minority (the bourgeoisie) who use their economic power in order to exploit the mass of the population (the proletariat) by taking the economic surplus for their own benefit. This inherently conflictual situation gives rise to a class struggle which centres on the ownership and control of the means of production. All political institutions and cultural beliefs are shaped by the economic arrangements and those with economic power – the ruling class – in such a way that it helps them in realising their narrow commercial gains. This paves the way for the Marxist concept of **ideology** which can be simply defined as a body of ideas (basically false) characteristic of a particular social group or class (in capitalist social formation, the bourgeoisie). Ideology is the weapon wielded by the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, in order to keep the latter in a state of passive acquiescence. This is basically through indoctrination of "false consciousness", the idea that capitalism is the one and only social formation that can serve the economic interests of the proletariat, and also alluding to the fact of its irreversibility.

In bourgeois capitalism, the privileged bourgeoisie rely on the proletariat – the labor force responsible for survival. Marx theorized that when profits are not reinvested in the workers but in creating more factories, the workers' plight would begin to deteriorate. This is what may be termed as **exploitation**, directly a result of the capitalist's realization of the **surplus value**. The awareness on the part of the proletariat about the truth of this fact would help in enabling them achieve **class consciousness**. This would be the crucial moment, where no short-

term patching is possible, or successful on the part of the bourgeoisie. At this critical juncture, **revolution** will lead to a restructuring of the system. A historical survey leads us to a number of social formations, each a product of a play of dominations: **primitive communism, slave economy, feudalism, capitalism**. Marx extends this survey to envision (as a prognosis) a revolution which will destroy the capitalist formation, thereby leading on to a brief transitional phase of the **dictatorship of the proletariat.** This will eventually pave the way for the establishing of **communism,** culminating into the **classless society**, which would also mark the **end of history**. Here, historical materialism will come to an end, and a **utopia** realized. This, in short, sums up the rudimentary ideas of Marx.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Q.1 What is Marxism? In what way does Marxist theory mark a break from Hegel's?

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Q.2 You are expected to know the difference between the idea of 'Historical/Dialectical Materialism' (Marx) and 'Dialectical Idealism'(Hegel). Attempt a paragraph in about 200 words from the ideas given in the glossary.

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Q.3 What is the chief fallacy related to Marxist theory?

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GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS AND PHRASES:

Dialectic: process or situation involving contradictions or conflicts of opposites and their resolution.

Hegelian Dialectics: A system of exploring the evolution of ideas through contradictions involving **thesis** and **anti-thesis**. The resolution is the **synthesis**. But Hegel asserted that the synthesis arrived at is never final, and leads on to newer ideas and their contradictions, thereby keeping the process of the evolution of ideas alive.

Dialectical Idealism: A Hegelian proposition which historicizes the evolution of Ideas in man as the only phenomenon associated with existence. Such an evolutionary trend is possible because of man's cognitive capacity to rationally and critically formulate theories/ philosophies different and supposedly more progressive/positivistic than their predecessors.

Dialectical Materialism : A historiography formulated by Marx that is based upon Hegel's dialectical method, with the prime difference that "material" is privileged over the world of "ideas". To simplify the matter, it can be said that Marx is more concerned with "matter" than the "mind". According to him, human history has been a continuous play of dominations over access to material resources, eventually resulting in the formation of two distinct classes – **haves** and **have not's**. In capitalist

social formation, these two classes are referred to as the *bourgeoisie* (haves) and the *proletariat* (have-nots).

Interpellation : This term signifies the awareness of an individual's **subject-position** through the instance of another hailing out –"you there!" (it will be discussed in greater detail in section 1.6)

Surplus value : The surplus profit realised by a capitalist after denying the workers with what they actually should be getting in terms of wages or salaries. It is this which results in the **exploitation** of the proletariat.

Class consciousness : a term which implies the coming into awareness of the proletariat about the fact of their "real" condition, which is exploitation by the bourgeoisie, through ideological manipulation, through instilling false consciousness. The emergence of the proletariat from such a mental conditioning would hasten the process of revolution, through which only the ushering in of the classless society can be envisaged.

Dictatorship of the proletariat : According to Marx, a stop-gap arrangement, immediately following the successful proletarian class struggle. This phase will mark the undisputed reign of the proletariat, where they will attempt to weed out the vestiges of bourgeoisie ideology. This would be a transition phase, eventually giving way for the establishment of the classless society, a utopia where communism will prevail, thereby marking the end of history, with no great need of further struggle between man on the basis of class differences.

4.2 Marxist Literary Criticism

Based on the socialist and dialectical theories of Karl Marx, Marxist criticism views literary works as reflections of the social institutions out of which they are born. According to Marxists, even literature itself is a social institution and has a specific ideological

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function, based on the background and ideology of the author. In essence, Marxists believe that a work of literature is not a result of divine inspiration or pure artistic endeavor, but that it arises out of the economic and ideological circumstances surrounding its creation. For Marxist critics, works of literature often mirror the creator's own place in society, and they interpret most texts in relation to their relevance regarding issues of class struggle as depicted in a work of fiction. Although Marx did not write extensively on literature and its place in society, he did detail the relationship between economic determinism and the social superstructure in various texts, including *The Critique of Political Economy* (1859), where he stated: "The mode of production of material life determines altogether the social, political, and intellectual life process. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being, that determines their consciousness." Thus, although he did not expound in detail on the connections between literature and society, it is agreed among most scholars that Marx did view the relationship between literary activity and the economic center of society as an interactive process.

Although Marx and Friedrich Engels detailed theories of Socialism early in the twentieth century, it was not until the 1920s that Marxist literary theory was systematized. The greatest impetus for this standardization came after the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia. The resulting socialist form of government and society, although uncertain about the length of time it would take for the new economic standards to create a new culture, believed that such a change was imminent. In the meantime, Socialist Realism was accepted as the highest form of literature, guiding both literary creation and official literary criticism in Russia. In the years since then, Russian literary theory has modified its extreme socialist stance to acknowledge that literary creation is a result of both subjective inspiration and the objective influence of

the writer's surroundings. Outside of the Soviet Union, one of the most influential Marxist critics was Georg Lukács. Born in Hungary, Lukács joined the Communist Party in 1918 and later migrated to Russia. He has defined his Marxist theories of literature and criticism in such works as *Die Eigenart des Asthetischen* (1963), and remains central to the study of Marxist criticism today.

In recent years, literary criticism has expanded in scope to address issues of social and political significance. Marxist critics such as Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson have expanded their realm of study to include cultural and political studies in their interpretations of literature. In this regard, Marxist critics, along with feminists, have begun studying literary criticism as an aspect of cultural sciences, notes Michael Ryan in his essay on the state of contemporary cultural and literary studies.

The English literary critic and cultural theorist Terry Eagleton defines Marxist criticism this way:

> Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to *explain* the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history. (Eagleton 1976: 4)

The simplest goals of Marxist literary criticism can include an assessment of the political "tendency" of a literary work, determining whether its social content or its literary form are "progressive"; however, this is by no means the only or the necessary goal. From Walter Benjamin to Fredric Jameson, Marxist literary critics have also been concerned with applying lessons drawn from the realm of aesthetics to the realm of politics, as originated in the Frankfurt School's critical theory.

4.3 Key Marxist concepts

Although Marxist critics have interpreted Marx's theories in several different ways, as Marxists they eventually return to a few central Marxist concepts: the dialectical model of history ; the notion that social being determines consciousness; and the base/superstructure model . For instance, the English critic Raymond Williams uses such terms as residual and emergent cultures to modify the base/superstructure model, not to question it. Similarly, terms like hegemony , which are not a part of Marx's theories, are used by critics to allow a greater application of Marxist concepts.

- **A materialist view of history**: Using Hegel's theory of dialectic, which suggests that history progresses through the resolution of contradictions within a particular aspect of reality, Marx and Engels posit a materialist account of history that focuses upon the struggles and tensions within society. As society forms more complex modes of production, it becomes increasingly stratified; and the resulting tensions necessitate changes in society. For example, the introduction of heavy machinery into the feudal economic system fragmented existing social structures and necessitated a move towards capitalism.

- **Base and Superstructure:** Within Marx's dialectical account of history is the idea that a given individual's social being is determined by larger political and economic forces. Marx writes that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines consciousness." Simply stated, the social class into which a person is born determines her outlook and viewpoints.

  Marx then expands this concept of determination into one of the central concepts of Marxism—that of base and superstructure. The base is the economic system on which the superstructure rests; cultural activities—such as philosophy or literature—belong in the superstructure. To Marxist critics, a society's economic base determines the interests and styles of its literature; it is this relationship between determining base and determined superstructure that is the main point of interest for Marxist critics.

- **Ideology:** Marx believes that because the superstructure is determined by the base, it inevitably supports the ideologies of the base. Ideologies are the changing ideas, values, and feelings through which individuals experience their societies. They present the dominant ideas and values as the beliefs of society as a whole, thus preventing individuals from seeing how society actually functions. Literature, as a cultural production, is a form of ideology, one that legitimizes the power of the ruling class. In the eighteenth century, for example, literature was used by the English upper classes both to express and transmit the dominant value systems to the lower classes.

- **Marxism and literature:** Marxist literary critics tend to look for tensions and contradictions within literary works. This is

appropriate because Marxism was originally formulated to analyze just such tensions and contradictions within society. Marxist literary critics also see literature as intimately linked to social power, and thus their analysis of literature is linked to larger social questions. Since Marxism is a belief system which can be used to analyze society at the grandest or most detailed level, Marxist literary criticism is ultimately part of a much larger effort to uncover the inner workings of society.

- **Marxism and other theories :** Marxist literary criticism may be thought of as a reaction to many of the rigid theories of the New Critics. Unlike the New Critics, who saw the text as a self-contained whole, Marxists generally focus upon the unresolved tensions within works of literature.

    Similarly, although Marxist criticism has both influenced and been influenced by structuralist criticism and post- structuralist criticism, it greatly differs from them in its refusal to separate literature and language from society. Marxist criticism is materialist, so it has more in common with theories that focus upon how literature functions within social, political, and economic structures, than it does with theories that focus only upon the text. Marxist criticism has had an enormous influence on feminism , new historicism , and most recently, cultural studies .

    As a system that looks for causes beneath the surface of society, Marxist criticism has much in common with psychoanalytic criticism . In fact, it is possible to make a rough comparison between the Marxist model of base and superstructure and the Freudian model of unconscious and conscious.

4.4 Major Exponents

Georg Lukacs and the Social Realists

There is a great deal of difference in opinion among Marxist literary critics concerning the relationship between ideology and literature. Since Marx's own writing, theorists such as the Soviet social realists, Georg Lukacs, and Louis Althusser have gradually modified or expanded on Marx's original concepts. The Soviet socialist realists believe that because ideology is part of the superstructure, it must correspond to the economic base of society. In their view, literature inevitably reflects the economic base; there is no way that it can function outside of the strict base/superstructure model. Like the social realists, the critic Georg Lukacs feels that only realistic forms of fiction are artistically and politically valid. But Lukacs and the social realists have a limited perspective. They both fail to recognize that their are legitimate works which fall outside such a literal reading of the base/ superstructure model.

It is doubtful that Marx and Engels themselves took such a deterministic approach to literature. In their work, literature is not merely a passive reflection of the economic base. Although they conceded that literature cannot change society, or base, in itself, they suggested that literature can be an active element in such change.

Antonio Gramsci

The Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, with his concept of hegemony, allows for an even more flexible reading of the base/ superstructure model. Gramsci believes that ideology alone cannot explain the extent to which people are willing to accept dominant values. He also realizes, along with many other Marxist critics, that the base/ superstructure model is much too rigid to account for cultural productions which do not simply reinforce those dominant values.

In a way, Gramsci's notion of hegemony is a continuation of the concepts behind ideology. Hegemony is a sort of deception in which the individual forgets her own desires and accepts dominant values as their own. For example, someone might think that going to college is the right and necessary step in every life, when in reality their belief is socially constructed. Literature, then, may be seen as something that both reinforces dominant values and occasionally calls them into question. For example, nineteenth century women writers of sentimental fiction used certain narrative conventions merely to reinforce dominant values, whereas a writer like Jane Austen used many of the same conventions to undermine the same dominant values.

Louis Althusser

The French theorist Louis Althusser considers the relationship between literature and ideology . For him, this also includes an understanding of hegemony. Althusser suggests that ideology and hegemony, like literature, present a constructed version of reality, one which does not necessarily reflect the actual conditions of life. Thus, literature neither merely reflects ideology, nor can it be reduced to it. Literature may be situated within ideology, but it can also distance itself from ideology—thereby allowing the reader to gain an awareness of the ideology on which it is based. For example, a novel may present the world in a way that seems to support dominant ideologies, but as a work of fiction it also reveals those ideologies. So, once again, although literature itself cannot change society, it can be an active part of such changes.

4.5   Analysis of Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

Source: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press 1971

Althusser begins his essay by attempting to analyze the factors responsible for the **Reproduction of the Conditions of Production.** He feels that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last long. The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production. This may be 'simple' (reproducing exactly the previous conditions of production) or 'on an extended scale' (expanding them). It follows that, in order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. It must therefore reproduce:

1.   the productive forces (raw materials, machinery, labor)
2.   the existing relations of production (the maintenance of the owner-worker/s status quo).

Thus, according to Althusser, no production is possible which does not allow for the **reproduction of the material conditions of production**. For instance, each year it is essential to calculate well in advance what is needed to replace what has been used up or worn out in production: raw material, buildings, machines, and so on.

But it is worth considering that the reproduction of the means of production does not take place at the level of the firm. This is a glaring problem that was first highlighted by Quesnay, and resolved ultimately by Marx. The reproduction of the material conditions of production cannot be thought at the level of the firm, because it does not exist at that level in its real conditions. What happens at the level of the firm is

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an **effect**, which only gives an idea of the necessity of reproduction, but fails to allow its conditions and mechanisms to be thought.

Althusser illustrates this through a simple example: Mr X, a capitalist who produces woollen yarn in his spinning-mill, has to 'reproduce' his raw material, his machines, etc. But he does not produce them for his own production – other capitalists do: an Australian sheep farmer, Mr Y, a heavy engineer producing machine-tools, Mr Z, and so on. Mr Y and Mr Z, in order to produce those products which are the condition of the reproduction of Mr X's conditions of production, also have to reproduce the conditions of their own production, and so on to infinity – the whole in proportions such that, on the national and even the world market, the demand for means of production can be satisfied by the supply.

In order to think this mechanism, which leads to a kind of 'endless chain', it is necessary to follow Marx's 'global' procedure, and to study in particular the relations of the circulation of capital between Department I (production of means of production) and Department II (production of means of consumption), and the realization of **surplus value**.

Althusser explores the conditions under which the **reproduction of the productive forces, i.e. the reproduction of labour power**, is ensured. He says that it takes place essentially **outside** the firm. It is ensured by giving labour power the material means with which to reproduce itself, i.e., by wages. According to Althusser, this quantity of value (wages) necessary for the reproduction of labour power is determined not by the needs of a 'biological' Guaranteed Minimum Wage alone, but by the needs of a historical minimum (Marx noted that English workers need beer while French proletarians need wine) – i.e. a historically variable minimum.

However, it is not enough to ensure for labour power the material conditions of its reproduction if it is to be reproduced as labour power. It is necessary that the available labour power must be 'competent' to work in the complex system of the process of production. That is, the labour power has to be (diversely) skilled, in accordance with the requirements of the socio-technical division of labour, its different 'jobs' and 'posts'. This reproduction of the skills of labour power tends decreasingly to be provided for 'on the spot', but is achieved more and more outside production: by the, **capitalist education system** and by other instances and institutions.

Althusser cites an example to illustrate the above fact: children at school learn to read, to write and to add. That is, they learn a number of techniques, including elements of 'scientific' or 'literary culture', which are directly useful in the different jobs in production (one instruction for manual workers, another for technicians, a third for engineers, a final one for higher management, etc.). Thus they learn **know-how.**

But besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the **'rules'** of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. They also learn to handle the workers correctly, to order them about properly, to speak to them in the right way, etc.

To put this more scientifically, the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology

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correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words'.

In other words, the school (also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology*. All the agents of production, exploitation and repression, must in one way or another be 'steeped' in this ideology in order to perform their tasks 'conscientiously' – the tasks of the exploited (the proletarians), of the exploiters (the capitalists), of the exploiters' auxiliaries (the managers), or of the high priests of the ruling ideology (its 'functionaries').

Here, Althusser feels, is the pertinent moment when one needs to recognize the effective presence of a new reality: **ideology**. He feels that Marx's departure from Hegel lay in the fact that he (Marx) conceived the structure of every society as constituted by 'levels' or 'instances' articulated by a specific determination: the *infrastructure*, or economic base (the 'unity' of the productive forces and the relations of production) and the *superstructure*, which itself contains two 'levels' or 'instances': the **politico-legal** (law and the State) and **ideology** (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political ...).

This representation of the structure of every society as an edifice containing a base (infrastructure) on which are erected the two 'floors' of the superstructure, is a **spatial metaphor**. The idea of using this metaphor, according to Althusser, is to illustrate the importance of the base, i.e., the upper floors could not 'stay up' in the air alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base. Thus the object of the metaphor of the edifice is to represent above all the '*determination in the last instance' by the economic base*. The effect of this spatial metaphor is to endow the base with an index of effectivity: the determination in the last instance of what happens in the upper 'floors' (of the superstructure) by what happens in the economic base.

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Acknowledging the determination of the base in the last instance, it cannot be, however, denied that the 'floors' of the superstructure are also endowed with different indices of effectivity. Their index of effectivity (or determination), as determined by the determination in the last instance of the base, is thought by the Marxist tradition in two ways: (1) there is a '**relative autonomy**' of the superstructure with respect to the base; (2) there is a '**reciprocal action**' of the superstructure on the base.

The Marxist tradition conceives of the State as a **repressive apparatus**. The State is a 'machine' of repression constituted by the police, the courts, the prisons; also the army, which intervenes directly as a supplementary repressive force in the last instance, when the police and its specialized auxiliary corps are inadequate. It enabled the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation).

Nevertheless, with respect to the metaphor of the edifice (infrastructure and superstructure), this presentation of the nature of the State is still partly **descriptive**. By the term, descriptive, or descriptive theory, Althusser implies the first phase of every theory. As such, one may envisage this phase as a transitional one, necessary to the development of the theory. This implies: (1) that the 'descriptive theory' is the irreversible beginning of the theory; but (2) that the 'descriptive' form in which the theory is presented requires a development of the theory which goes beyond the form of 'description'.

This idea, Althusser clarifies, through the example of the State. The Marxist 'theory' of the State which is available is still partly 'descriptive', that means first and foremost that this descriptive 'theory' is precisely the beginning of the Marxist theory of the State, and that

this beginning gives one the essential point, i.e. the decisive principle of every later development of the theory.

Hence, the descriptive theory of the State represents a phase in the constitution of the theory which itself demands the 'supersession' of this phase. That is why, in order to develop this **descriptive theory** into **theory as such**, i.e. in order to understand further the mechanisms of the State in its functioning, it is indispensable to add something to the classical definition of the State as a **State Apparatus**.

The State (and its existence in its apparatus) has no meaning except as a function of State power. The whole of the political class struggle revolves around the State: around the possession, i.e. the seizure and conservation of State power by a certain class or by an alliance between classes or class fractions. The State Apparatus may survive, as was proved by bourgeois 'revolutions' in nineteenth-century France (1830, 1848), by *coups d'état* (2 December, May 1958), by collapses of the State (the fall of the Empire in 1870, of the Third Republic in 1940), or by the political rise of the petty bourgeoisie (1890-95 in France), etc., without the State Apparatus being affected or modified. It may survive political events which affect the possession of State power. Even after a social revolution like that of 1917, a large part of the State Apparatus survived after the seizure of State power by the alliance of the proletariat and the small peasantry.

From the above instance, it becomes obvious that the 'Marxist theory' of the state is still in part descriptive, and cannot be understood without recourse to further supplementary theoretical development. Here, Althusser's contribution to Marxist descriptive theory becomes apparent. He proposes the following thesis: In order to advance the theory of the State it is important to take into account not only the distinction between *state power* and *state apparatus*, but also another reality which is clearly on the side of the (repressive) state apparatus, but must not be confused

with it. Althusser calls this reality by its concept **the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).**

In Marxist theory, the State Apparatus (SA) contains the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which constitute, what Althusser terms, the **Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)**. 'Repressive' suggests that the State Apparatus in question 'functions by violence' – at least ultimately. He defines **Ideological State Apparatuses** as a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. The following institutions may be considered as part of the Ideological State Apparatuses:

- the religious ISA (the system of the different churches),
- the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'schools'),
- the family ISA
- the legal ISA
- the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties),
- the trade-union ISA,
- the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.),
- the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports, etc.).

The difference between the two is that while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a *plurality* of Ideological State Apparatuses. Second, it is clear that whereas the unified – (Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the *public* domain, much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the *private* domain. Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families, some schools, most newspapers, cultural ventures, etc., are private.

What distinguishes the ISAs from the (Repressive) State Apparatus is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses *function 'by ideology'*. Althusser qualifies this statement with the clarification that every State Apparatus, whether Repressive or Ideological, 'functions' both by violence and by ideology, but with one very important distinction. This is the fact that the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology. For example, the Army and the Police also function by ideology both to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction, and in the 'values' they propound externally.

In the same way, but inversely, it is essential to say that for their part the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression, but this is rather concealed, even symbolic. Thus Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the Family.... The same is true of the cultural ISA (censorship, among other things).

The above observation leads one towards an understanding of what constitutes the unity of the apparently disparate body of the ISAs. If the ISAs 'function' massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, insofar as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, *beneath the ruling ideology*, which is the ideology of 'the ruling class'. Given the fact that the 'ruling class' in principle holds State power (openly or more often by means of alliances between classes or class fractions), and therefore has at its disposal the (Repressive) State Apparatus, one can accept the fact that this same

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ruling class is active in the Ideological State Apparatuses insofar as it is ultimately the ruling ideology which is realized in the Ideological State Apparatuses, precisely in its contradictions. Therefore, *no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses.*

Hence, the Ideological State Apparatuses may be not only the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle. The class (or class alliance) in power cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as it can in the (repressive) State apparatus, not only because the former ruling classes are able to retain strong positions there for a long time, but also because the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there.

At this point, Althusser returns to the central question which he had kept in abeyance: **how is the reproduction of the relations of production secured?**

For the most part, it is secured by the exercise of State power in the State Apparatuses, on the one hand the (Repressive) State Apparatus, on the other the Ideological State Apparatuses. The role of the repressive State apparatus, insofar as it is a repressive apparatus, consists essentially in securing by force (physical or otherwise) the political conditions of the reproduction of relations of production which are in the last resort relations of exploitation. Not only does the State apparatus contribute generously to its own reproduction (the capitalist State contains political dynasties, military dynasties, etc.), but also and above all, the State apparatus secures by repression (from the most brutal physical force, via mere administrative commands and interdictions, to open and tacit censorship) the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses.

In fact, it is the latter which largely secure the reproduction specifically of the relations of production, behind a 'shield' provided

by the repressive State apparatus. It is here that the role of the ruling ideology is heavily concentrated, the ideology of the ruling class, which holds State power. It is the intermediation of the ruling ideology that ensures a 'harmony' between the repressive State apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses, and between the different State Ideological Apparatuses.

The Ideological State Apparatus which has been installed in the *dominant* position in mature capitalist social formations as a result of a violent political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant Ideological State Apparatus (the Church), is the **educational ideological apparatus**. In fact, the School-family couple has replaced the Church-family couple.

The Educational ISA takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most 'vulnerable', squeezed between the Family State Apparatus and the Educational State Apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology (arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature, etc) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state (ethics, civic instruction, philosophy). Somewhere around the age of sixteen, a huge mass of children are ejected 'into production': these are the workers or small peasants. Another portion of scholastically adapted youth carries on: and, for better or worse, it goes somewhat further, until it falls by the wayside and fills the posts of small and middle technicians, white-collar workers, small and middle executives, petty bourgeois of all kinds. A last portion reaches the summit, either to fall into intellectual semi-employment, or to provide, as well as the 'intellectuals of the collective labourer', the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.) and

the professional ideologists (priests of all sorts, most of whom are convinced 'laymen').

Each mass ejected *en route* is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in class society: the role of the exploited (with a 'highly-developed' 'professional', 'ethical', 'civic', 'national' and a-political consciousness); the role of the agent of exploitation (ability to give the workers orders and speak to them: 'human relations'), of the agent of repression (ability to give orders and enforce obedience 'without discussion', or ability to manipulate the demagogy of a political leader's rhetoric), or of the professional ideologist (ability to treat consciousnesses with the respect, i.e. with the contempt, blackmail, and demagogy they deserve, adapted to the accents of Morality, of Virtue, of 'Transcendence', of the Nation, of France's World Role, etc.).

Of course, many of these contrasting Virtues (modesty, resignation, submissiveness on the one hand, cynicism, contempt, arrogance, confidence, self-importance, even smooth talk and cunning on the other) are also taught in the Family, in the Church, in the Army, in Good Books, in films and even in the football stadium. But no other Ideological State Apparatus has the obligatory (and not least, free) audience of the totality of the children in the capitalist social formation, eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven, except the School.

But it is by an apprenticeship in a variety of know-how wrapped up in the massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class that the *relations of production* in a capitalist social formation, i.e. the relations of exploited to exploiters and exploiters to exploited, are largely reproduced. The mechanisms which produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: an ideology

which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology (because it is ...lay), where teachers respectful of the 'conscience' and 'freedom' of the children who are entrusted to them (in complete confidence) by their 'parents' (who are free, too, i.e. the owners of their children) open up for them the path to the freedom, morality and responsibility of adults by their own example, by knowledge, literature and their 'liberating' virtues.

In fact, the Church has been replaced today *in its role as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus* by the School. It is coupled with the Family just as the Church was once coupled with the Family. One can now claim that the unprecedentedly deep crisis which is now shaking the education system of so many States across the globe, often in conjunction with a crisis (already proclaimed in the *Communist Manifesto*) shaking the family system, takes on a political meaning, given that the School (and the School/Family couple) constitutes the dominant Ideological State Apparatus, the Apparatus playing a determinant part in the reproduction of the relations of production of a mode of production threatened in its existence by the world class struggle.

Althusser next critically theorises his notion of **ideology**. According to Marx, ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group. In *The German Ideology*, this formulation appears in a plainly scientific context. Ideology is conceived as a pure illusion, a pure dream, i.e. as nothingness. All its reality is external to it. Ideology is thus thought as an imaginary construction whose status is exactly like the theoretical status of the dream among writers before Freud. For these writers, the dream was the purely imaginary, i.e. null, result of 'day's residues', presented in an arbitrary arrangement and order, sometimes even 'inverted', in other words, in 'disorder'.

Ideology, then, is for Marx an imaginary assemblage (*bricolage*), a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'day's residues' from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence. It is on this basis that ideology has no history in *The German Ideology*, since its history is outside it, where the only existing history is, the history of concrete individuals, etc. In *The German Ideology*, the thesis that **ideology has no history** is therefore a purely negative thesis, since it means both:

1. ideology is nothing insofar as it is a pure dream;
2. ideology has no history, which emphatically does not mean that there is no history in it, but that it has no history of its *own.*

Now, the thesis Althusser wishes to defend adopts the terms of *The German Ideology* ('ideology has no history'), yet it is radically different from the positivist and historicist thesis of *The German Ideology.*

For on the one hand, he thinks it is possible to hold that **ideolog*ies* have a history of their own** (although it is determined in the last instance by the class struggle); and on the other, he thinks it is possible to hold that i**deology** *in general has no history*, not in a negative sense (its history is external to it), but in a positive sense.

This sense is a positive one if it is true that the peculiarity of ideology is that it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, i.e. an *omni-historical* reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what can be called history, in the sense in which the *Communist Manifesto* defines history as the history of class struggles, i.e. the history of class societies.

In order to approach his central thesis on the structure and functioning of ideology, Althusser presents two theses, one negative, the other positive. The first concerns the object which is 'represented' in the imaginary form of ideology, the second concerns the materiality of ideology.

Thesis I. Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.

One commonly calls religious ideology, ethical ideology, legal ideology, political ideology, etc., so many 'world outlooks'. But these are largely imaginary, i.e. do not 'correspond to reality'. However, they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world (ideology = *illusion/allusion*).

The essential point is that on condition that one interprets the imaginary transposition (and inversion) of ideology, they can arrive at the conclusion that in ideology 'men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form'. The question that arises is: why do men 'need' this imaginary transposition of their real conditions of existence in order to 'represent to themselves' their real conditions of existence?

The first answer (that of the eighteenth century) proposes a simple solution: Priests or Despots are responsible. They 'forged' the Beautiful Lies so that, in the belief that they were obeying God, men would in fact obey the Priests and Despots, who are usually in alliance in their imposture, the Priests acting in the interests of the Despots or *vice versa*, according to the political positions of the 'theoreticians' concerned. There is therefore a cause for the imaginary transposition of the real conditions of existence: that cause is the existence of a small number of cynical men who base their domination and exploitation of the 'people' on a

falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations.

The second answer is the material alienation which reigns in the conditions of existence of men themselves. Men make themselves an alienated representation of their conditions of existence because these conditions of existence are themselves alienating.

All these interpretations thus take literally the thesis which they presuppose, and on which they depend, i.e. that what is reflected in the imaginary representation of the world found in an ideology is the conditions of existence of men, i.e. their real world.

It is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world. It is this relation that contains the 'cause' which has to explain the imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world. Or rather, it is the *imaginary nature of this relation* which underlies all the imaginary distortion that can be observed in all ideology.

Thesis II: Ideology has a material existence.

According to Althusser, an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material. Of course, the material existence of the ideology in an apparatus and its practices does not have the same modality as the material existence of, for instance, a table. But the term "matter" can be discussed in many senses, or rather that it exists in different modalities, all rooted in the last instance in 'physical' matter.

Through this, Althusser wants to posit that an individual living under an ideology also leads a material existence. He cites a pertinent

example to corroborate this view: An individual believes in God, or Duty, or Justice, etc. This belief derives (for everyone, i.e. for all those who live in an ideological representation of ideology, which reduces ideology to ideas endowed by definition with a spiritual existence) from the ideas of the individual concerned, i.e. from him as a subject with a consciousness which contains the ideas of his belief. In this way, i.e. by means of the absolutely ideological 'conceptual' device (*dispositif*) thus set up (a subject endowed with a consciousness in which he freely forms or freely recognizes ideas in which he believes), the (material) attitude of the subject concerned naturally follows.

The individual in question behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which 'depend' the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject. If he believes in God, he goes to Church to attend Mass, kneels, prays, confesses, does penance (once it was material in the ordinary sense of the term) and naturally repents and so on. If he believes in Duty, he will have the corresponding attitudes, inscribed in ritual practices 'according to the correct principles'. If he believes in Justice, he will submit unconditionally to the rules of the Law, and may even protest when they are violated, sign petitions, take part in a demonstration, etc.

Throughout this schema it can be observed that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize 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. If he does not do so, that is termed as an aberration.

Indeed, if he does not do what he ought to do as a function of what he believes, it is because he does something else, which, still as a function of the same idealist scheme, implies that he has other ideas in his head as well as those he proclaims, and that he acts according to these other ideas, as a man who is either 'inconsistent' or cynical, or perverse.

In every case, the ideology of ideology thus recognizes, despite its imaginary distortion, that the 'ideas' of a human subject exist in his actions, or ought to exist in his actions, and if that is not the case, it lends him other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse) that he does perform. This ideology talks of actions inserted into *practices*. And these practices are governed by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed, within 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, finally, comes to his central thesis: **Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects.**

According to him, there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects. This implies that there is no ideology except for concrete subjects. Thus, it is essential to realize that both he who is writing these lines and the reader who reads them are themselves subjects, and therefore ideological subjects. It follows that the category of the subject is a primary 'obviousness'. Like all obviousnesses, the 'obviousness' that the author and the reader are subjects is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes obviousnesses which one cannot *fail to recognize*.

Althusser cites a simple example: when a friend knocks on the door and is asked through the door, the question 'Who's there?' answers 'It's me', there is instant recognition of the fact of who that person is.

On opening the door, the fact of who that person is gets confirmed without any anomaly.

Through this concrete illustration, Althusser wishes to point out that knocker and the respondent are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantees the fact of both as concrete, individual, distinguishable and irreplaceable subjects. The writing currently being executed, and the reading currently performed, are also in this respect rituals of ideological recognition, including the 'obviousness' with which the 'truth' or 'error' of the above reflections may be imposed upon one.

But to recognize that one is a subject and that they function in the practical rituals of the most elementary everyday life (the fact of being accosted by one's name) – this recognition only gives one the 'consciousness' of the incessant practice of ideological recognition – its consciousness, i.e. its *recognition*. But in no sense does it give one the **scientific knowledge** of the mechanism of this recognition. Now it is this knowledge that has to be reached, while speaking in ideology, and from within ideology, one has to outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to usher in a beginning of a scientific (i.e. subject-less) discourse on ideology.

Thus in order to represent why the category of the 'subject' is constitutive of ideology, which only exists by constituting concrete subjects as subjects, Althusser employs a mode of exposition: 'concrete' enough to be recognized, but abstract enough to be thinkable and thought, giving rise to a knowledge.

As a first formulation, he says: **all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects,** by the functioning of the category of the subject.

This is a proposition which entails that one distinguishes between concrete individuals on the one hand, and concrete subjects on the other, although at this level concrete subjects only exist insofar as they are supported by a concrete individual.

Althusser poses that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals, or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects by that very precise operation which he has called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police hailing: 'Hey, you there!'

Assuming that the above utterance takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere act of turning, he becomes a *subject*. This is because he recognizes that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, not someone else. Verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed.

Thus it can be said that what seems to take place outside ideology (i.e., in the street), in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it. That is why those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical *denegation* of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says, 'I am ideological'. It is necessary to be outside ideology, i.e. in scientific knowledge, to be able to say: I am in ideology.

Thus ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects. As ideology is eternal, it can be easily said that ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects. This necessarily leads one to the proposition: **individuals are always-already subjects**.

That an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born, is a reality accessible to everyone. Freud shows that individuals

are always 'abstract' with respect to the subjects they always-already are, simply by noting the ideological ritual that surrounds the expectation of a 'birth', that 'happy event'. Everyone knows well in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived.

An individual caught in this system of interpellation as subjects, of subjection to the Subject, work by themselves in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of the 'bad subjects' who on occasion provoke the intervention of the (Repressive) State Apparatus. But the vast majority of (good) subjects work all by themselves, i.e. by ideology. They are inserted into practices governed by the rituals of the ISAs. They 'recognize' the existing state of affairs, that they must be obedient to God, to their conscience, to the priest, to the boss, to the engineer, that they should love their neighbours etc. Again, there is an ambiguity in the use of the term "subject": (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. In the above analysis, this ambiguity gets clarified: the individual *is interpellated as a free subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject*, *i.e. in order that he shall freely accept his subjection*, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection.* That is why they work all by themselves.

The wilful subjection/submission to the Subject is therefore an ideological act, that seems natural, but is evidently not so. In capitalist

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production, the reality which is necessarily *ignored* in the very forms of recognition (ideology = misrecognition/ignorance) is indeed, in the last resort, the reproduction of the relations of production and of the relations deriving from them.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Q.1 In what sense does Althusser expand upon Marx's "descriptive" theory of the State in this essay?

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Q.2 What is the difference between Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses? Why is the Ideological State Apparatuses plural?

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....

Q.3 How is Ideology responsible for interpellating individuals as subjects?

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....

Q.4 What is the difference between Descriptive Theory and Theory as such?

....

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4.6 References and Suggested Readings

Foundational Texts on Marxist Criticism

Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London: Metheun Books, 1976.

Selden, Ramden. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

4.7 Further reading

Baxandall, et al. *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*. New York: International General, 1973.

Although Marx and Engels didn't concern themselves with literature in their basic theories, they were both very interested and influenced by literature. This book collects some of their writings and comments on literature.

Craig, David, ed. *Marxists on Literature*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.

This book is a collection of essays by various Marxist critics. It offers a variety of approaches to literature from a Marxist perspective.

Eagleton, Terry. *Criticism and Ideology*. London: New Left Books, 1976.

Although this book is not specifically about Marxist literary criticism, it offers valuable descriptions of many contemporary theories from a Marxist perspective.

Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London: Methuen, 1976.

This book is a very clear introduction to the application of Marx's theories to the study of literature.

Forgacs, David. "Marxist Literary Theories." *Modern Literary Theory*, eds. Jefferson and Robey. London: Batsford, 1986.

This book describes many types of literary theory; and its chapter on Marxist theory is a good introduction.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

In this book, Williams tries to modify many of the basic concepts of Marxism to allow for a more complex reading of literature.

UNIT- V

NEW HISTORICISM

Contents

5.0 Objectives

In this unit, you will be able to acquire an elaborate idea on New Historicism. You will also be able to gather information on other aspects related to New Historicism as : Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Michel Foucault's concepts and so on. By the end of this unit, you are expected to –

- formulate an idea about the basic principles of Historicism and New Historicism.
- be able to identify the differences between Historicism and New Historicism as well as the advantages and disadvantages of New Historicism.
- to analyze some other aspects related to New Historicism as Cultural Materialism and so on.
- to acquire an idea as to what is Cultural Materialism and its distinction with New Historicism.
- develop a critical perspective of your own.

5.1 Unit Introduction

New Historicism as a new kind of study is gaining prominence in Renaissance studies; a sustained attempt to read literary texts of the English Renaissance in relationship to other aspects of the social formation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This development is called 'New Historicism' and involves figures such as; Stephen Greenblatt, Jonathan Dollimore, Louis Montrose, Leah Marcus and so on.

Stephen Greenblatt, one of the main founders of New Historicism, coined the given term in his introduction to a special issue of *Genre, Volume 15* (1982). He prefers, however, to call his own critical enterprise, *Cultural Poetics*, in order to highlight his concern with literature and the arts as integral with other social practices that, in their

complex interactions, make up the general cultural of an era. In an interview with Matthew Norris, Greenblatt says, "I didn't imagine (New Historicism) as a program, or a long-range ten-year plan… It was a way of trying to do a new kind of work. Ofcourse, I hoped it would have an impact, but I wasn't trying to start a school or imagining in myself as founding a new movement. I imagined it as expressing this powerful sense that we need to try to do things differently".

So, this unit gives you an idea on New Historicism and other related topics in a brief but elaborate manner. The concept is very engrossing as it is a recent development. However, you must not stop with just reading what is provided to you in this unit. This unit will help you to acquire the basic principles, ideas and concepts of New Historicism. You should try to read more works on this topic to develop better and proper understanding of the topic.

5.2 Theory Before New-Historicism : Historicism

Much of what passes under the rubric of the 'New Historicism' is not radically new, but represents a return to certain foci of analysis as developed by previous traditions of Historicism. Historicism began towards the end of the eighteenth century with German writers such as : Herder and continued through the nineteenth century historians as : Von Ranke and Meinecke to twentieth-century thinkers as ; Dilthey, Collingwood and so on.

Now let us see what is Historicism. Historicism implies a historical approach to the study of a text or set of texts. The historical critic, while studying a text, generally concentrates on the condition of the age, race and circumstances, which produced it. His most immediate concerns then become –

    i)   the scholarly attempt to recreate the conditions under which the author worked,

ii) the prevalent philosophy of the age which inspired the writer to produce his work,

iii) the literary sources,

iv) the date of publication of the work,

v) the educational background of the author,

vi) the biography of the author and so on.

Therefore, Historicism assumes that a literary work carries the past into the present, which helps us to a certain extent to determine the past and its significance.

Historicism has been characterized by a number of concerns and features. It shows that literary texts cannot be somehow torn from history and analyzed in isolation, outside the historical process. Their form and content are determined by the specific historical circumstances, their specific situation in time and place. Hence, we cannot bring to our analysis of Shakespeare the same assumptions and methods that we bring to Plato; the fact that they belong to different historical periods and different social, political and economic circumstances will profoundly shape their notions of truth, of art and politics, and hence whatever meanings we might attribute to their texts. In other words, literature must be read within the broader context of culture, ranging over politics, religion and aesthetics, as well as its economic context.

A second feature of Historicism is that the history of a given phenomenon is sometimes held to operate according to certain identifiable and fixed laws, which makes the result predictable. A third concern arises from the recognition that societies and cultures separated in time, have differing values and beliefs. Therefore, the historian operates within the horizon of his or her own world view, a certain broad set of assumptions and beliefs.

Hence, there arose a dilemma regarding the historical interpretation of a text. On one hand, it denies history any constitutive

role in the formation of texts and on the other hand, a historical view of text reduces emphasis on authorial intention and agency. The fundamental principles of Historicism, then, are opposed to those of many twentieth century movements as; Russian Formalism and New Criticism.

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Stop to Consider

Now let us pause and think for a while about –

Russian Formalism – The Russian Formalists were a group of writers who flourished during the period of the Russian Revolution of 1917. There were two schools of Russian Formalism –

(i) The Moscow Linguistic circle led by Roman Jakobson formed in 1915 and,

(ii) The Society for the study of Poetic Language founded in 1916.

The Formalists tended to understand the general nature of literature, literary devices and historical background of the texts.

New Criticism – This term set current by the publication of John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* in 1941, came to be applied to a theory and practice that was prominent in American literary criticism (1960). This theory opposed the historical interpretation of the text and upheld the practice of reading the text as an independent entity.

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5.3 What is New-Historicism?

New Historicism, since the early 1980s, has been the accepted name for a mode of literary study that its proponents oppose to the formalism they attribute both to the New Criticism and to Deconstruction that followed it. In place of dealing with a text in isolation from its

historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations. They observe the literary text not as somehow unique but as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourse – religious, political, economic, aesthetic – which both shaped it and, in turn, were shaped by it.

The term 'New Historicism' was coined by the American critic Stephen Greenblatt, whose book, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning : from More to Shakespeare* (1980) is usually regarded as its beginning. A simple definition of New Historicism is that it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same period of history. In an oft-quoted phrase of Louis Montrose, an American critic, New Historicism is described as : "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history". This historical mode is grounded on the concepts that history itself is not a set of fixed, objective facts; a historicist or critic is bound to be influenced by his cultural and historical discourses and he might reproduce or judge the content-matter of the text on this ground. Because of this reason, we find considerable diversity and disagreements among individual exponents of New Historicism. New Historicists acknowledge that they themselves, like all authors have been shaped and informed by the circumstances and discourses specific to their era, hence their on critical writings construct rather than discover ready-made textual meanings.

What is most distinctive in the new mode of historical study is that it has been influenced by a number of concepts and theories as : Post Structuralism, Feminism, Marxism, Cultural Studies and so on. The concepts, themes and procedures of New Historicists criticism took shape in the late 1970s and early 1980s, most prominently in writings by scholars of the English Renaissance. In the course of the 1980s, the view-points and practices of New Historicism spread rapidly to all

periods of literary study, and were increasingly represented, described and debated in conferences, books and periodical essays.

In this *Introduction* to a collection of New Historical writing, called *The New Historicism* (1989), the eminent critic, Aram Veeser stresses the unity among New Historicists by outlining certain key assumptions that bind together the practitioners and even some of the critics of New Historicism. Some of these are : (i) that literature cannot be separated from material conditions; (ii) that the boundary between literary and non-literary texts is a false one; (iii) the human nature is not same and universal; (iv) the Historical critics depend on methods which they condemn; (v) critical discourses adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. Therefore, these are some assumptions on which New Historicists depend upon to review a work.

Stop to Consider

Now, let us pause for a while and observe the following –

Stephen Jay Greenblatt (born November 7, 1943) is a literary critic, theorist and scholar. Greenblatt is regarded by many as one of the founders of New Historicism, a set of critical practices that he often refers to as 'cultural poetics', inorder to highlight his concern with literature and the arts as integral with other social practices that, in their complex interactions, make up the general culture of an era. Greenblatt has written and edited numerous books and articles relevant to New Historicism, the study of culture, Renaissance studies and Shakespeare studies and is concerned to be an expert in these fields. His most popular work is *Will in the World*, a biography of Shakespeare that was on the New York Times Best Seller list for nine weeks. He is also co-founder of the literary-cultural journal, *Representations,* which often publishes articles by new historicists.

Thick Description – New Historicists have asserted that literature is not distinct from history that is relevant to it. The old historians did make such a distinction viewing historical context, as 'background' information necessary to appreciate fully the separate world of art. New Historicists reject not only this distinction but also the separation of artistic work from their creators and audiences. They have used the term "thick description" to wipe off such distinctions. This term was first used by Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist, whose work has greatly influenced contemporary literary criticism. The goal of thick description is to reveal inter-locking conventions and discourses that caused a production or literary work, to have a particular meaning or meanings for people within a given culture. Thick description has become a favourite tool of the New Historicists who, in describing and analyzing literary works try not to shun or avoid history and politics.

Check Your Progress

(1) What is Historicism? What are the major concerns of a historical critic?

(2) What are the basic features of Historicism?

(3) Attempt a definition of New Historicism.

(4) What are the major characteristics of New Historicism?

(5) Mention some assumptions of Aram Veeser which bind the New Historicists together.

(6) Write a short note on 'Thick Description'.

5.4 New and Old Historicism – Some Differences

When we say that New Historicism involves the parallel study of literary and non-literary texts, the word 'parallel' constitutes the

essential difference between this and the earlier approaches to literature which had made some use of historical data. These earlier approaches made a hierarchical separation between the literary text and the historical background.

The practice of giving equal weightage to literary and non-literary material is the first and major difference between 'new' and 'old' historicism. As representative of the 'old' historicism, we could cite E.M.W. Tillyard's The Elizabethan World Picture (1943) and Shakespeare's History Plays (1944), books against which New Historicism frequently defines itself. These books described the set of conservative mental attitudes (to society, to the deity, to the created universe, etc.), which Tillyard saw as typifying the Elizabethan outlook and approaches to Shakespeare (through to the 1970s) was characterized by the combination of this historical framework.

A second important difference between old and new historicism is encapsulated in the word 'archival' (in the phrase 'the archival continuum'), for the word indicates that new historicism is indeed a historicist rather than a historical movement. That means, it is interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents, in history-as-text. It shows that actual thoughts, or feelings or intentions of a writer can never be recovered or reconstructed, so that the real living individual is now entirely superseded by the literary text which has come down to us.

New Historicism accepts Derrida's views that there is nothing outside the text, in the special sense that everything about the past is only available to us in textualised form. It passes through three processes : first, through the tradition of its own time, then through those of ours and finally through the distorting web of language itself. Whatever is represented in a text is thereby remade. The aim of 'New Historicism' is not to represent the past as it really was, but to present a new reality by re-modelling it.

5.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of New Historicism

New Historicism has certain advantages and disadvantages. It should be noted that New Historicism, inspite of having the word 'Historicism', empire of literary studies, for it entails intensive reading (in the literary-critical manner) of non-literary texts. Further, little attention is paid to the previous writing about the same text, as if the advent of New Historicism has wiped off earlier reviews and concepts of the work. So, we should not expect to find the methods of New

Historicism greatly valued or admired by historians. It is, on the contrary, a way of 'doing' history which has a strong appeal for non-historians.

However, New Historicism has its advantageous sides too, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, although it is founded upon post-structuralist thinking, it is written in a far more accessible way, for the most part avoiding post-structuralism's characteristically complex and dense style and vocabulary. Secondly, the material itself is often fascinating and is wholly distinctive in the context of literary studies. The essays look and feel different from those produced by any other critical approach and immediately give the literary student the feeling that a new territory is being entered.

Thirdly, the political edge of new historicist writing is always sharp. But, at the same time it avoid the problems frequently encountered in a complex and straight way by Marxist criticism. It seems less overtly polemical and more willing to allow the historical evidence its own voice.

Stop to Consider

It is essential to know about Michel Foucault and his relation with New Historicism.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has exerted an enormous influence on many branches of thought in the later twentieth century. He had a seminal impact on New Historicism that was initiated by Stephen Greenblatt. Foucault was born in France and he was the son of a physician (doctor). Most of Foucault's works was centred around the theme – the methods with which modern civilization creates and controls human subjects, through institutions as : schools, hospitals, prisons etc.

Foucault's image of the state-as-all-powerful is that of 'panoptic' (all-seeing) surveillance. The Panopticon was a design for a circular prison conceived by the eighteenth century philosopher Jeremy Bentham; the design consisted of tiered ranks of cells which could all be surveyed by

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a single warder positioned at the centre of the circle. The panoptic state, however, maintains its surveillance not by physical force, but by the power of discourse (mental set-up or ideology of the society), which is the main weapon to circulate the political field.

Check Your Progress :
(1) What are the advantages of New Historicism?
(2) What are the limitations of New Historicism?
(3) Write a short note on Michel Foucault's 'Panoptic Surveillance'.

5.6 A Brief Note On Cultural Materialism

The British critic Graham Holderness describes cultural materialism as a 'politicized form of historiography'. We can explain this as meaning the study of historical material (which includes literary texts) within a politicized framework, this framework including the present which those literary texts have in some way helped to shape. The term 'cultural materialism' was made current in 1985 when it was used by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield as a sub-title in their work, Political Shakespeare. They say that the term has four features –

(i)   Historical context,
(ii)   Theoritical method,
(iii) Political commitment, and
(iv)   Textual analysis.

To comment briefly on each of these, firstly, the emphasis on 'historical context' undermines the transcendent significance

traditionally accorded to the literary text. Here, the word 'transcendent' roughly means 'timeless'. The position taken, of course, needs to face the obvious objection that if we are today still studying and reading Shakespeare, then his plays have indeed proved themselves 'timeless', in the simple sense that they are clearly not limited by the historical circumstances in which they were produced. The aim of this aspect of cultural materialism is to allow the literary text to recover its histories which previous kinds of study have often ignored. Secondly, the emphasis on 'theoritical method' signifies the break with liberal humanism and the acceptance of ideas of structuralism, post-structuralism and other approaches which have become prominent since the 1970s. Thirdly, the emphasis on 'political commitment' signifies the influence of Marxist and Feminist perspectives and the break from the conservative – Christian framework which dominated earlier forms of criticism. Finally, the stress on 'textual analysis' shows that there is a commitment not just to make theory of an abstract kind, but to practice it on canonical texts which continue to be the focus of academics, and which are prominent national and cultural icons.

The two words in the term 'cultural materialism' are further defined : 'culture' includes all forms of culture (as : television, popular music, fiction etc), it does not limit itself to a certain form. 'Materialism' signifies the opposite of 'idealism'. An idealist's belief is that culture represents the free and independent play of the individual's talent. But, materialist belief is that culture cannot transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture cannot be independent of the economic and political system. Cultural Materialism particularly involves using the past to 'read' the present, revealing the politics of our society by emphasizing or suppressing the past.

SAQ :

(1) How does Holderness describe 'Cultural Materialism'?
(In about 20 words).

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(2) What is Cultural Materialism? What are its basic features
according to Dollimore and Sinfield? (In about 100 words).

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(3) How would you attempt to explain the four features of
Cultural Materialism? (In about 100 words).

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(4) What do the two words in the term 'Cultural Materialism'
signify? (In about 50 words).

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5.7 How is Cultural Materialism Different from New Historicism?

Cultural Materialism is often linked in discussion with New Historicism. Though the two movements belong to the same family, there is an ongoing family quarrel between them. It means that there are some points of difference between the two terms. Firstly, cultural materialists tend to concentrate on the interventions whereby men and women make their own history, whereas new historicists tend to focus

on the power of social and ideological structures which restrain men and women. The result is a contrast between political optimism and political pessimism.

Secondly, cultural materialists see new historicists as cutting themselves off from effective political positions by their acceptance of a particular version of post-structuralism, with its radical skepticism about the possibility of attaining secure knowledge. The new historicists' defence against this charge would be that being aware of the inbuilt uncertainty of all knowledge doesnot mean that we give up trying to establish truths. It simply means that we do so, conscious of the dangers and limitations involved, thus giving their own intellectual enquiries a special authority.

A third important difference is that the new historicist situates the literary text in the political situation of its own day, while the cultural materialist situates it within that of ours. This shows the difference of political emphasis between the two approaches.

Check Your Progress

(1) Mention some points of difference between Cultural Materialism and New Historicism.

(2) How would you differentiate Historicism from Cultural Materialism?

(3) New Historicism is "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history." Explain New Historicism in this context.

(4) What is the significance of 'Thick Description' in the New Historical context?

(5) Write a short note on 'Discourse'.

(6) Write a brief note on Stephen Jay Greenblatt and his views on New Historicism.

5.8 Summing Up

By now, you must have formed a proper idea on New Historicism and other relevant concepts. New Historicists read the texts by juxtaposing literary and non-literary texts, reading the former in light of the later, making the text free from customary academic weightage. Besides, the term, 'New Historicism' has its roots or origin in Historicism as mentioned earlier. It is somewhat different from Cultural Materialism. Stephen Greenblatt is the major exponent of this theory, and it was he who coined the term, and used it first in his work. Besides, Foucault's views have also developed the study of New Historicism.

With this, I sum up my discussion on New Historicism. The language is easy, so that you will be able to grasp the topic well. Try to read more books on the topic as this is not enough. You may also search over the internet to acquire better knowledge on the topic. I have tried to present everything in a nutshell, but in an engrossing and elaborate manner.

5.9   References and Suggested Reading

(1)   Abrams; M.H. – A Glossary of Literary Terms : Harcourt Publishers : Singapore (2001) : 7th Edition.

(2)   Barry; Peter – Beginning Theory : Manchester University Press : New York (2007) : 2nd Edition.

(3)   Brooker; Peter — A Glossary of Cultural Theory : Arnold : London (2003).

(4)   Habib; M.A.R. – Modern Literary Criticism and Theory : Blackwell Publishing : Australia (2008).

(5)   Waugh; Patricia (Ed.) – Literary Theory and Criticism : Oxford University Press (2006).