
UNIT 1 LITERATURE, CRITICISM AND THEORY

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit I want to introduce you to some general concepts related to theory and literary criticism, and briefly touch upon the distinction between them. I also want to disprove some myths, clear a few misconceptions and, try to even dispel the misgivings that may be lurking in your mind about theory. In this unit, too, I propose to chart out the growth and proliferation of theory in the 20th century.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section I want to talk about some words which you use in literary conversation and writing. The questions I ask are :

- what is literature
- what is literary criticism and
- what is theory

But before you read the following try to answer those questions yourself, and then see if you and I are thinking along the same lines. Do not worry about the correctness of your answers.

1.1.1 What is Literature

Sometimes simple questions flummox us simply because we take certain things and ideas, about which questions cannot be asked, for granted. The question, which appears in the form of a heading to this section, belongs to that category. One of the easy, always known, and, yet difficult to answer questions. Nonetheless let me make an attempt to tackle it and some other related questions.

The term "Literature", as Raymond Williams, with whose work you may already be familiar, has reminded us, is of a comparatively recent origin. Originally, it referred to, as indeed it still does, any written, printed matter on any subject. We still refer to medical "literature", talk about availability or otherwise of "literature" on a subject etc. Earlier it signified something similar. It is from this source that the term,

"literate" was derived. Sometime in the 19th century it began connoting specifically what was earlier covered under the broad rubric of "poetry". As an academic discipline, "classics" and "rhetoric" preceded it. Literature's critical meaning is still visible in the use of the word "literature". Matthew Arnold (1822-88) gave it the final seal of its current meaning in his famous essays. Now in its specialized use it means what poetry used to signify in earlier times. It includes all imaginative writing: poetry, fiction, drama. The rise of the notion of literature is intimately related to the growth of the print industry, when texts were easily duplicated in the wake of the steam-run printing machines during the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850) in Europe. Books became commodities as the capitalist market economy generated a middle class which had the leisure and the literacy to read books. The idea of literature grew along with another allied concept, that of culture. I am tempted to draw a simple relationship between these: agriculture->Industrialization->leisure->literature->culture.

1.1.2 What is Literary Criticism

This too is one of those awkward questions about which I have already told you. When someone asks you whether you like a particular book, a novel, a short story, and you say "yes" or "no" you are on the threshold of literary criticism. When s/he asks you why, and then you attempt an answer trying to rationalize your perception, you are "doing" literary criticism, albeit at a rudimentary level. Similarly, you do film or art criticism. Understanding and interpreting literary experience, even when not articulated can be literary criticism. Now, this can be an amateurish response. Alternatively, it could also be a highly sophisticated, professional one of the kind we generally read in review columns or journals.

English poets and critics whose works you read have battled over the question of the relative superiority or otherwise of criticism over creation: Wordsworth and Arnold, for example. Some enduring criticism has also come into being by way of "Defense of Poetry". You already know of some of these, such as Sidney's (1554-1586) and Shelley's (1792-1822) Essays. The classical criticism of the Greeks and Romans grew around attacks on and defense of the position of poets in a civil society. "Aesthetics" and "Poetics" were terms that were earlier used before the vogue of "Criticism" set in. You can find brief histories of such common words in Raymond Williams's book entitled *keywords*. And then, more recently, "theory" was introduced into our departments.

1.1.3 What is Theory

Let me try to define the term "theory" for you. You can, if you like, make necessary changes.

Very generally speaking, A THEORY (any theory) provides a system by which experience can be organized and made sense of, or at least into something which will be comprehensible.

All theories are constructed against the threat of chaos, which is the absence of system or organizing principles, to make sense of what comes to us, however, provisional and imperfect that sense may have to be. That is the basis of all dogma, religious and political alike.

What applies to life also applies to our experience of works of art. How does a work of art mean what it means? How do we make sense of the work, whether it be a literary, or non-literary text? Under what conditions is meaning produced? Literary Theory, as we know it, owes its origin to human attempt to deal with these issues. Where does meaning lie: In the text or in the mind of the reader? Does the author use

the form of the poem or novel as an empty receptacle, which s/he then fills (impregnates, like the Heavenly Muse, dove like, as Milton says) with meaning? What effect does it produce in the mind of the reader? Does the subjectivity of the reader determine or contribute to the meaning of the work of art/literature that s/he is exposed to? Or, is meaning an objective reality, having an ontological status? Does the reader make special attempts to get at the meaning immanent in the text? You can see that these are clearly philosophical issues. The philosopher asks similar questions about objective and absolute reality whether the tree that I see or touch is the reality.

In their philosophical writing, Hobbes (1588-1679) and Locke (1632-1704) talk about "wit" and "judgement" and illustrate their general theory by referring to (among other categories of knowledge, like History,) poetry. Hobbes says, "In a good poem... both Judgement and Fancy are required.... Judgement without Fancy is wit, but Fancy without Judgement not." The eighteenth century philosopher, Kant (1724-1804), had talked about "Aesthetic Judgment" as opposed to "Moral Judgment", and described it as "purposiveness without purpose". Wordsworth's (1770-1850) theory of literature in his "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads* is as much literary criticism as "theory": the Romantic theory of poetry.

Instead of making a contradistinction between "theory" and "criticism" one can perhaps talk about "Practice" as an antonym to theory. So we often come up with statements like: "In theory this sounds all right. But in practice, it is impossible to achieve". Hence the pun in Aijaz Ahmad's book, *In Theory*. I am reminded of the title of one of Ezra Pound's (1885-1972) books, *How to Read*, which (that is, the phrase, not the book) can be used to define what we understand by theory. As long as we go on talking about how to read we are doing literary theory. Once we start reading a text in accordance with those dicta, we are doing literary criticism.

It might be helpful in this context to recall what David Lodge says. Literary critics, he says, have since the 1960's shown "a much greater intent in, and anxiety about, the theory of their own subject (what is sometimes called, after Aristotle, poetics) than was formerly the case, at least in Britain and America". He further says, "literary criticism has been drawn into the cortex of a powerful new field of study in which all [the] disciplines are merged and interfused, and which goes under the general noun of 'theory'" (p ix). We will examine more of this and also the subtle distinction between "criticism" and "theory" presently.

1.1.4 Contradistinction

By definition then, you can see the difference between what is generally referred to as theory, and what we have always known as literary criticism. Theory, in the context of literature, is the set of broad assumptions about literature, and the function of criticism. When you say, for example, that economic condition of a society, its modes of production, and class system, in any given time determine the literature of that society in that given period of its history, you are making a theoretical pronouncement. However, when you start analyzing any work of art, a poem or a novel of that society and period from that theoretical perspective, you are doing literary criticism. This kind of "reading" of literature is, of course, known as Marxist criticism, that is literary criticism where you have applied the Marxist "theory" of literature. And, you may have done it yourself, without knowing it! "Reading" in this sense is purposive reading, with theory in mind. *Literary criticism, you may say, thus, is applied theory.*

Secondly, or to put the same thing in a different way, whereas the object of literary criticism is any given, particular, literary (oral or written) work, that of classical poetics or contemporary theory is usually generalization about literature. Invariably, it is the second which leads to the practice of the first. This indeed is what scientific method is all about: from the particular or individual case studies to the general; and

then application of the general principles or theory to the individual or particular works.

For some reason, the term theory, as opposed to literary criticism, came into vogue when structuralism and post-structuralism opposed new criticism. In this sense, theory is used to describe a wide range of approaches from the Marxist to the deconstructionist school. But, as early as 1957, Wimsatt and Brooks used the term theory in referring to any broad assumptions about literature, even in the case of the works of classical writers such as Horace (65-8 BC) or medieval writers, such as Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-74). They refer to Horace as a "literary theorist". They also talk about how "Literary theory and criticism received a new emphasis in Italy during that phase of the general Renaissance which was speeded by the western movement..." What Horace says about certain literary works, their relative merit or demerit, is criticism. But surely, he says all these with certain broad assumptions in mind, or even expressed ones. As Wimsatt and Brooks say, "The main thing assumed in the criticism of Horace is the normative value of the literary 'species' (p.80).

But when we talk of theory here, or even for that matter, whenever we talk about theory, what we have in mind is the more recent phenomenon of "doing" theory. That is to say, the structuralist and poststructuralist turning in literary criticism: from Marxism to Deconstruction, from Foucault to the speech-act theory, is a academic phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century. In addition, theory has broken the disciplinary boundaries between various academic disciplines.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION IN THEORY

In this section I try to give historical reasons for the rise of theory in the latter half of the 20th century. Naturally, this history will be *my* version of what happened, which will be coloured by whatever history I have read and heard from others. You should not--must not--take for granted indiscriminately all that I say by way of generalization and simplification. Ironically enough, this kind of scepticism, questioning that I recommend is also the result of developments in theory. In subsequent blocks you will be told about "subject positions", "interpellation" and so on. Also, questions of historiography have contributed to this kind of scepticism. Let me then proceed with my version of what happened in the earlier decades to English Studies.

Until the first quarter of the 19th century higher education in England was a monopoly of the Church of England, and confined to Oxford and Cambridge. These two ancient universities were like all-men-monasteries in the form of colleges. The teachers were unmarried church men and like them students were all housed in the colleges. Ancient Greek and Latin literature, Divinity and Mathematics were the subjects of study. In 1826 a university college was for the first time founded in London opening up facilities to men and women of all religions. From 1828 English was offered as a subject for study and the first English professor was appointed in 1829. However it was English language rather than literature which received the main thrust. The inclusion of literature came about in 1840 when F. D. Morris was appointed professor at King's College. He said what Arnold was to take up programmatically later: The study of English literature, he said, would serve "to emancipate us... from the notions and habits which are peculiar to our own age". He also stressed on "fixed and endearing" values that literature highlighted. This can be taken as the central tenet of liberal humanism with an appeal to high moralism supposedly beneficent to human kind. The apparent absence of political motive or ideology cannot stand a moment's scrutiny; because, both what Morris (1834-1896) said and what Matthew Arnold made a life long crusade were indicative of the threat that the rising working class

forces posed for the traditional ruling class. English was to be a substitute for religion, now that faith had given way to doubt, and religion had all but lost credibility. With its ideological baggage depleted, religion had to be replaced by a new ideological baggage. Hence, Arnold's prophecy that poetry (criticism) would replace religion. We will soon see how Eliot's and the new critics' conservatism and Leavis's appeal to literary values will make last ditch attempts at saving liberal humanism from growing attacks from rival camps mostly from the political left, which had already dubbed religion as the opium of the people. If you want to know more about this you must read such books as *The Social Mission Of English Studies 1848-1932* by Chris Baldick, *Re-reading English* edited by Peter Widdowson, and *The Rise of English Studies* by D. J. Palmer, as well as *The Moment of Scrutiny* by Francis Mulhern.

1.3 THEORY BEFORE THEORY

The theory that ruled the world of literary criticism, without purporting to be theory, was or has been known as "liberal humanism". Here are some of the basic tenets of the creed, which Peter Barry lists in his book *Beginning Theory*:

1. That literary value is transcendental. That is, good literature is of timeless significance; such writing is "not for an age, but for all time" (Ben Johnson had said of Shakespeare). More recently, in the 20th century Ezra Pound has defined literature as "news which stays news."
2. That a literary text contains its own meanings within itself and it does not require any elaborate process of placing it within a context, whether this latter be
 - a) Socio-political
 - b) Autobiographical
 - c) Literary-historical

As critics, the liberal humanists adhere to the approach which insists upon the primacy and self sufficiency of the "words on the page", the black marks.

3. That to understand the text well it must be detached from these contexts and studied in isolation. (Though some pre-theory critics would disagree with such a generalization).
4. That human nature is essentially unchanging.
5. That individuality is something securely possessed within each of us as our unique "essence". The discipline as a whole believed in what is now called the transcendent subject, which is the belief in the individual (the "subject").
6. That the purpose of literature is specially the enchantment of life the propagation of humane values.
7. That form and content in literature must be fused in an organic way, so that one grows inevitably from the other.
8. That sincerity (comprising truthfulness towards experience, honesty towards the self, and the capacity for human empathy and compassion) is a quality which inheres in the language with which literature is made.
9. That what is valued in literature is the "silent" showing and demonstrating of something, rather than the explaining, or saying, of it.

10. That the job of criticism is to interpret the text, and to mediate between it and the reader.

1.4 IMMEDIATE CONTEXTS

The main impulse towards literary theory as it now comes to us, rose in the wake of the modernist movement. As Aijaz Ahmad says, even the "more advanced sectors of English studies during the period between the two World Wars were dominated by four main... tendencies: the practical criticism of I. A. Richards; the conservative, monarchist, quasi-Catholic criticism of T.S. Eliot; some elements of avant-gardist modernism which nevertheless remained much less theorized in the English-speaking countries than in continental Europe; and the then newly emergent 'New Criticism' of Ransom, Tate and others in the United States" (p.46).

The resistance to such exclusivist and technicist (that is emphasising technique), criticism developed in England first, where there was an older tradition of socially conscious literary study. (You must not be perturbed by such jargon and neologisms as "exclusionist" and "technicist" as they are coined from the simple words you use: "exclusive" and "technical". F.R Leavis instituted and led the *Scrutiny* group by assimilating some of the pedagogical strategies of practical criticism; just as this latter, developed and sponsored by I.A Richards, had made special attempts to make a science of literary criticism, and a strong plea for eliminating subjective appreciation of literature/poetry. Leavis's close reading also made an attempt to define objective criteria for literary analysis to displace the aristocratic notions of literary "taste", while trying to locate the new texts of English literature in the larger story of English social life. Ironically enough, the whole *Scrutiny* enterprise has been seen in more recent times as itself being part of a conservative bourgeois undertaking. As I recount later, this is an episode in the history of the rise and mission of English. This history has been encouraged at least in part by the cultural studies of Raymond Williams who was influenced by the Marxist intellectual movement of his times.

Frank Lentricchia who has tried to trace the history of "theory" in his book *After the New Criticism* says, how "By about 1957 the moribund condition of the New Criticism and the literary needs it left unfulfilled placed us in a critical void. Even in the 1940s, however, those triumphant times of the New Criticism, a theoretical opposition was quietly gathering strength" (p.4). Whereas the New Critics concentrated on the text as an autonomous entity, the new opposition tried to absorb the isolated text into large mythic structures. Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) made the decisive break with the New Critical past absorbing scattered dissidence. While carrying out his critical-theoretical mission, Frye made a series of anti-New-Critical remarks, and called the New Criticism "the aestheticist view". The New Critics, he said, behaved as if they were in possession of special techniques, which enabled them to engage in vaguely sacramental activity. He described the activity as made up of cryptic comment and ritual gesture which were too occult for comprehension. Frye's purpose was, as Geoffrey Hartman was to say, to democratize criticism, and demystify the muse. If you are uninitiated in contemporary theorists, and have been reading them now trying to understand their work, you might think "how silly" it was on their part to think that way. But, many students in those decades were in awe of their teachers who taught the New Critical way. They thought of their teachers as people who possessed special knowledge of hidden meanings of texts to which they, the students, themselves had no clue. You may now be inclined to say the same thing about the theorists, especially if you are among the uninitiated. But the actual democratization has taken place in the shape of the large number of critical-theoretical practices you now can choose from. Many

such backward glances during the mid-20th century saw a correspondence between the New Critical practices and the growth and evolution of literary modernism.

A case in point is Eliot, and the highly influential role that he and other modernist poet-critics played in changing the course of English literature and literary criticism. Assessing his own literary criticism later in life, Eliot claimed that his criticism was the by-product of his poetry workshop. His early essays, he said, tried to justify and defend the kind of poetry he and his friends were writing at the time. Truly enough, his early essays, such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent", emphasized "impersonality" in art. Simultaneously, when he talked about the function and tools of literary criticism he valued "comparison and analysis", and chided biographical and historical criticism. However, Eliot often contradicted himself. The critics who came to value modern poetry, such as I. A. Richards, severed the text from its context, and called such analysis of poetry without any reference to the poet's life or times, "Practical Criticism". Poetry thus became the dominant subject for criticism. So much so, they returned to the classical tradition of calling all literature poetry. Shakespeare's plays were also looked at as poems.

1.5 FROM CRITICISM TO THEORY

Aijaz Ahmad begins the Introduction to his well-known book, *In Theory*, by saying that "The notable development in literary studies, as these have evolved in all the English-speaking countries over the past quarter-century or so, is the proliferation, from a great many critical positions, of what has come to be known simply as 'theory'". This explosion of "theory" is due to radical disagreement over interpreting almost every social, cultural phenomenon. Whereas social scientists evolved theories earlier in order to tune their investigation to scientific methods, literary critics took their cue from the social scientists. And, social scientists included literature in the broad scope of their investigation. By criticism, then, what we need to understand in the context of pre-theory, is what has come to be known as the liberal humanist tradition. In fact "liberal humanism" stands as an antonym to "theory", though I should think that the former is itself a theoretical position.

Let me explain briefly to you what I mean by this.

Though most of the New Critics were conservative in their ideological stance, many others were liberal humanists.

As early as the 1930s, Rene Wellek and F.R. Leavis debated such fundamental issues as the relationship between philosophy and "literary" criticism in the latter's journal, *Scrutiny*. Wellek pointed out to Leavis his dissatisfaction with the position of literary criticism being carried out without the teaching of larger philosophical arguments and thus in a "theoretical vacuum". What he actually complained of Leavis's reading of the romantics was that Leavis had not stated his "assumption more explicitly" and "defended them substantially" [*Scrutiny*, March 1937, P.376].

The works of all the figures discussed in this section can be found in the collection *English Critical Texts*, ed. D. J. Enright and Ernest de Chickera (Oxford University Press, 1962).

It is perhaps unnecessary to supply a full-scale example of humanist practice, since that practice will surely be familiar to whoever is reading the book.

1.6 THE COMMUNICATION CHAIN

Before I end this unit, I want to draw your attention to an important concept which helps us to differentiate between various theories. This is the "communication chain".

Roman Jakobson (pronounced yakobson) has given us a very convenient structure of the communication chain, by looking at art or literature as an act of communication. It is a tripartite structure which can be represented through the following sketch:

Addresser (Author) --Context--	CODE (Text/message)	Addressee (Reader) --Reader's context--
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You will notice that critics and theoreticians have tended to concentrate on one of the three parts of any given literary work. Though no reading or theory can strictly and exclusively confine its attention to one of the three nodes, it is the accent on one or the other of the three that lends its character to a theory/reading. Some critics concentrate on the analysis of the text itself and exclude all considerations of the author's biography or historical situation. Some others concentrate on the author's life and times; and yet others on the reader's own perceptions. The third almost deny the objectivity of the text, even the existence of the author. Hence such titles as "Is there a text in the Class?" or "The Death of the Author", or "The Birth of the Reader".

1.7 LET US SUM UP

I have in this unit tried to analyze the subtle and not so subtle distinctions between literature and criticism, as well as literary criticism and theory. We saw that :

- Theory i.e. the impulse towards thinking about the act of literary criticism or judgment was always there.
- That there was a time when some critics acted as if they did not use any theory.
- That liberal humanism which is often foisted as an alternative to theory is itself a theory.

I have further tried to trace in this unit a brief history of how "criticism" has given way to "theory" in the 20th century, and particularly isolated those "non-literary" considerations, ideologies, which went into the making of pre-theory criticism.

1.8 QUESTIONS

1. What would your answers be if you are confronted by the question: why do you like a particular piece of writing?
2. What is the difference between critique and criticism? Think about this and write your answer.
3. List some of the critical theories and theorists you have come across. Write short notes on what you think about their approaches.
4. Do you believe that theory helps us understand literature better?

1.9 SUGGESTED READING

Brooks, Cleanth, and William K. Wimsatt 1957 *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, Yale University Press.

Lodge, David. Ed. 1988, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Longman.

Lentricchia, Frank 1989 *After the New Criticism*. University of Chicago P. 1980. An interesting book attacking theory is Peter Washington's *Fraud: Literary Theory and the End of English*. Fontana.

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UNIT 2 OVERVIEW OF WESTERN CRITICAL THOUGHT

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
 - 2.1.1 Critical Antiquity and Classical Heroes
 - 2.1.2 Plato's Parable
 - 2.1.3 Further Considerations Of Plato
 - 2.1.4 Aristotle
 - 2.1.5 Aquinas, Longinus and Dante
- 2.2 The English Tradition
 - 2.2.1 Sidney
- 2.3 Some Philosophical Foundations
- 2.4 Early Romanticism
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit we discussed how literary criticism has become self-conscious to the extent that it is preoccupied with itself, thus giving rise to theory. But is theory peculiar to the study of literature in the later half of this century? One reason why students of literature find it difficult to grasp theory is their general ignorance of the Western philosophical traditions. In this block it will not be possible to explain any of them in detail. However, I will briefly touch upon some of the philosophical foundations of Theory in this unit.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

I am sure you are aware of the commonplace statement that criticism is as old as creation. William Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks have said: "Because poets have a strong tendency to form opinions about their craft and to use these opinions as part of the message of their poems, we are likely to find literary theory of a sort as far back as we can find poems" (p.1).

We are concerned here mostly with Western critical thought. Critical thought derives from, general aesthetics which in turn is guided by philosophical debates and ideas* about what Reality is, God, and the possibility of absolute knowledge. In fact, there has always been a connection between philosophical thought and critical thought. There has also been a correspondence between the pagan and Christian concept of the Word and Logos. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. There has been a correspondence between Word-world, and the world and word. Just as philosophers have persistently tried to interpret the Word and/or the world to us, aesthetic inquiry has focused on the literary word.

2.1.1 Critical Antiquity and Classical Heroes

Some very early Greek poets also show an awareness of, or through implication, propound critical theory or practice. For example, when Homer or Milton begins his epics with an invocation to the muse, he is uttering a theory about his poems—namely, that they are written, with the help of divine inspiration. This idea has played an influential role in subsequent critical theory. Between Homer and Plato (c.428/7-c.348/7BC), considered to be the first conscious theoretician of literature, centuries

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pass; but in the intervening period many Greek poets and dramatists, such as Hesiod (8th century BC) and Pindar (c. 522-433 BC), made various critical remarks: such as : poetry is charming, that poetry is instructive, that it comes natural to a genius, that it has to be learned by art, and so on. Aristophanes (c.448-380 BC) in his plays also uses dialogues dealing with the subject of literature.

Western critical thought has sought to focus on such questions as, does literature refer or correspond to an external reality? What sort of "truth" does literature aim at? What psychological processes contribute to the reader's understanding or enjoyment of literary texts? What are literature's links with history? This unit will focus on various strands of Western critical thought.

2.1.2 Plato's Parable

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), professor of philosophy at Harvard University from 1924-36 and the author of many important philosophical and mathematical works, once called all of Western Philosophy "a footnote to Plato." The same is true of literary criticism. Most readers of Plato turn to *The Republic* to find Plato's opinions about literature (which in those days was synonymous with poetry).

Plato wrote that the ideal state is divided into three classes: the artisans, the military, and the philosophers. The philosophers are in charge of ruling the state, the military with defending it, and the artisans with sustaining it physically. The artisans and the military like poetry, but it is contrary to the nature of philosophy, and is therefore bad for the state and poets should be either exiled or have their energy re-channeled into more productive areas. Eventually, the state will mature to a level where poetry is all right, but only as hymns of praise to the gods and in tribute to famous and virtuous men.

It is important to remember two things. First of all, *The Republic* is in verse form, and is neither a hymn to the gods nor a tribute to a famous man. Second, Plato is using the ideal state as a metaphor for the mind of the virtuous man, with the three classes symbolizing the "Tripartite Soul." In this model, the artisans stand for the appetites, the military stands for the spirit, and the philosopher-kings stand for reason.

According to Plato, reason exists so that we may transcend the baser needs of the appetites and the spirit. Therefore, Plato did not actually advocate exiling poets, as he is usually thought to have done. What he meant simply was that the truly enlightened person would not need or want poetry, and furthermore that poetry can keep us from becoming such a person by feeding the spirit and appetites while holding reason in check. In fact, Plato compared poets to mad men, and seemed to believe their madness was contagious. However, we can see the irony of the fact that Plato was not above using the power of poetry for his own ends.

Plato definitely believed that poetry had power, and that power made people want to imitate what they saw in art. This sounds bad. Why? To answer that question, we need to look at Plato's metaphysical beliefs.

According to Plato, the nature of the universe is imitation (or *mimesis*). Plato was an *idealist*. That is, he believed that reality consists of various layers. The top layer is made up of ideas, and all the lower levels imitate those ideas. Actually, according to Plato, the top layer is made up of one idea, The Good, and that all things and ideas only existed insofar as they participated in The Good, which was the ultimate reality. Therefore, the further one got from The Good, the further one was from reality, and the deeper into evil. (According to Plato, evil came from mistaking appearance for reality, or *accident* for *essence*.)

Let us look at an example. My chair is made up of a series of accidents. For instance, it is brown and mostly soft. It has wheels on it, and its height can be adjusted. What

makes my chair real, however, is that it imitates the form of a Chair. All chairs, no matter what accidents might make up their existence, have essential *Chairness*. Hence, no accidental chair is really real, only Chair is really real. Since only reason allows us to approach the world of forms, reason is the highest element in the mind of man.

Art, then, is bad because it imitates the accidents of life, and is therefore one step further removed from the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Art is dangerous because when human beings see or hear art, they want to imitate it, and therefore are led further away from the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

2.1.3 Further Considerations of Plato

In his *Ion* (dated first decade of the fourth century), Plato ascribes dialogues pertaining to literary theories to Socrates and Ion, the rhapsode. [A rhapsode can be described as a cross between the modern-day university or college lecturer and actor]. Since Plato was Socrates's disciple the dramatization of literary criticism can be considered as historical rather than fictional. In fact some of the passages there have been quoted both as evidence of opposed views about poetry.

One of the interesting points that you will find emerging from *Ion* is that to have a rhapsodic attitude towards poetry or criticism is like being a critic without any break up of theory, who often would make such statements about any work as "How touching!" "or" Beautiful, beautiful!..."

Plato's own views about art emerge more clearly from his *Republic*. Most of these views he expressed in the context of his objection to poetry. In *Phaedrus* he strongly objects to the nuisance value of the poet because of the latter's dependence on divine madness in his *Republic*. Plato expresses his distrust in very simple terms. Poetry, he says, "feeds and waters the passions," creating divisions and unsteadiness in the heart, or frivolous laughter. These are against positive civic values.

And therefore when any one of these pantomimic gentlemen [the poets] ...comes to us, and makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, [we] will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy wonderful being; but we must also inform him that in our State such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them. And so when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city. For we mean to employ for our souls' health the rougher and severer poet or storyteller, who will imitate the style of the virtuous only and will follow those models which we prescribed at first when we began the education of our soldiers.

What are the main reasons for this? For one thing, if poetry produces immoral results, it is because of the nature of poetry itself, thinks Plato. Poetry deals with a variety of motives and feelings not all of which are desirable. The feelings could be both good and bad producing pleasure and pain both. Also, poetry deals with fictitious incidents and characters. He gives the example of Homer and Hesiod and the Greek dramatic poets who do not always represent God as wholly good but these Gods are manlike: quarrelsome, deceitful and fallible. Their heroes are emotional or unheroic. In this context, Plato mentions his concept of imitation or *Mimesis*. Plato develops this idea at different places in the *Republic*. More recently Plato's dialogues on love have been seen as the earliest impulse on a love between men, which some modernists called "Greek Love".

"Queer theory" has renewed this attention on "Platonic love"

2.1.4 Aristotle

Overview of Western Critical Thought

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a student of Plato, and, although his theories differed in many significant ways from Plato's, often overturning them in Oedipal reaction, they were also very dependent on them. Metaphysically, he was also an idealist, although he believed that ideas were implicit in things, rather than existing outside of things. As for the ultimate reality, he believed that the empirical world resulted from "Thought thinking Itself." How does that work? Well, it is complicated, and even if I explain it thoroughly, it still will not necessarily make sense. Besides, we can explain Aristotle's views about Art without ever having to know how the universe came about. So I will not touch upon that particular issue. I will not talk about them here, but I do encourage you to find out about them on your own.

Aristotle, like Plato, sees Art as imitative, but, unlike Plato, sees it as imitating essence, rather than accident. Therefore, Art is actually higher on the chain than the empirical world, and elevates rather than lowers us. Of course, Art, like everything else, has a formal cause to which it must adhere, and the best art, like the best desk, is the one which most closely imitates, or participates in, its particular form. Aristotle wrote *Poetics* to describe the various forms of the various arts. We know he wrote so much that would now run to several volumes, but his description of Tragedy is the only in-depth exploration that is extant.

Aristotle set a long tradition by applying the techniques of natural science to Art and establishing a taxonomy of artistic forms. He describes tragedy in terms of its four causes. Its material cause is, in the grossest sense, words and gestures, though these can be broken down into plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle and song (Aristotle explains each of these at length). The formal cause is, naturally, Tragedy, which Aristotle defines as the presentation of action (as opposed to narration of action, which belongs to both epic and history), in which, the efficient cause is the playwright, and the final cause (this is important) is the evocation of fear and pity for the purposes of purgation. In other words, Tragedy makes us feel bad; so that we can get those feelings out of our system. When the audience is watching a performance of *Oedipus Rex*, each member of it feels repelled by the hero's relationship with his mother, horrified when he blinds himself, pity for his helpless plight. Each of these feelings is an unhealthy part of the viewer's emotional state. But in undergoing the emotional experience, s/he gets rid of the unhealthy emotions, however temporarily--thus ensuring and restoring emotional balance and health. The metaphor that Aristotle uses is that of a purgative.

It would appear that Aristotle was a great admirer of the Oedipus plays. In fact, much of his theorizing on Tragedy seems to have been directly inspired by Sophocles, though it also derives heavily from his metaphysics. Hence, Aristotle sees Oedipus as moving from his position as King to that of Pauper. All characters are moving from substance to privation, and the Tragedy has come to fruition when reversal has occurred. Aristotle also described the plot of Tragedy in such clear terms that students/learners still learn the Aristotelean plot line in graduate and postgraduate classes (exposition, rising action, climax and denouement, or falling action).

2.1 5 Aquinas, Longinus and Dante

Despite the fact that Boethius' (c.475-525) disdain for poetry was firmly grounded in medieval theology and philosophy, not all medieval scholars agreed with it. Thomas Aquinas's (c.1225-34), for example, was an extremely talented critic, and he turned his interpretive talents to scripture. Dante Alighieri took Aquinas' ideas and showed how they might be applied to secular texts, such as his own *Divine Comedy*.

Longinus seems to write largely to refute Plato's disdain of poetry. His work *On the Sublime* deals first and foremost with the idea of transcendence. In other words, what makes a work great is that it sort of takes over our heads and makes us see things that are not there. This is the hermeneutic spell that Plato thought was so dangerous. Longinus attacks this. So, his *On the Sublime* is all about how to maximize transport or elevation since, according to Longinus, that is the one true characteristic of great Art.

The first two characteristics of the sublime are, for the most part, innate. These are the ability to think great thoughts and the ability to feel powerful emotions. The poet, then, must have both a great mind and a great soul. The rest of the sublime depends on the ability to communicate that greatness. Longinus believes these abilities can be taught.

The poet must be properly able to "form figures." This seems to be more than simple characterization, since he refers to figures of thought and of expression. The poet must be able to put together characters and phrases. Next on his list is "noble diction," which includes the proper word choice and use of metaphors. Finally, Longinus calls for "dignified and elevated composition."

The specifics of what Longinus has to say are much less important than the generalities. He was the first to articulate the idea that great art comes from a "great soul." He believed that a mystical transport action was the ultimate aim of art, and he believed that properly elevated language was the way to achieve that. However, it is important to remember that, although we might disagree with his ideas about elevated language, he allows for that. "When, therefore, a thing is heard repeatedly by a man of intelligence, who is well-versed in literature, and its effect is not to dispose the soul to high-thoughts, and it does not leave in the mind more food for reflection than the words seem to convey, but falls, if examined carefully through and through, into disesteem, it cannot rank as true sublimity because it does not survive a first hearing." Therefore, the reaction of an intelligent and sensitive audience is always the foremost determinant of a work's worth, rather than the value it has been given by tradition.

In the medieval mind, there were two ways to know God: the Bible and the Book of the World. In fact, the natural sciences as we know them had their birth in this idea, since interpretation of the natural world was considered a sacred activity. As for the interpretation of the Bible, Aquinas suggested that any passage could be read both literally and allegorically, and that allegorical readings could be broken down into three types: allegory (correspondence to ordinary life), moral (behavioral message), and anagogic (dealing with the eternal verities and glory of God). If this sounds like hard work, it was! Such a detailed reading of the Bible could, and did, take more than one lifetime to complete, and you could then be sure there was more that you missed.

We know from his writings that Dante (1265-1321) had this kind of reading in mind when he wrote *The Divine Comedy*, and quite a few people have indeed spent their entire lives studying the writings of Dante.

Dante's work is important for a number of reasons. For one, his attention to detail impressed the Modernists, like Eliot and Pound, and they strove to create works which could also survive such close criticism. Dante also helped keep poetry (and probably quite a few poets) alive through the middle ages. The medieval people did not shy away from putting people to death and destroying their books if they felt that people's souls might be in jeopardy. Many believed that the Bible was the only book that we (as humans) needed, except perhaps commentaries upon scripture, and that any other texts were both irrelevant and dangerous. (Boethius was very popular among such thinkers). Dante's writing was so beautiful, intelligent and devout that he managed to keep the argument going for several more centuries.

2.2 THE ENGLISH TRADITION

As is common knowledge, the Renaissance saw the importation of many of the ancient classical texts and, therefore, poetics into England. Plato and Aristotle were particularly appropriated. But not all theory was imported, much was homegrown too. Some Englishmen formulated their own theories. Chaucer (c.1348-1400) was one of them. Of course, he did not write literary criticism and theory separately. But many of the characters in his narrative poems talk "Theory", such as the Wife of Bath. My friend and colleague, Professor Nalini Jain has shown in an unpublished lecture how Chaucer had anticipated by nearly six centuries some of the theories. Before Chaucer, in a 13th century vernacular poem can be found the earliest literary criticism in English. I refer to the allegorical *conflictus* entitled *The Owl and the Nightingale*, where the case for didactic aims in poetry can be found. Even Shakespeare, as you know, theorizes about drama, performance, poetry and the poet. Some time in the 15th century classical thought got disseminated after the fall of Constantinople. From now on you can clearly discern the influence of Greek and Roman classical thought in English writing.

2.2.1 Sidney

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86) was truly the typical Renaissance man, in that he seems to have read and understood just about everything there was to read and understand. In his *Apology for Poetry*, he draws heavily upon classical authors, including Cicero (106-43BC) and Quintilian (ADC. 35-c.100) in addition to all the usual ones (Plato, et al.). He applies their criteria to Renaissance art, which is a little different, since earlier critics had a tendency to neglect their contemporaries in favor of works that had already been established as classics.

As you might expect of a fan of Cicero, Sidney writes in the form of the eight-part classical oration. Just to leave you something to do. I will not map out the whole *Apology*, but I will give you the names of the parts--(*exordium*--the attention getter, *narratio*--the history of the question, *propositio*--the answer to the question, *partitio*--the breakdown of the answer, *confirmatio*--proves the answer on its own merits, *reprehensio* or *refutatio*--refutes counter arguments, *digressio*--talks about implications and related topics, and *peroratio*--concludes the argument and stirs the blood).

Sidney begins with some general statements about human culture. First of all, all human cultures are a blend of art and utility. Second, poetry is of prime importance in all cultures and in all times. Sidney's big step comes when he turns classical and medieval attitudes about culture on their head. He says that Poetry is more important than mere philosophy, as the latter cannot stir men towards virtuous action in the same way as poetry can. He also says that philosophy is so concerned with universals that it is never down to earth. History, on the other hand, must concern itself with the particulars of human existence, which does not help us live our lives. Poetry, blends the universal and the particular along with the capacity to inspire us to noble action, all of which makes it the most powerful of the arts.

In the *refutatio*, Sidney deals with all the standard attacks. Poetry cannot be a waste of time if you accept his definition of poetry as that which can inspire us to noble action. He takes Boccaccio's (1313-75) stand that art is neither true nor false, hence poetry cannot be a lie, and he further points out that we cannot devalue all poetry just because there has been a lot of bad poetry. This leads him to a convenient misreading of Plato, namely that Plato was himself a poet, and that he was only attacking the misuses of poetry, not poetry itself. Arguably Sidney's most influential idea appears in the *digressio*, when he takes the time to point out that English is, in fact, a legitimate language for poetry (as opposed to Latin or Italian). This is either

incredible insight or a self-fulfilling prophecy, because in just a few years, the scene was to be flooded with English poets.

After the exuberance of the Renaissance, its humanistic and individualistic fervour declined in favour of a more authoritarian and regimented poetics. After the Restoration, roughly speaking, in 1660, a fresh wave of enthusiasm for the Classical (ancient) texts emerged. Dryden (1631-1700) pioneered such a movement. His Plato-like dialogues between supporters of the ancients and moderns and other critical works paved the way. This gave way to the high neo-classicism of the 18th century on which Samuel Johnson's (1709-1784) gigantic presence looms large.

However, I now quickly jump two centuries to the romantic ideas. But before that I must digress a bit.

2.3 SOME PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

All these antitheses and their attempted resolutions may be described as arising out of the empirical and analytic trends of the 17th and 18th centuries. German Romanticism was a response to scientism. It attempted to reestablish poetically the fractured harmony between human being and nature and between the parts of human consciousness. The most lyrical and the most visionary of the German theorists, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) in his essay *Christendom or Europe*, wrote a memorable version of the charge that science was ruining all. Science was making "the infinite creative music of the universe into the dull clapping of a gigantic mill driven by the steam of chance and floating upon it, a mill, without architect and without miller, grinding itself to pieces, in fact a *perpetuum mobile*."

The whole aesthetic trend owed a great deal to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), whose "Copernican revolution" had occupied and had recalled thinking from the atomically and externally oriented analyses of Hume (1711-1776) and centered it reflexively on an active and unifying creativity of the known subject. (The term, "Copernican revolution" is used to refer to any major-epistemological shift in the history of ideas, and is drawn from the massive contribution of Copernicus in shifting the focus from the earth as the center of the universe.) Kant questioned the earlier view that some experiences "fed" the mind and all knowledge desired from experience and comprised empirical truth. More Precisely, Kant disrupted Locke's (1632-1704) view that "there is nothing in the mind except what was foisted in the senses". At birth the mind is a clean sheet (a *tabula Rasa*), Locke had said, "sense, experience inscribes on it" Kant critiqued this view. He challenged the reigning notion that reason was supreme. Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, 1790, was a happily aesthetic afterthought, making an intermediate ground and connection between his earlier philosophy of science or *Critique of Pure Reason* and his philosophy of the moral imperative or *Critique Of Practical Reason*. His account of *Judgement* was a decisive statement in the history of modern general aesthetics and at once exerted a strong influence upon literary theory or aesthetics. It has a direct reflection in the essays of Schiller Johann Christopher Friedrich von (1759-1805), German dramatist and lyric poet, and it is the ghostly paradigm, in *a priori* lines, of many more highly colored utterances by the poets and literary professors. On the one hand, Kant had mapped the world of necessary physical events: conditioned by time and space and spectacles of sensory intuition, unified by the imagination, ordered according to the categories of scientific understanding, and in the end only somewhat tentatively and hopefully affirmed under the sanction of the absolute, the soul, the world whole, and God, ideas which were provided by our highest *a priori* faculty, the reason and on the other side, the free moral world of our choices, according to the categorical imperative. And then, after a while, the mediational concept of the aesthetic values, the beautiful and the sublime, both subjective. The latter, the more subjective of the two, was an *a-prioristically* elevated version of the feelings of awe and of self-congratulatory expansion which

had been described empirically by eighteenth century British writers and especially by Burke (1729-1797). These feelings yielded Kant the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. The beautiful, however, was something higher than accidental and private pleasure, had a universal claim on human recognition, and was a norm though not a strictly definable nor. The appreciation of it was not interested in any possessive or partial way. It was a form of order with which nature was favored by our own act of knowing, though we looked on it, unlike the subjectively experienced sublime, as something out there, in nature. It was a "purposiveness without purpose." That is, it was not a teleology towards a nameable further end, but a higher satisfactory fitting of experience precisely to our own faculty of experiencing, to the progress of our knowledge.

2.4 EARLY ROMANTICISM

The American and French Revolutions stand in the political background of early romantic thinkers like Wordsworth and Coleridge. The aristocracies that had previously controlled Europe were falling, the middle class was growing, and power was increasingly shifting to the common people. It makes perfect sense, then, that Wordsworth's poetry, and his criticism of poetry, should be aimed at the common man, rather than at educated aristocrats. [This simplistic reading of literary history has been questioned by some].

For Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Coleridge (1772-1834) both, this meant a turn away from elevated language and subject matter, and a turning toward spontaneity and emotion. Like Longinus, the Romantics believed that a poet was born with a Great Soul, but unlike him, they believed that ordinary language was the proper vehicle for the communication of that soul, for a poet was "a man speaking to men." For Wordsworth, this meant rural and pastoral language, for he believed that the most important knowledge came from communing with nature. For Coleridge, it simply meant the language spoken by most people at ordinary times.

Another major shift took place in what people considered the aim of poetry. Earlier ages had considered poetry to exist in order to change people's behaviour. The Romantics threw that out the window. According to them, poetry existed purely as a form of expression, particularly the expression of intense emotion, hence Wordsworth's classic definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity."

The last big aspect of neoclassicism to be rejected was the mechanistic model of composition. Appropriately, considering the emphasis on nature, the Romantics believed that a poem should contain (and present) an organic unity and balance, rather than one based on a mechanical model. The Romantics continued to use sonnets and elegies and other set forms, but they also wrote a lot in blank verse and even free verse, further breaking "the rules" as determined by the neoclassicists.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit I have tried to explain how philosophers and poets have always thought about theorizing on literature : as early as classical antiquity from Homer's and Plato's times to the 19th century. We saw how their interest in "theorising" sprang from making a science of evaluating and interpreting literature. But, in Plato's case at least, we saw how explicitly politics and poetics are interconnected. He took on the poetics in the context of formulating an ideal "republic". But in almost every case, the older theorists had theological starting points.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. What are Plato's arguments against poetry?
2. How did Aristotle argue in favour of the poets?
3. What is Longinus' theory of the Sublime?

2.7 SUGGESTED READING

Selden, Raman (1988). *The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present: A Reader*
Longman.

Barry, P. (1995) *Beginning Theory*

UNIT 3 TWENTIETH CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Northrop Frye and Myth Criticism
- 3.3 Marx and Marxism
 - 3.3.1 Marxist Criticism
 - 3.3.2 Ideology
 - 3.3.3 Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatuses"
- 3.4 Beginnings of Structuralism
- 3.5 Russian Formalists
- 3.6 Mikhail Bakhtin
- 3.7 Feminism, Feminist Theory and Criticism
- 3.8 Post Structuralism
- 3.9 Derrida and Deconstruction
- 3.10 Michel Foucault
 - 3.10.1 His Ideas of Sexuality
- 3.11 Deleuze and Guattari
- 3.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.13 Questions
- 3.14 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

I propose, in this unit, to continue with the "overview", but will concentrate on the twentieth Century. I have already talked about how this latter development took place gradually in the very first unit (1.5). I shall undertake the survey a little more closely and look at the developments up to more recent times, that is, the current century. I stick to the chronological sequence of the major movements or shifts, as far as is possible; but, of course, sometimes they overlap. I also arbitrarily choose individual critics/theorists and schools/ideas and will take up some basic ideas related to these complex issues and interrelationships.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It all seems to have begun with the modernist revolt. But that is easily said. When did modernism begin? Though T.E. Hulme [(1883-1917), poet, essayist and 'philosophic amateur')] Ford Madox Ford [(1873-1939), formerly Ford Hermann Hueffer)], and their enthusiastic disciple, Ezra Pound [(1885-1972), American poet] and circles around them in London are usually thought to have given the first impetus to modernism through their anti-romantic formulations, the modernist moment has been traced back to the turn of century movement of Art for Art sake. But the point to be noted is that it was because of the influence of these three and the later contribution of Eliot that New Criticism came into being.

Hulme's works were published posthumously as *Speculations* in 1924. But he propounded his ideas on a regular basis, as I have already said, with young and enthusiastic associates and followers drawn from both sides of the Atlantic. These ideas were frequently discussed in salons and hotel rooms in and around London. Let me briefly summarize Hulme's ideas. He starts by rejecting what every Romantic must accept - the inherent goodness of Man. Rather, he accepts the neoclassical idea that man is flawed, but improvable, and that institutions perform this function. This is

against the Romantic vision of Rousseau [Jean-Jacques (1712-78)], who believed that institutions served only to corrupt people. This leads naturally to an elitist vision of poetry, since only the poet who had thoroughly studied would be able to produce anything worthwhile. Hulme was also dismissive of the autobiographical dimension of many Romantics, because he believed that, while the poet should explore feelings, he must also explore ways and means to present those feelings impersonally. Finally, Hulme felt that, while many Romantics rejected organised religion, they had adopted most of the sentimental beliefs and mystical practices of that religion, and that their poetry was merely "spilt religion."

While much in Modernism is directly contrary to Romanticism, there is much in Modernism that is also very dependent on it. Romanticism, with its emphasis on individuality, inspired a great deal of Freud's writings, and Freud [Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who born at Freiberg in Moravia, and is known as the creator of psychoanalysis, a science which has had an incalculable effect both on Literature and on literary theory] spurred a passionate interest in all aspects of psychology on the part of the Modernists. The Romantics' introspective individualism, removed from Romantic notions of the innate goodness of Man, became the self-absorbed isolation that appears in so many Modernist writings. In addition, Hulme's idea that poetry, and writing in general, cuts through the curtain of appearance to see things as they truly are sounds almost as though it were taken straight out of William Blake (1757-1827) a mystic poet best known for his *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c.1790-3). (without the mysticism, of course).

Eliot brought new heights of philosophical coherence with his theories of the way in which the traditions of literature are changed. Eliot saw the artistic tradition as a massive whole, complete in and of itself. Any new work enters into a dialogue with the tradition, and eventually becomes a part of it, thus changing the shape of the monolith. Because of this dialogue, every artist must know the tradition, otherwise their work would not be able to properly converse. In his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", which is considered as an important modernist manifesto, Eliot tries to break away from the romantic legacy of Wordsworth, by now well over a hundred years old. Poetry is not the turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not an expression of personality, but an escape from personality, he insists. Since such Romanticism continued, and resulted in some very weak poetry around the turn of the century, Eliot saw the need to stage a revolt. For this purpose, he also needed to redefine "tradition". Tradition, was an organic, living whole which went back to Homer, Dante and beyond. Individual talent must, in his paradoxical formulation, also conform to this tradition in such a way that the existing monuments are also qualitatively altered with the advent of strong, new works of art. And, the most original works are those in which the old ones exert maximum influence. The developments that followed came to be known as New Criticism in America and the Leavisite school in England which I discuss in passing throughout the block. But of course you will read an entire block on them later.

3.2 NORTHROP FRYE AND MYTH CRITICISM

It may be very difficult to summarise the works of this influential Canadian critic; but not discussing him, however briefly, may be a much worse option.

We have already seen a glimpse of how Frye attacks the new critical methods. He attacks, that is, "the uniquely differentiated, isolate self who creates the isolate 'romantic image'." Frye also attacks the romantic-symbolist notion of originality.

But the main contribution of Frye is his myth criticism, which discounts any gift of originality on the part of the writer. His famous book, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) carries large scale enumeration of phases, sub-phases and the taxonomies of poetry.

The schema is rather elaborate as the analyst, according to Frye, aims at understanding how literature works. Towards that end he must set about "formulating the broad laws of literary experience, and in short writing as though he believed that there is a totally intelligible structure of knowledge attainable about poetry, which is not poetry itself, or the experience of it, but poetics" (*Anatomy* p. 14).

As Lentricchia says, it is not that Frye wishes to deny the clearly undeniable-- that at a certain level of existence a self may be distinctively differentiated from other selves. It is just that he believes that at the deepest and most authentic levels of existence--far below the conscious and willing surfaces of being--the self is a generous sort of medium peculiarly suited for the transmitting of literary studies called archetypal mythoi and images.

Frye's hope that literary critics may avoid the subjectivism and irresolvable disputes of taste, is based on his corner stone assumption that all literary expression is controlled by a small number of abiding literary universals, "four narrative pre-generic" categories which are "logically prior" to the usual literary genres."

He also talks about the centripetal and centrifugal movements of meaning. Against the "romantic image" which celebrated the unique text authored and authorised by the isolated subject, Frye brings his mythic conception of a largely unconscious self, a sort of communal subject, as the origin and authority for a text whose identity is not different.

3.3 MARX AND MARXISM

Though Marx and Engels wrote in the 19th century, their main ideas took time to be generally acceptably and influential. Since this latter happened in the 20th century, I cover him in this Unit.

Marxist criticism asks questions which derive from the disciplinary formations of general aesthetics and literary criticism, and also from an autonomous Marxist theory. And, like, most other critical theories, Marxist theory too has physical foundations though it began by seeking to change the direction of philosophy. As Marx famously declared: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it." One of the philosophers Marx had in mind was Hegel. [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), German philosopher whose central idea is the dialectic of thesis - antithesis and sign thesis, which he applied to the problem of historical evolution as represented by the *Weltgeist* or World spirit. His dialectical method was adopted by political thinkers like Marx and Engels, who advocated reform and revolution]. But neither Marx nor Engels [Friedrich Engels (1820-95), German philosopher, who wrote influential essays on the social and political conditions in Britain in the 1840s] nor any of his numerous followers have tired of pointing out Marxism's debt to Hegel. Engels looking back on Hegel's importance to himself and Marx, wrote: "What distinguished Hegel's mode of thinking from that of all other philosophers was the exceptional historical sense underlying it. However abstract and idealist the form employed, the development of his ideas, runs always parallel to the development of world history, and the latter is indeed supposed to be only the proof of the forms." In his introduction to the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel (1770-1831) himself states his view of the direction and destination of all human history. "The history of the world is none other than the progress of consciousness of freedom." Here the key philosophical concept is "consciousness", and the method of tracing this history is dialectical. Both the concept and the method were to play an important role in Marxist criticism and theory. Before I go on to talk about Marxist criticism proper I want to clear the ground for it briefly by touching upon these two components consciousness and the "dialectical method."

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* is a convenient study point of both. If phenomenology is the study of the way in which things appear to us, a "phenomenology of mind" will be study of the way in which the mind appears to us. Thus a "phenomenology of mind" will be a study of how a mind will appear to itself. Hegel's *Phenomenology Of Mind* traces different forms of consciousness. His aim is "the exposition of knowledge as a phenomenon" [Phenomenon is that of which the senses or the mind directly takes note - the appearance]. To cut a long and complicated story short, Hegel undertakes to *analyze stages of consciousness* which will/might lead to the knowledge of the truth or absolute truth or the Absolute. The treatise is a meditation on the "*detailed history of the process of training and educating consciousness itself up to the level of science.*" Hegel then proceeded to investigate "self-consciousness", the stage in the development of consciousness when it can reflect upon itself. Since ideology is crucial to our understanding of later developments in Marxist theory, I shall by and by give you a rough idea of what it means conceptually.

3.3.1 Marxist Criticism

Marx divides up philosophy into the idealists (Plato and Aristotle most notably) and the materialists. There are two kinds of materialists, mechanical and dialectical. The mechanical materialist basically thinks of life in terms of Newtonian physics. Everything is predetermined and predictable if only we had the apparatus to adequately apprehend it all. Dialectical materialism proposes that the world as we know it is the product of a dialectical process which proceeds by means of thesis and antithesis leading to synthesis, which in turn becomes a new thesis, leading to an antithesis, etc.

According to Marx, this dialectical process leads to an infinitely rich sensuous manifestation, out of which human beings abstract experience. In fact, what we call 'thinking' is simply this process of abstraction. According to this, then, all ideas exist only insofar as they are abstractions from objective experiences. How these ideas are arrived at is historically determined by the time period in which they arise, socially determined by the society out of which they come, and economically determined according to what resources the person generating the ideas comes from. One example of this is Law, which is always determined by certain phenomena and by the society, time period, and economic class it deals with. It is easy to see from this that the production of every work of art must also be determined by the circumstances surrounding its birth.

While Marx himself does not say too much about this, later Marxists have brought to their studies a little bit of the old mimetic power argument, which says that art influences human behaviour. For that reason, bourgeois, capitalist art is dangerous because it perpetuates a bourgeois, capitalist system.

The theoretical and political formulation of Marxism posed a distinct set of problems for literary criticism. First, there was a felt need for a reformulation of the status of all symbolic activity such as language, law, politics, religion, and so on. These were accorded a secondary and supplementary status in relation to the primary domain of economic structures, the material base of the mode of production. The structure of layering and relationships are pyramidal. The base of the pyramid represents the basic socio-economic relations on which rests the "superstructure" comprising further layering of politics, law, arts, etc. Depending on the structure of the base the superstructural relationships are built.

This metaphorical representation of the socio-material reality has been widely disputed. Beginning with the contradiction between Marx's and Engles' views on the question of a "relative autonomy" of art and literature, questions have been asked and doubts raised about the dialectical mediation or interchange between the different

"levels" of multiple and uneven structures of causality, and of the relative autonomy of some areas. Also, the metaphor is too simple to explain the complex interrelationships. Marxist theory has often presupposed a methodological separation between the two domains at the level of investigation. At the same time, it assumes a correlation between the values produced in symbolic processes and the values arising from or serving the relations of material production. Thus there has been a moving away from a theory of social domains to a theory of the class agents who live in the social domains. This moving away has entailed a moving away from a theory of superstructures to a theory of ideology.

3.3.2 Ideology

Original definitions of ideology, with reference to "democracy" and "individualism" tended to affirm the transcendence of ideas and of the mind. In the program of the French Revolution institute de France, "ideology was the generic study of ideas that existed as universals in the realm of reason (rather than history)".

Nearly fifty years after its coinage Marx completely reversed its meaning. He denounced/dismissed [as ideology] the *self serving world-view* of the middle class (which he believed the bourgeoisie had foisted on the proletariat). "Ideology now meant "false consciousness": *a system of beliefs about the world and one's own relation to it that represented the interests of the dominant social class*. Marxist works set to expose the misinterpretations of "ideology", its false ideals, to strip away the lie and expose the liar. For a literary critic to do this would imply that s/he is an adversary of the work. But in practice Marxist criticism is not as simplistic. It has sought to illuminate [recall Benjamins title *Illuminations*] rather than to expose, to decode rather than to debunk. There is this basic opposition between those who erect imaginary worlds and those who try to unearth the foundations of these. As long as ideology meant "false consciousness", its relationship to reading and criticism remained problematic.

Though neither Kant nor Hegel claimed that "consciousness" led to any complete knowledge of the thing in itself or the Absolute, Marx's theory of false consciousness implied the possibility of an objective knowledge of reality. For he modeled his scientific analysis of the society on the mechanistic and deterministic science of the 19th century. The objective impact of ideology, Marxism sought to understand, in shaping social laws of causality. Yet as a subjectivity "ideology" was only an obstacle to be removed- an opiate. Scientists then claimed the absolute objectivity of its methods and interferences free from any subjectivity whatsoever. The Marxists of the "Frankfurt Institute of Social Research" founded in 1923, tried to recast Marxism from a science into a social philosophy. This disengaged or at least tried to disengage a cultural and philosophical Marxism with its own problems and possibly its own laws. The result of this became evident much later, after World War II. Now instead of warning us of false consciousness Marxists concentrate on consciousness per se. Ideology thus became a terminus under scrutiny rather than a see through or pass through, which or displacing which reality was to be examined.

As students of literature or culture what does all this mean to us? For, we are not necessarily interested in Marxist theory per se. We need to approach theory pragmatically i.e. to make it subservient to our understanding of literature. We are greatly helped by the long tradition of Marxism's interest in literature, and the changes in the course of Marxist theory also coincide with the beginning, growth and evolution of modernism. And the engagements of Marxist critics with the phenomenon of modernism, and the explorations of and the attitude to the relationship between ideology and realism and modernism is a fascinating aspect of the history of Marxist theory.

3.3.3 Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatus"

The question of ideology receives paramountcy in the work of Louis Althusser. In looking up Althusser, we move away from one tradition of Marxist criticism to another.

Althusser stresses the materialist economist Marx over the social historian. "For Althusser, ideology is real, though a non-historical reality. By this latter he means that ideology is "omnipresent, transhistorical", not composed of any particular context but rather the constant structure of social knowledge. Just as Freud meant that the conscious is internal, Althusser proposes that "ideology is external", that is always there as the "representation" of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real condition of existence." Althusser effects a radical transformation in conception of reality. It is not so much dependent "on the real conditions of existence" as more potently another account of it.

Althusser in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus", groups literature with other productive activities. Also, as I have just pointed out about Althusser's definition of ideology, the imaginary world is not an expression of representation of the real realm. The conception of literature as a production implies that on the one hand, as a produced object, the text is seen as a component of the general system of social production. On the other, the same text, as a productive activity, is seen as a distinct practice of signification (i.e. the act of producing signs) which is related to other practices of signification (such as religion, law etc.). In both cases literary discourse is treated as a reality in its own right. The significance of the term discourse is to be noticed here. Since the representations worked by texts belong to the realm of ideology, literary discourse is both of the same order as the ideological and yet is capable of a reflexive, self-distancing relation to it.

For Althusser ideology reproduces subjects who are willing workers in the capitalist system. Capitalism requires not only the hands of labour, but also the willingness of workers to subject themselves to the system—to accept the 'status quo'—and it is in this area that ideology works. Ideology is not a matter of conscious beliefs, attitudes and values, nor is it a matter of "false consciousness". It is a matter of the representation of imaginary versions of the real value that people live by. In his words, of course, in translation : It "is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."

In the post-structuralist phase Marxist literary theory has assimilated diverse influences such as those of deconstruction, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Foucault. Also its use, particularly Althusser's theory of ideology which has penetrated literary critic theories as diverse as feminism, postcolonialism, and discourse analysis, and of course the new historian.

3.4 BEGINNINGS OF STRUCTURALISM

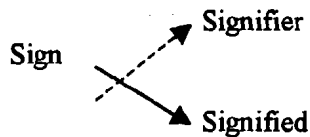
The name of Claude Levi-Strauss is inextricably linked to structuralism. But for students of literature and literary theory, the name of Roland Barthes is more important. As Jonathan Culler says in his book, *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), it is an intellectual movement centred around "the work of a few major figures, among whom the chief, in the field of literary studies, is Roland Barthes" (3).

Barthes once defined structuralism as a mode of analysis of cultural artifacts (such as literature) which originates in the methods of contemporary linguistics ("Science versus Literature" qtd in Culler, *ibid.*). In fact, even Levi-Strauss's methods of analysis in the field of "cultural anthropology" borrows heavily from the same sources.

Therefore, it may be necessary to elaborate some of the basic tenets of contemporary linguistics.

Twentieth Century Development

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) revolutionised linguistics by declaring that the way language functions is quite arbitrary in the sense that there is no obvious correlation between a linguistic or phonetic utterance/unit and the idea or thing it tries to refer to/convey. A linguistic sign has two components:



Culler has paraphrased and simplified the Saussurean argument thus: When Saussure postulated a science of "semiology" or the science of signs, he said that if one considers rites as customs as signs they will appear in a new light. Linguistics should be the source of illumination in this regard. In the case of nonlinguistic signs there is always a danger that their meanings will seem natural. One must view them with a certain detachment to see that their meanings are in fact the products of a culture, the result of shared assumptions and conventions. But in the case of linguistic signs the conventional or "arbitrary" basis is obvious. By taking linguistics as a model, one may avoid the familiar mistake of assuming that signs which appear natural to those who use them have an intrinsic meaning and require no explanation.

The other separation that Saussure insisted on was, in the field of linguistics, between specific speech acts and the general system of a language. The first he called *parole*, and the second, *langue*. *Langue*, he said, was the proper object of study. Such a distinction between the rule and behaviour based on it has been later called, by Noam Chomsky, *competence* and *performance*. For a more detailed history and evolution of structural linguistics and structuralism I strongly recommend the Culler book I have just referred to.

For it was Levis-Strauss, who started it all by looking at mythology in terms of structural units, called mythemes, and at the relationships between these mythemes. Basically, he says that we can look at any myth as a whole bunch of mythemes tagged together. So, the Oedipus myth contains mythemes of "The Young Man with Mysterious Origins," "The Encounter on the Road," "Self-Mutilation," and a whole bunch of others, depending on which particular telling of the tale we are dealing with. According to Levi-Strauss, we can look at a whole bunch of different tellings and put together a pretty good idea of what the whole myth really says, and that by looking at how all these mythemes go together, we can also understand a lot about mythology, since the same mythemes keep showing up in different cultures all over the world.

Applied to literature, Saussure's or Levis-Strauss's theory would mean that we study not individual poems and plays (*paroles*) but the system (*langue*) which produces them.

In his works on fashion, "System de la mode", Barthes (1915-1980) talks about parallelism or homology between language and narrative. A narrative is like a long sentence. But he does not apply rigidly the grammatical categories. He is aware that narrative language modifies the units to suit its goal. For example his basic narrative units are "function" and "index". They are determined by whether the units link with others to form a *chain of actions* (the *functions*), or whether their role is a more diffuse contribution to the meaning of the story, such as information about *characters* (the *indices*).

In Barthes' poetics the language of narrative achieves a self reflexivity. "The signs of the narrator are embedded in the narrative, hence perfectly detectable by a

semiological analysis." *The old question of what is "out there" to which a work points is no more relevant.* This leads to a radical rejection of referentiality which haunted the new critics.

3.5 RUSSIAN FORMALISTS

Formalism, as the word itself indicates, refers to the theory which believes in the primacy of form. Whereas the new critics attached some moral and cultural values to art forms, the Russian formalists separated, at least initially, form from content, and said that the human content carried no literary value as such.

For the latter, literature was simply a special use of language. Formalist studies grew around the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1915 under the leadership of Roman Jakobson. Jakobson later established the Prague school. The Russian political leader, Trotsky was critical of formalism, which was then transformed by Jakobson into its structuralist avatar. Jakobson is best known for his famous concept of "defamiliarization". Since "normal" language renders nature and experience commonplace and ordinary, it is the task of literature to bring about a freshness in nature and human consciousness by a special use of language.

Perhaps this is what he meant when he said that "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known". His idea influenced Brecht's dramatic technique.

In the later period of formalism, i.e., the Bakhtin school, combined formalism and Marxism.

3.6 MIKHAIL BAKHTIN

Mikhail (pronounced mikahil) Bakhtin was a Russian genre critic whose theories were not just influential but also directly related to literature. His genre, of course, was the novel and he looked at the novel in, well, novel ways.

Bakhtin was concerned with language or discourse as a social activity. The Bakhtin School comprising Bakhtin, Pavel Medvedev and Valentin Voloshinov believed 'words' to be active, dynamic, that had several connotations and would mean something different to a different person or social hierarchy or whose meaning would differ according to time and place. Earlier linguist patronised the view that – language was 'isolated ... divorced from its verbal and actual context'. The Bakhtin School used the Russian word 'slovo' which can and is translated into English as 'word', but the Russian connotation extends a social flavour that would more readily imply utterance 'or even' discourse'.

Bakhtin looked upon language as an instrument and an area of class struggle. Hitherto revolutions (for example the French Revolution of 1789), could not be visualized without bloodshed. With Bakhtin came a new theory, verbal signal or words as instruments of revolution. Where does this become apparent? It becomes apparent when various class interests come into conflict with each other on language grounds.

Bakhtin considered the novel to be such a dynamic genre that would eventually take over, many other genres. For instance, Epic, which was characterized (according to Bakhtin) by an uncrossable gulf separating the characters and events from the audience was eventually subsumed by the novel, in such a way that a separation would be unthinkable. Such an understanding would explain ancient writers like Euripides (480-406BC), who wrote about Epic characters in a novelized manner. It

could also be used to explain newer genres, such as Magic Realism, which seems to demonstrate a blending of the novel with the fairy tale. Accordingly, while we might object to Bakhtin's theories by pointing out poets such as Walt Whitman (1819-1921) who are very clearly using heteroglossia, Bakhtin would answer that *Songs of Myself* is simply a novelized poem, or even a novel in verse form.

3.7 FEMINISM, FEMINIST THEORY AND FEMINIST CRITICISM

In this section I shall try to give you a very general and simplified version of a theoretical-critical movement which is vast, complex, and international in its sweep. Usually, in common writing and literary conversation the three categories I have put in the title are conflated or indiscriminately banded about. Though this does not lead to disastrous confusion, one ought to be a little more careful.

To put it simply, feminism refers to a general pro-active political stance in all fields of social or cultural life, demanding gender equality or protesting against exploitation of the female sex. The basic premise on which feminism is based is that in most societies, past and present, men have appropriated all the power they need to themselves, thus dominating every sphere of life, marginalizing and exploiting, even silencing women. Feminist theory or thought, quite obviously, theorises about this stance. This might involve the nitty-gritty of how such gender discrimination operates and on what grounds it can be fought. Finally, feminist criticism looks at a text from the feminist point of view. Beginning with Aristotle, who had said that the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities, women writers and readers have had to contend with such influential misogynist prejudice prevalent in different ages. Feminist criticism invariably has to read against the grain. Instead of acquiescing to such patriarchal representation of the "inferior" sex in various texts, feminist criticism interrogates them. Also, it has tried to resurrect many women writers who had been ignored in the male dominated canon. Gerard Manley Hopkins, not many years before Virginia Woolf talked about "a room of one's own", equated the penis with the pen. That is, he made it abundantly clear that writing was a male domain. Though *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) changed all this through her own writing and advocacy, the importance of Mary Wollstonecraft (*Yindi... Women* 1972), *Vindications of the Rights of Women* (1792) before her, and Simone de Beauvoir, (*The Second Sex*, 1949), *The Second Sex* (1949) afterwards, have played crucial roles in the history of feminism. Feminist literary criticism has been of many kinds. But broadly speaking, it has often been prescriptive, sometimes descriptive and often indulging in angry ranting. But invariably the purpose has been the same: it has a common political position.

Feminist criticism went through three phases of development. In the 1970s, critical attention was focused on texts by male writers that constructed influential but typical images of women – this was the 'combative' phase (a term used by P. Barry). In the 1980s Feminist criticism began to turn towards other kinds of criticism/interpretation (e.g. – Marxist, structuralist, linguistic etc.). It also began exploring the nature of the female world, female experience and re-establishing the canon influential writing by women.

Elaine Showalter describes the shifts of focus as from 'androtexs' (books by men) to 'gynotexs' (books by women). Showalter's contribution also extends to the three phase in women's writing. The phases being:

- feminine phase (1840-80) - phase of emulation whereby female writers imitated the male writer techniques and sense of aesthetics.
- feminist phase (1880-1920) - defiant phase wherein distinct, radical positions were maintained

- female phase (1920 onwards) - phase of acceptance where female writing and experience is explored.

The methods have been various and have derived liberally from psychoanalysis, Marxism, and Derridean deconstruction. There have also been schools such as the radical French Feminists, Afro-American, American or the British versions. Many radical feminists champion the cause of lesbianism, and are therefore called lesbian feminists. In the block on Feminism you will read about "gynocriticism" and many other new feminist concepts.

3.8 POST-STRUCTURALISM

Having looked at structuralism, it would be pertinent to ask this question – what do you think is post-structuralism? Is it a continuation and therefore a further development of structuralism or a rebellion against it? Think about it. Below I will try and summarize what Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory* (1995) analyses post-structuralism to be.

Post Structural critics, he says, 'read the text against itself (p.73) in doing so, they uncover various layers of meaning embedded in the text. They analyse the text semantically looking for 'similarities in sound', the origin and root meanings of words, metaphors and highlight these in such a way, that their analysis become extremely crucial to the meaning of the text. Their analysis, is so intense that it generally leads to an explosion of the language into 'multiplicities of meaning'. In their search for disunities they also locate shifts and gaps of different kinds in the text and utilise these 'fissures' as evidence of what may be 'repressed' or merely 'glossed over or passed over in silence by the text'. (p.73). They tend to explore the disunities rather than the unity or continuity of a text.

3.9 DERRIDA AND DECONSTRUCTION

Jacques Derrida (b. 1930) is a French philosopher who has had more influence on literary studies than on philosophy. His influence is prominently felt in the universities of America, where a School of 'deconstruction' exists and draws inspiration from him.

What Claude Levi-Strauss tried to do for the myth was largely based on Saussurean linguistics. He believed that a 'scientific' account of culture could be reached by identifying the system that underlines the infinite manifestations of any form of cultural production. Derrida however, was to argue that such an analysis would imply a secure position, a 'centre' or 'transcendental signified', is outside the system that is being analysed, which in reality does not really.

Derrida himself was a willing supporter of the fact that there is 'a world of signs without fault, without truth and without origin, which is offered to an active interpretation'. This belief led to the establishing of a new school of criticism based on deconstruction. What deconstruction stands for is essentially taken from Derrida's essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," wherein he states that 'language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique.' What deconstruction does is offer the readers a chance to produce/create their own meanings out of the text by an activity of semantic 'freeplay'. Underlying this licence is the belief that a text inevitably undermines its own claim as possessing a determinate meaning.

Derrida takes a good look at semantics and finds that it really does not make any sense. The basic idea is that every word contains and evokes every other word by association, and beyond that, that the meaning of every word is always deferred by

circumstances. Because of this, ambiguity is always present, and we can never tell exactly what someone else means. Most semanticists have had to acknowledge the ambiguity of language, but they maintained that, eventually, you could get at the meaning. However, according to Derrida, there is always a tension between opposites, and there is no central meaning holding it all together. Therefore, any unit of language could, potentially, mean just about anything. Without meaning, then there can be no Truth and no Authority, and so power relations in our entire culture more or less fall apart. This is the beginning of deconstruction.

Just like it sounds, deconstruction revolves around taking things apart. In that respect, however, it is no different from traditional analysis. Deconstruction, however, does more than take a thing apart to see how it works. Rather, it takes a thing apart in order to see how it was put together in the first place, why it was put together like that, and whether it makes any real difference.

When Derrida was first writing, he was deconstructing philosophy, showing how it failed as a system of thought because of its dependence on an inherently flawed tool: language. For example he analyzed the works of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* (1976). However, later deconstructionists have turned to literature, which is, of course, a completely different situation. Where many people get fed up with Deconstructionism is when the Deconstructionists say that, given the ambiguity in our language, communication is impossible (you can not step in the same river once). Another frustrating aspect of Derrideans is that their writing tends to be obtuse at the best, nonsensical at the worst. Of course, if I were going to apply their own critical views to their work, I would feel it necessary to point out that, if you are setting out to show that communication is impossible, it is not in your best interest to write in such a way as to be easily understood.

Derrida's other works include *Writing and Differenc* (1978), and *Dissemination* (1982).

3.10 MICHEL FOUCAULT

Michel Foucault (1928-84), was a Professor of the History of Systems of Thought in Paris, at the time of his death. He was a philosopher, social scientist and historian of ideas. He may even be called a post-structuralist.

Like Derrida, Michel (pronounced "missel" not "mikel") Foucault did not believe that there was a central meaning that held a word together, nor did he believe in absolute knowledge. Rather, meaning and knowledge existed, not in language, but in society, and are inextricably tied up with power relations. He went to the extent of saying that what we understand or accept as "knowledge" is a construct. "Truth" is constructed-even law and medicine.

If we start with Marx and Heidegger, we get the idea that all knowledge is contingent upon a certain set of circumstances, and that those circumstances are affected by socio-economic and cultural factors. For those individuals who have been labeled the bearers and determiners of knowledge, then, life is good. However, since knowledge is always power, then the knowledge you have must be guarded carefully. Therefore, we have elaborate institutions set up to guard knowledge, and we only let individuals have access to knowledge after they have been properly indoctrinated. While considering discourse as a crucial human activity, he does not believe it to be universal or general. He is more keen on the historical or general. He is more keen on the historical dimension of change in the discourse. When writing *Madness and Civilization* (1961) Foucault realized that what is considered normal or rational, in fact shuts out/ silences what these two terms exclude. In such a situation individuals must obey the unwritten/unspoken rules and observe them, failing which

they could be condemned to silence. Foucault's observations in *Madness and Civilisation* is relevant to feminist criticism and to post colonial theory as well. Foucault's works namely, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* (1976) reveal various forms of 'knowledge' about sex, crime, psychiatry and medicine as having arisen and then being replaced. He is more interested in tracing the discontinuous fields rather than offering period generalisations. For him history is a 'discontinuous range of discursive practices and each 'practice is a set of rules' and regulations 'governing writing and thinking'. (Raman Seldon and Peter Widdowson, p. 159). Foucault also denies the possibility of possessing an objective knowledge of history like Nietzsche (p. 160). Foucault uses discourse mainly to analyse the power struggle within the real world.

Foucault has been incredibly influential not only in philosophical and literary circles, but also in composition pedagogy. According to Foucault, every discipline is designed to allow new propositions to come into being while situated within given discourse communities. Because the will to power is diffused throughout language, then the discourse of the community revolves around that will to power, and can actually hijack our use of language, so that the discourse writes us, rather than the other way around.

One example of how socially determined the power of language is, is in dealing with the role of the author. In ancient times, Foucault argues, writing was a way of defeating death. Achilles chose a violent death because he knew that he would be immortalized. Shakespeare wrote so that he and his loved ones might never die. Contemporary writers, on the other hand, are always writing their own deaths. The minute a writer publishes, s/he has immediately eclipsed him/herself with a doppelgänger.

3.10.1 His idea of sexuality

Foucault's ideas of sexuality has led to many theories. He studied the creation and the view of the concept of sexuality. His *The History of Sexuality* pioneered queer theory. In it he builds an argument grounded in a historical analysis of the word "sexuality" against the common thesis that sexuality always has been repressed in western society. Quite the contrary: since the 17th century, there has been a fixation with sexuality creating a discourse around sexuality. It is this discourse that has created sexual minorities. Confession is the basis of sexuality. Foucault's analysis is based on the power relations in our society. The 19th century saw an unprecedented fixation on sexuality, something not necessarily hiding sexuality, but creating new categories. The concept "sexuality" can only exist in a social context; it is not a natural category.

In *The History of Sexuality* (in two volumes), Foucault attempts to disprove the thesis that western society has seen a repression of sexuality since the 17th century and that sexuality has been unmentionable, something impossible to speak about. The past was seen as a dark age where sexuality had been something forbidden. Foucault, on the other hand, states that western culture has long been fixated on sexuality. We call it a repression. Rather, the social convention not to mention sexuality has created a discourse around it, thereby making sexuality ubiquitous. This would not have been the case, had it been thought of as something quite natural. The concept "sexuality" itself is a result of this discourse. And the interdictions also have constructive power: they have created sexual identities and a multiplicity of sexualities that would not have existed otherwise.

3.11 DELEUZE AND GUATTARI

Why do we have desires? Deleuze and Guattari say it is because we are just a bundle of desiring machines. Desire is the nine-hundred pound gorilla of the unconscious. We do not desire things because we were not breast-fed long enough or because we never had sugared cereal when we were children. We just desire stuff. Desire is not an effect of some event, desire is a cause, rather THE cause of everything we do. Because humans desire stuff, we produce stuff.

However, in our culture, we have this idea that all desire is the result of a lack. That is perfectly understandable, since that is what "they" want us to believe. Who is "they?" "They" are the people that gain by making us believe that our desires can be satisfied by buying a new laundry detergent or a new house, or whatever. "They" are also the people who abstract out 'labour' from the real people that do the labour, thus causing your basic Marxist alienation.

So, all literature, myth, art, culture, etc. is simply produced in response to an atomistic desire to produce stuff. Freud (1856-1939), however, looked at these artifacts and saw them as representing something other than themselves. In fact, he took quite a leap in suggesting that the Oedipus myth, produced in Ancient Greece represented the emotional dynamic of a middle class European nuclear family with a structure completely unlike any ancient Greek would recognize. According to Deleuze and Guattari, representation is an invalid concept because the idea of representation forces us to imagine vague concepts and symbolic relationships that do not actually exist. Similarly, abstraction is bad for the same reason, and the Self is merely an abstraction from all the little desiring machines that each individual contains. Since the Self is merely an abstraction, then the health or lack thereof of that self is simply a socially constructed notion or what this abstraction should look or feel like, and therefore invalid.

3.12 LET US SUM UP

I have also tried to simplify some of the key formulations from the modernists down to the postmodernists and poststructuralists. You must have noticed how what had once appeared to be "modern" or revolutionary concepts of Hulme, Eliot, Pound, Richards et al have later been shown up as reactionary or hegemonic formulations. Also, we have seen how from the earlier stages of language, or text oriented criticism, latter day criticism and theory have either, like some structuralists and Derrida became radically text centred, or contextual (the author's or reader's contexts).

3.13 QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by the term "modernism"?
2. Marx and Althusser are all followers of Hegel. How could you trace the development of Marxism from Hegel to Althusser?
3. What were Bakhtin's main concerns regarding language? How does he treat language?
4. Do you notice any similarity between Derrida and the Post-structuralist critics?
5. From your understanding of the section on Feminist Criticism, state briefly in your own words what feminist critics do?
6. In what ways is Feminism indebted to poststructuralist methods?

3.14 SUGGESTED READING

Feminism:

Gilbert, Sandra and Gubar, Susan.

The Madwoman In The Attic : The Woman Writer And The 19th Century Literary Imagination.

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UNIT 4 THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Literary Criticism Prior to Arnold
- 4.3 Arnold and Literary Criticism
- 4.4 Eliot's View of the Matter
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- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Questions
- 4.8 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

I propose to introduce you to some basic notions about how critics from time to time thought of their own trade: How have they faced the question, what is the purpose behind what they were doing, that is the "function of criticism"? I touch upon Arnold and Eliot mainly. But I also present Eagleton's historical perspective of how criticism has evolved *vis-a-vis* their perceived social function.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

You have of course read about the poets' frequent questioning of the function/use of poetry ranging from the didactic to the aesthetic. But from time to time critics too have asked questions about the function of criticism, though this is relatively a more recent phenomenon. Until the time critics started taking their work seriously, and asking themselves questions about their preoccupation, poets were preoccupied with the question of the "function" of poetry. But even for someone like Aristotle, dramatic poetry acted as a kind of therapy; for Shakespeare, it held a mirror up to nature; and so on. In this unit I discuss a few of the main statements on the subject made during the 19th and 20th century.

One reason we must inquire into how successive generations of critics have perceived their role as critic by posing the question regarding the function of criticism is to see the difference between the intended or professed purpose, and the effect or result of their critical endeavor. Also, through such an engagement we can understand how the self-consciousness of critical activity has evolved over the years.

The term "function" in this context has two implications. One, the anxiety of the poet or the critic or the poet-critic that his/her work is not significant or useful enough; hence his/her tone is justificatory. Secondly, it could also mean that the critic is laying down principles of criticism. Hence his/her tone might be didactic. The most famous of this recent preoccupation, of course, is Arnold's essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time". No less is Eliot's response to Arnold's essay "The Function of Criticism". More recently Eagleton has written a book on *The Function of Criticism*, though it is not prescriptive as the others which use the same title. In the following sections I take them up one after the other.

4.2 LITERARY CRITICISM PRIOR TO ARNOLD

Though Arnold first spoke at length about the function of criticism, and spoke with passion, there were before him poet-critics who wrote criticism with a more hidden agenda. I will go into this in some detail when I discuss Terry Eagleton's account of the developments of the public function of criticism. But for now I would like to undertake a hurried survey of the field. Broadly speaking, critics and theorists of earlier times could be divided into two categories: (1) those philosophers who wrote about poetry incidentally and (2) poets who wrote criticism: the poet-critics. They can also be divided into categories depending on whether they thought who their criticism was directed at: the poets, their trade or the audience. For some thought that criticism benefited the poets, helped them improve their trade. Some others thought that criticism was directed primarily at the audience.

To the first category belong Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and many others for whom, implicitly, literary criticism is incidental to their larger philosophical/ political preoccupation. For them, the function that criticism served was to give meaning to the invisible universe, to support their respective world view. After all, the poet *created* as did God. Their theory of the creator and creation was illustrated through what the poet did. God the Maker of the Beautiful and Sublime, poet the *maker* of the beautiful and sublime. The Logos (Word) of God and the logos (word) of the poet.

The poet-critics of the English tradition from the 18th century onward used criticism mostly to defend their kind of poetry. Thus there is a shift from the earlier function of criticism to defend poetry per se to an increased tendency to defend or popularize or market (as the case may be) a certain kind of poetry. T.S. Eliot was to talk about this line of poet-critics in his essay "To Criticize The Critic": Dryden, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Samuel Johnson, Matthew Arnold, and so on. However, I think of Pope more than Dryden or Johnson in the context in which I invoke their names. Though much of his work, "Essay on Criticism" is about poetry; it is also about criticism. As Winsatt and Brookes say, "his poem is never without the interest of a certain shimmer upon the surface through the implied dimension of criticism of criticism" (p. 236). In the first part, he makes the critics job appear more risky, responsible and comically vulnerable than poets:

'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in *judging ill*... (my italics).

Here the foundation of criticism seems to be, through implication, judgement. Then the first part goes on to dwell on the "theme of universal nature and the ancient models study from that early ... to social observation upon the deplorable license of the last age". The job of criticism is to judge well. So Pope talks about the causes of bad criticism: The chief cause being the bad habit of judging mere details instead of whole poetic achievement.

The latter, according to Pope, is the chief aim of criticism. When we study Arnold's criticism, particularly his manifesto piece "Preface" to *Poems 1853*, we find him making a very similar point. He is very critical of the English critics who praise Shakespeare by paying attention to minor details, and not assessing him whole.

4.3 ARNOLD AND LITERARY CRITICISM

For Arnold, Criticism is a very broad intellectual preoccupation touching upon and subsuming so much that he defines "poetry", "criticism" and "culture" almost interchangeably: Poetry "is at bottom a criticism of life" ("Wordsworth" 1879). Criticism is a "disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." ("The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" 186

Culture is "the pursuit of our social perfection by means of getting to know the best which has been thought and said in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas..." (*Culture and Anarchy*). Arnold saw the function of criticism from that broad angle as the promotion of a lively circulation of the best ideas yet available to humanity. But this is not for its own sake. It has the further purpose of producing a climate in which poetry could thrive. Arnold's didactic theory of poetry leads him to a didactic view of criticism too. He begins his essay by criticizing the English for their low esteem of criticism. He quotes a contemporary who in turn quotes the authority of Wordsworth. The latter, the contemporary says, "holds the critical power very low, infinitely lower than the inventive"; and he said "today that if the quantity of time consumed in writing critiques on the works of others were given to original composition, of whatever kind it might be, it would be much better employed.... A false and malicious criticism may do much injury to the minds of others; a stupid invention, either in prose or verse, is quite harmless". He is interested mainly in the shortcomings of English criticism, and says that The English critic "must dwell much on foreign thought". Though judging is often thought to be a critic's main business, it should be "the judgment which almost insensibly forms itself in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge". Arnold admits that the critical faculty is lower than the inventive. The purpose of this tautological exercise has been seen more recently in the context of "The Mission of English". The promotion of criticism as a civilizing influence has increasingly appeared to have been impelled by ideological considerations. Hence the deliberate use of the word "mission", a pun on the earlier "mission" of Christian missionary activity. Marxist criticism has seen these apparently innocent activities as ideological. In this context you can turn to Unit III, where I discuss Althusser's theory of "Ideological State Apparatuses".

Thus, closely looked at, one can discern a pattern in Arnold's critical writings: a life-long preoccupation, an interface between the private and public function of criticism. In the private sphere, criticism helps the poet hone his/her skills, and make his/her poetry achieve a social purpose. This view emerges from his "Preface", in which he justifies his exclusion of a poem, "Empedocles at Etna" on the grounds that it is an allegory of the poet's mind. The protagonist, in his/her dilemma, allows himself/herself to be chained through inaction. As Arnold says, the situations in the poem are those in which "the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance;" in which "there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done." The situation of Empedocles, as he represents him, is "poetically faulty": the reasons why he excludes him from *Poems*. Poetry should strengthen the individual. Far from serving this function, the poem becomes an embodiment for the conflict within the poet, of private concern and public duty. Thus, the Preface has been called Arnold's essay on "The Function of Poetry at the Present Time".

In trying to separate the two warring parts, Arnold would shift to his criticism the burden of his public duty. But gradually, as criticism itself is made to serve that function, particularly in the essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time", poetry gets redefined in a later essay as a criticism of life. In the "Preface", he says that good criticism helps in the creation of good poetry/literature. In the "Preface", for example, he says that "a young writer... wants ... a hand to guide him through the confusion, a voice to prescribe to him the aim which he should keep in view...." "Such a guide the English writer at the present day will nowhere find." This narrow function of criticism is enlarged to greater ends, to the public sphere, as we have seen, a "disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." If in the study of poetry and elsewhere, poetry is seen as a "criticism of life", and in *Culture and Anarchy* not on much different terms, "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know...the best which has been thought and said in the world", the agenda for criticism/poetry/culture is clearly laid out.

4.4 ELIOT'S VIEW OF THE MATTER

We have already seen some aspects of Eliot's criticism. Your reading of his criticism may have revealed to you the fact that he wrote, at least in his early years, in the shadow of Arnold and did so rather self-consciously. Arnold, after all represented English critical orthodoxy at that time just as Tennyson did that of poetry. Eliot was to write in the "Preface" to *The Sacred Wood* (1920) that some one needed to redo Arnold's task, as Arnold had paid too much attention to the social function of poetry and criticism. He also wrote to a friend about how he was using Arnold as a "stalking horse". He classed him among "Imperfect critics" calling him a propagandist for criticism rather than a critic. In trying to redo Arnold's task, in 1923, he called his essay with a conscious allusion to the Arnold essay, "The Function of Criticism". By omitting the phrase "at the present time", he perhaps intended to suggest that he believed the function of criticism to be for all times.

Eliot defines the function to be the "elucidation of works of art and correction of taste". He begins by taking up issues with Middleton Murry, a contemporary critic; but takes on Arnold in the 4th section of the essay:

Matthew Arnold distinguishes far too bluntly, it seems to me, between the two activities: he overlooks the capital importance of criticism in the work of creation itself. Probably indeed, the larger part of the labor of an author in composing his work is critical labor; the labor of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing: this frightful toil is as much critical as creative. I maintain even that the criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer on his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism and (as I think have said before) that some creative writers are superior to others solely because their critical faculty is superior.

This passage is part of Eliot's persistent attempts to place the poet-critic on a high pedestal. Yet, Eliot is careful in pointing out that creation is an autotelic activity, whereas criticism depends on something else. Finally, however, "The critical activity finds its highest, its true fulfillment in a kind of union with creation in labour of the artist".

'Interpretation' is only legitimate when it is not interpretation at all, but merely putting the reader in possession of facts which he would otherwise have missed. The critic, for Eliot is to equip himself with two tools: comparison and analysis, which he needs to use carefully. And he uses them to correct the taste of the reading public, and elucidate but not interpret. I am not sure in what way Eliot distinguishes between "elucidation" and "interpretation". Can they be kept separate? I expect you to inquire into this.

4.5 TERRY EAGLETON'S ARGUMENT

The complete title of Eagleton's book is *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism*. In it he discusses, as he says in the Preface, how "criticism today lacks all substantive social function". He shows how this was not the case in earlier centuries, when criticism belonged to the "public sphere". In sharp contrast to this earlier phase, nowadays, Eagleton argues, it is "either part of the public relations branch of the literary industry, or a matter wholly internal to the academies" (Preface, p. 7). You may or may not agree with Eagleton's argument, but in what follows I want to summarize his argument.

Eagleton admits that his essay is "a drastically selective history of the institution of criticism in England since the early eighteenth century."

4.5.1 The first part of Eagleton's argument

According to Habermas, the "public sphere" comprises a realm of social institutions--clubs, journals, coffee houses, periodicals--in which private individuals assemble for the free, equal interchange of reasonable discourse. They, thus, weld themselves into a more or less coherent body whose deliberations may assume the form of a powerful political force. In the early 18th century two central institutions belonging to the public sphere were Steele's *Tatler* and Addison's *Spectator*. Though they were animated by moral concerns and used satirical ridicule to correct a licentious and socially regressive aristocracy the public sphere of which they were a part received its impetus from the need to consolidate its own class (the middle class).

For Eagleton, drawing upon the argument put forward by other Marxist critics that in the age of Enlightenment the concept of criticism cannot be separated for the institution of public sphere, says that "Literary discussion became an arena to pave the way for political discussion in the middle classes" (p11). Addison knew how to upbraid the traditional ruling class while keeping in with it, avoiding the invective of writers like Pope and Swift. At this point Eagleton again draws support from Habermas who points out that the public sphere develops earlier in England than elsewhere because the English gentry and aristocracy, traditionally involved in questions of cultural taste, also shared economic interests with the emergent mercantile class. The intimacy of cultural, political and economic preoccupations is thus more marked in England than elsewhere.

What I have said before of the Arnoldian mission was not new or peculiar to Arnold. As Eagleton goes on to say "What will help to unify the English ruling bloc" even in Addison's educative, cultural enterprise, "is culture; and the critic is the chief bearer of this historic task.... [Thus] modern criticism in England was born ironically of political consensus" (12).

4.5.2 The second part

In the second part of his essay Eagleton suggests that among the "factors responsible for the gradual disintegration of the classical public sphere, two are of particular relevance to the history of English criticism. The first is economic: as capitalist society develops and market forces come increasingly to determine the destiny of literary products, it is no longer possible to assume that 'taste' or 'cultivation' are the fruits of civilized dialogue and reasonable debate" (p.34). The sources of cultural determinants are from now on beyond the frontiers of public sphere. Private commercial and economic interests deplete the public sphere and break its consensual nature. Whereas earlier the public was the co-subject of the writer's art, now it becomes an anonymous entity.

Eagleton cites another reason for the erosion of the public sphere: the political. The nation and/or society as a whole is identified with the ruling class. This is tied up with the notion, during the *Victorian Age* of the gentleman.

The politicization of the "public" sphere is best seen in such magazines as the *Edinburgh Review* and *Quarterly Review*, as well as the *London Magazine*, each of which, toed the line of some form of real politick or the other. To quote Eagleton, "If criticism had to some degree slipped the economic yoke of its earlier years whom it was often no more than a thinly concealed profit for bestsellers wares, it has done so early to exchange such enthrallment for a political one. Criticism was now explicitly, unabashedly political." (p 38).

It is at this stage that criticism becomes a politically contested space rather than of cultural consensus, and the 19th Century sage is born. The Victorian sage projects an

apolitical image of himself. Carlyle (1795-1881, teacher, literary writer, tutor and reviewer) said Arnold belong to this category.

Eagleton proceeds in this vein to trace further changes in the self-conception of the critic till the time of Eliot in the 20th Century and further upto Raymond Williams. You must read before you take up Eagleton's essay, another useful but simpler book *The Rise And Fall of The Man of Letters* by John Gross.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

I have laid out for your guidance a brief and simplified summary of how various critics in the past have viewed their task as critics. They have usually perceived their task to be an idealistic one. Criticism for such critics serves a social and cultural function. For critics like Coleridge and others with a philosophically inclined mind took criticism as a way of understanding the difference between the poet's mind and that of the non-poet. Yet others thought of criticism as a way of improving poetry. Eliot described the critic's task as being directed towards the audience: the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste.

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. Try to place Arnold's criticism in relation to that of the Romantics on the one hand and that of Eliot on the other.
2. How do you react to Eagleton's version of the history of criticism in the public sphere, especially in the 18th century?
3. How does the question of ideology affect our reading of Arnold's or Eliot's criticism?

4.8 SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 5 INDIAN AESTHETICS

Structure

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- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Religious Foundations
- 5.3 Non-spiritual Expressions
- 5.4 Mystic Function
- 5.5 Krishna
 - 5.5.1 Rasa
 - 5.5.2 Rasa after Bharata
 - 5.5.3 Rasa and Jouissance
 - 5.5.4 Dhvani
 - 5.5.5 Criticism of the Dhvani theory
 - 5.5.6 Sphota
 - 5.5.7 Alamkara
 - 5.5.8 Auchitya
 - 5.5.9 Sruti
- 5.6 The concept of Theory in India
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Questions
- 5.9 Glossary
- 5.10 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to acquaint you with the theories of literature of Indian antiquity as they have come down to us in Sanskrit texts. I do this mainly because of the growing feeling among Indian academics that we have forgotten our own aesthetic traditions, and have been enslaved by Western theories of art and literature. You may be aware of some members of this nativistic school, such as Ganesh Devy and Kapil Kapoor. The first has a book called *After Amnesia*, for which he won the Sahitya Akademi award some years ago. We at IGNOU want to do our bit to "decolonize" our mind by paying special attention to our cultural heritage. I also want to point out some similarities and differences between the two traditions whenever the occasion so demands. I draw upon works of scholars such as Kapoor and Y.V. Kantak (who has analysed Aristotle's theory of imitation and our theory of *amukarana*).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

You may have come across such binaries as Indian or Eastern versus Western. In fact, I have myself talked about "Western" philosophical traditions all through my block. But "West" is not a monolith, nor is, for that matter, "East". Even so, we go on using such categories for our convenience, which is alright, but we must be very careful. Even "India" is a difficult conceptual terrain in this critical-historical over-eagerness at easy and secure categorization. I have always felt uneasy about this. I have also thought, what nowadays largely passes as "Indian" aesthetics is actually a Hindu view or theory of literature. I received corroboration of this when, browsing the Internet once, I found the heading: "Hindu Aesthetics". The thought that had occurred to me was: once you say, "India", you refer to the colonial political entity, where a large number of diverse cultures not only exist but coexist--the composite culture where many traditions have existed. The terms oriental as opposed to occidental are often simply distinguished as geographical entities on a simplistic basis. Oriental art and oriental aesthetics are terms which are used to designate all art

and aesthetics produced in the Eastern Hemisphere. "Indian" aesthetics, however, is not an easy category, as I have already pointed out. When what passes for Indian aesthetics now was happening during the Mayuran, Gupta, and such other empires, the political geography was different from what it became later. Also, diverse foreign influences have made "Indian" culture even less homogeneous. So, we cannot talk about Indian literature and yet ignore these foreign traditions, the Islamic and European, as they have taken root and developed here. But this has been the accepted way, and cannot be remedied by me in this block. In any case, this being a troubled territory, I let that pass. All that I wanted to do by mentioning my nagging doubts to you is to make you wary of too easy a generalization.

5.2 RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS

Religious and philosophic thought is quite significant as a factor in the social context of art in any moment of history. If you list the dominant religions of Oriental antiquity, you will realize how varied the inspiration of these religions were to artists. This is especially the case, you will agree, with the Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic faiths. All these religion-based cultures were producers of art. The development of the religions was accompanied by a corresponding growth in vivid imagery. Thus, much Indian art and criticism had a religious form and content. Thus it is that these aesthetics had a spiritual base or context. This is evident from the link that one can make between the *rasa-lila* of Krishna and the *Gopis* and the *rasa* theory. Also, the artists, rulers, and spectators-audience show a willingness to accept fantastic representations of the supernatural. You might have noticed how emphasis is placed on mystic symbolism in the arts, in dance and theatre in particular. A more or less theoretical discussion followed, rather than preceded, these performances. You may recall how Aristotle's *Poetics* was similarly based on certain epics and tragedies and other art forms which had already been performed.

Most Indian art can be given a religious interpretation by persons of a strongly theistic inclination. This was not necessarily the intention of the artists or of his first audiences. You can, if you so like, apply religious interpretations to the most humble, utilitarian products as also to the most magnificent structures. Of course, there have been many Indian works and their interpretations which include ideal representations of gods and spirits, which are theistic.

5.3 NON-SPIRITUAL EXPRESSIONS

Many Indian aesthetic theories run down the *indriya* perceptions as *maya* or illusion. Even so, you notice many works of art employing sensory experiences. Apart from the sensory, naturalistic and humanistic expression have also made a mark in India's long philosophical traditions. Aesthetics was preoccupied with the production or stimulation of *rasa*, or *rasotpanna*. As we shall have occasion to see, *rasa* had a spiritual as well as sensuous dimension to it. It was seldom that these were blended.

5.4 MYSTIC FUNCTION

But as I have said already, art was produced and received in the framework of the spiritualism of the time. Mural paintings, scrolls, and stone or bronze sculptures helped, or were at least thought to help, stimulate the desired attitude, as a means of achieving *moksha*, or *mokshaprapiti*. Accordingly, aesthetics was preoccupied with mystic symbolism. The bronze icon of the dancing Shiva is a symbol of the cosmic rhythm of creation and destruction.

The myths and legends related to Krishna have contributed to Indian aesthetics in a major way. Krishna, after all, is the archetypal *rasika*. A great god, he is also the mischievous child, the divine flute-playing lover, and religious-moral teacher, propounding, what is often referred to as the "Hindu" world view, the Karmic view. Indian philosophers have called attention to the importance of *rasa* in the experience of creation and appreciation of the arts in general, and particularly the theatre arts. They have also emphasized that *rasa* is not of one kind but of many, and constituted of many ingredients. An allied concept is that of *guna* or value that goes with *rasa*. The *rasa* theory as it is known to many Indian language-literature critics was originally formulated by Bharata in his treatise, *Natyashastra*. After him Abhinavagupta developed the theory further in his *Dhvanyaloka*. There were many others too in between. Almost all these texts have been handed down to us orally until a time when they were turned into written texts. It is, therefore, difficult if not impossible to talk about definitive texts. Most of the important ideas have been derived from these two principle thinkers; and I concentrate on them rather than the others (Bhamaha of the sixth century, Rudrata of the ninth century, Dandin of the seventh century) for my introduction. Also, I take up their major theories instead of taking them up in two different sections.

5.5.1 Rasa

The word "*rasa*" was originally used for the drink, of the gods (*somarasa*) and men alike, and also for such non-drinks as mercury. In Sanskrit aesthetics, the term was employed initially in the context of drama and later to poetry. From Bharata onwards, the term signified, and still, does aesthetic pleasure or thrill, invariably accompanied with joy that the audience/spectator/reader, experiences while witnessing/hearing the enactment or reading of a drama or poem.

In Bharata, it is the effect of drama. For him the main purpose of dramatic performance is to create or enact the *rasas*. Without *rasa* drama can have no appeal to the spectator: "*na rasadrite kaschid arthah pravartate*." "*Artha*" means "meaning". *Rasa* is *artha per excellence*. Bharata's famous *sutra* is, "*vibharambhva-vyabhichari sayogad rasanishpattih*". This means that *rasa* emanates from a combination or comingling of *vibhavas* (causes), *anubhavas* (effectes), and *vyabhicharis* (accessories).

He clarifies his point by using an analogy: just as *rasa* (flavor) issues from the combination of many spices, herbs, and other *dravyas*, so does *rasa* in drama, as it comes from the combination of many *bhavas*. The concoction is made by the combination of such diverse substances as molasses, spices, and herbs; similarly permanent or universal emotions, called *sthayibhavas*, crystallize into *rasa* when they are nourished by the accompanying *bhavas*. Bharata coined the term *rasa* for aesthetic relish because it can be tasted: *rasaaswadan* or *asvadyatvat*.

This is then an affective theory of art, as Aristotle's theory of *catharsis/purgation* is. Of course, they are very different in their respective conception. The point of similarity is that in each case the theorists are looking at the psycho-physiological being effected on the spectator or listener as the case may be. The two theories are not about the text/performance per se; but the composition/performance has to be such that such a evocation/production of *rasa* or pity and terror would be the result.

5.5.2 Rasa after Bharata

Bharata's explanation of *rasa* may not answer all the problems arising out of it, but these problems were extensively discussed by many of his interpreters, such as Bhatta Lollata, Bhattanayaka, and Abhinavagupta.

Bhatta Lollata is of the view that a *sthayibahva* (stable emotion), when intensified by poetic description or histrionic representation through *vibhavas*, *anubhavas* etc., becomes *rasa*. The *rasa* primarily resides in original characters like Rama and Sita, since they were the first to experience a wide range of emotions from love to grief. But through *anusadhana* (a mental activity, and act of imagination) the actor attributes to himself the role of original characters and thus experiences *rasa* secondarily. Lollata ignores the poet and the audience in this transaction of *rasa*.

Shankuka considered the effect of *rasa* on the spectator through the latter's involvement in the action (inference). This is explained through the analogy of a picture horse. When we see the picture of a horse or wooden horse, we accept it as a real horse. This is the case when the spectator sees the faked emotions or *rasas* of the performer.

However, it is Bhattanayaka who clearly asserted that *rasa* affects the spectator, and developed the theory further by saying that poetic language is different from ordinary language. He imposed on the *rasa* theory a system of theology and philosophy. He spiritualises it to a great extent by saying that through *rasa* the spectator's self becomes one with the divine soul, the *paramatma*. Through this he achieves a flash of bliss. He treats the *rasa* experience in terms of *swarupananda*, which is a kind of infinite subjectivity. The individual soul becomes the supreme soul. What is achieved is self-realization: *atma-sakshatkara*.

5.5.3 Rasa and Jouissance

When you read about structuralism and post-structuralism in a later block, you will be introduced to Roland Barthes' idea of *jouissance*, or bliss. Barthes talks about the reader's freedom from the oppression of authorial intention. For him what is important, after the "death" (not real but metaphorical) of the author is the gay abandon of the reader, who can discover his meaning in the text. [Critics like Stanley Fish added to this idea by talking about the creation of the text by the reader. (See the latter's *Is there a Text in the Class?*)]

Barthes thinks of the modernist novel as the text of rapture or rupture, which gives rise to the text of *jouissance*. For the reader discovers the fissures and gaps in the text which gives him pleasure. Though the theory of *rasa* is different from this idea of Barthes in many ways, it is noteworthy how both insist on the effect a literary text might have on the reader. In that sense, therefore, both are reader oriented theories. Also both the metaphors have undertones of sexual pleasure.

5.5.4 Dhvani

This word means "sound" literally, but does not deal with the function of sound in the musical sense. The theory was first propounded by Anandavardhana, the ninth century thinker, in his treatise, *Dhavanaloka* (*Dhvani+aloka*). The *Dhvani* theory considers the indirectly evoked meaning or suggestivity as the characteristic feature of literary utterance. This feature separates and determines the literary from other kinds of discourse, and is an all-embracing principle which explains the structure and function of the other significant aspects of literary utterance: the aesthetic effect or *rasa*, the figural mode and devices (*alamkara*), and so on. In Kapoor's words, "all the subsequent literary theorists in the tradition found the combination of *rasa* and

dhvani theories both adequate and sufficient to analyse the constitution of meaning in literature."

In his treatise I have mentioned before, Anandavardhana has given a detailed description of structural analysis of indirect meanings. According to him, if we can explain how indirect meanings arise systematically, we can claim that all potential meanings inhere in a text. Anandavardhana uses the term *dhvani* to designate the universe of suggestion. (The soul of *kavya* is *dhvani*, he says).

His preference for the term sprang from the fact that grammarians before him had used the term to denote several concepts. First, to denote the sound structure of *śabda* or words; second, to denote the semantic aspect of *śabda*; and third, the complex of the now revealed suggested meaning and the process of suggestion involved. Thus *dhvani* theory is a theory of meaning (an Indian hermeneutics or sorts), of symbolism. The thrust of this theory is towards claiming a greater value for the poetry of suggestion.

Anandavardhana integrates the theory of the *rasa* with his *dhvani* theory; that is, he says that *dhvani* is the method through which the effect of *rasa* is achieved. *Rasa* is the effect of suggestion.

5.5.5 Criticism of the *dhvani* theory

Subscribers to two schools of thought, the *nyaya* and *mimamsa* subsequently raised objections to the above theory on three counts: (a) *dhvani* is nonexistent; (b) it is a product of inference and is to be included under *lakhsana*; and finally (c) it is beyond the realm of words.

5.5.6 *Sphota*

In order to arrive at his own theories, Anandavardhana was indebted to Bhratrihari's *sphota* theory. Let me try to explain the latter. Bhratrihari says in his treatise, *Vakyapadiya*, that what communicates the meaning of a word or sentence is technical called *sphota*. It is of three kinds:- i) *Varnasphota* i.e. the *sphota* of *Varna* which literally means the alphabet; so that *Varnasphota* is a reference to the meaning of letters. ii) *Padasphota*: *sphota* of *padas*. That is the meaning of words. iii) *vakyasphota*: the meaning *vakya* that is sentences. The philosophy behind this theory is that, since *varnas*, *padas* and *vakyas* are all momentary (particularly when spoken), they are forever passing as the next letter, word or sentence is uttered/produced. Thus the coexistence of several letters, words and sentence is not possible. Consequently, conveying or understanding the meaning through utterance is impossible. Bhratrihari says that there is no knowledge which can be expressed without its relation with words. This epistemological position has been reiterated by many Western philosophers. For, says Bhratihari in his work that

all kinds of meaning depend upon the power of words ... it is though words that all is difference as perceived ... there is no cognition in the world in which language does not figure... all knowledge is at worse intermined with language ... it is through the word that the object is a establisher...all this world [result or product or consequence] of language.

Thus the concept of *sphota* is developed by the Sanskrit grammarians to turn it almost into epistemology.

It explains how meaning is communicated even though the letters, words or sentences do not exist at the time of communication or reception.

The *Shastras* also agree that the property of *sphota* is to express the primary meaning (*mukhyaartha* = *mukhya* + *artha*). The philosophers of *Sanskrit* grammar held that the indivisible, external utterance is called *sphota* [the dictionary meaning of *sphota* is "bursting forth". The image that comes to my mind is the bursting off of seeds for disposal in a pea-pod. Here Derrida's theory of "dissemination" comes to our mind]. *Sphota*, they further held, is the root cause of creation. It is the *shabdabrahma*.

Let me try to explain. Speech or word (*logos*) in a state of *Sphota* is external (*nitya*) and perception itself is a proof of it. The letters pronounced separately are detached from each other and are not *shabda* itself; they are merely sounds as a means of expressing the word. Further, they are produced and destroyed; they again expose the 'word' which is more than mere conglomeration of some letters.

The letters producing sounds are actually minute air particles. When they are written down, in their written form they are encoded in lines and marks of different kinds. Thus the meaning produced through the bursting forth described above is neither the air particles nor the lines. So it makes no sense to divide sentences into words and letters; but the grammarians do so just for convenience so that the primary approach to the study of language can be made, says Bhratihari.

The sum and substance of *sphota*, therefore, could be that the sound-medium is the external word, that is *sphota*; that only makes the target object of the word expressed. The first letter gets defined better and better till the word is complete, the word gets defined and redefined as the sentence unfolds itself and so on... Thus meaning is always unstable.

The philosophical schools of Samkhya, Minank, Vedanta, Nyaya and Vaisheshika do not accept the concept of *sphota* for the purpose of understanding the word, meaning, or interpretation. For them letters and their sound are competent enough to convey the meaning, and indication/suggestion (*samketa*) is of help in the process.

5.5.7 Alamkara

Basically this is a study of language. If you have studied the grammar of any Indian-language, you must have come across repeated use of this word, which literally means "ornament". But, of course, *alamkara* is not mere decorative poetry, or embellishments in literature. The *alamkaras* are various figures of speech but with these latter are models of how meaning is or ought to be apprehended. Bahama, Dandin, and Udbhata of the sixth, seventh, and ninth centuries respectively have all talked about this literary device. The first among them, Bahama, talks of the pleasure of multiplicity of meaning inherent in certain *alamkaras* such as *samasukti*. (In Oriya, my language, this mode is adapted to suit its local needs; "*smasa+ukti*".)

As the tradition was developed, Anandavardhana sought to integrate with *dhvani* and *rasa*. *Dhvani* is evoked by figures of speech (*alamkara*). And as we have already seen, the former leads to an evocation of *rasa*. Some theorists have categorized *alamkara* as both phonetic-based and meaning-based: *sabdaalamkara* and *arthalamkara*. Though these are two main categories, there are numerous subcategories into which *alamkara* has been divided. I list some of them for you, with help from Kapoor.

- 1) *Sadrusya*(similarity)
- 2) *Virodha* (opposition)
- 3) *Srnkhalabadha* (chain bound)
- 4) *Tarka nyaya* (reasoning logic),
- 5) *Lokanyaya* (popular logic)
- 6) *Kavyanyaya* (logic of poetry)
- 7) *Gudharatha pratiti* (interference of meaning)

Mammata enumerates sixty one figures and groups them into seven types:

- 1) *upama* (simile)
- 2) *rupaka* (metaphor)
- 3) *aprastuta prasamsa* (indirect description)
- 4) *dipaka* (stringed figures)
- 5) *vyatireka* (dissimilitude)
- 6) *virodha* (contradiction)
- 7) *samuccaya* (concatenation).

5.5.8 Aucitya

The theory of propriety or appropriateness claims that in all aspects of literary composition, there is the possibility of a perfect, the most appropriate choice - of a subject, of ideas, of words, of devices. As such, it has affinities with Longinus's theory of the sublime (*On The Sublime*). The concept of propriety with reference to custom, subject, character and sentiment recurs in almost all theorists and is often discussed in association with figures of speech, *guna/dosa* and *ritis*. Anandavardhana relates this principle specifically to *rasa* (*Dhvanyaloka*). It has been used for propriety in delineating *bhavas* according to characters, and in the choice of *margas* (for example, in the use of compounds, etc.) according to the speaker, content and type of literary composition. Ksemendra made *Aucitya* the central element of literariness. He defines *Aucitya* as the property of an expression (signifier) being an exact and appropriate analogue of the expressed (signified) (see *Aucityavicaracarca*, verse 6).

In verses 8-10 of his book, Ksemendra enumerates the areas, locations or sites of literary compositions where the concept of *aucitya* is pertinent:

Pada (phrase), *vakya* (sentence), *prabandhartha* (meaning in whole composition), *guna* (excellences, qualities), *alamkara* (poetic figure), *rasa* (state of being), *karaka* (case ending), *kriya* (verb), *linga* (gender or marking), *vacana* (number), *visesana* (qualification), *upsarga* (prefix), *nipata* (redundancies), *kala* (time, tense), *desa* (country), *kula* (family), *vrata* (custom), *tattva* (truth), *sattva* (inherent self), *abhipriya* (motive), *svabhava* (nature), *sara samgraha* (essential properties), *pratiibha* (inmate ability), *avastha* (condition, state), *vicara* (thought), *nama* (name), *asirvada* (blessings).

5.5.9 Sruti

In Hindu culture, the word *sruti* ('that which is heard') is used to refer to their most sacred works. The emphasis here is on spoken language, as opposed to written language in the Western tradition. This comes directly out of Hindu metaphysics, according to which, the entire world is made up of different frequencies of vibration. In other words, the universe is sound. In addition to this, there is an Indian oral culture, which dates back to around 8,000 BCE, so there is yet another reason to emphasize speech.

In Hinduism, the world is divided between what is manifested and what is unmanifested, which makes up the majority of the world (three-quarters). This corresponds to the relationship between sound and silence, in which there is always a silence that underlies everything said. Because of this, the highest speech is considered to be that which brings sound back to silence. This leads to a very different idea of poetry, since the goal of Hindu poetry is to bring about silence in the mind.

There is a strong and diverse tradition in India of scholarship on the sacred texts, in fact, this tradition is much more diverse than any religious tradition in the west, since there are even purely atheist traditions. The Vedas (sacred texts) are in Sanskrit, which is considered to be the oldest language, and therefore a "natural language" based on onomatopoeia. Thousands of people come together to hear the Vedas being read, and most of them neither speak nor understand Sanskrit, and this does not matter at all.

According to at least one grammatical theory, for the Vedas, and other poetry, the "meaning" is very different from the Western ideas of meaning. It is something to be evoked rather than something conveyed. That is, the meaning of the Veda is its effect upon the hearer when chanted, and knowledge of the language is irrelevant to this. There is a definite connection here to the Speech Act Theory.

5.6 THE CONCEPT OF THEORY IN INDIA

Indian literature traditionally, like all other ancient literatures, has been oral. In this context of orality, literature has been an act of public communication. It has been a kind of performance. Even non-Hindu and non-native literatures have been performative, often extempore. Mushaira for example. These are performances of sorts. This is why all literature is classified either as *śravya* (aural) or as *prekṣa* (visual) or as *śravya-prekṣa* (aural-visual). This fact of aural, folk literature practices determines the nature of compositions, the relationship of the literary compositions to the audience/viewer/reader and therefore the concepts of literary theory. In this context the word *literature* itself is only partly appropriate. For "literature" is of letters, of the visible and legible marks on the page. Hence we have this notion that everything in print is literature, and we define literature in one of the ensuing sections. But it is sufficient to say that what we have are compositions, and for the poet/writer, the term *composer* is more appropriate. It quite rightly evokes associations of classical European music. As a poet is like a musician in that part of his art which lies in shaping sounds, the speech sounds. Again we cannot use the word "reader" as in the case of the Western audience. Should we say "audience", "participant", "hearer" or "viewer"? Perhaps the Indian term *sahradya*, one having the same kind of heart, i.e., one who is able to empathize, is a satisfactory term. It creates an entity that is more fluid and is richer. A *sahradya* has the competence analogous to that of the poet/composer to see, to hear, to feel, to participate, to experience.

Also, the theory of *rasa* makes us wonder whether too much theory spoils the relishing of a work of art? What all this amounts to perhaps is that literature in the Indian context is to be relished through a combination of two attitudes: those of *sahradya* and *rasika*.

There is also a growing and important school of thought spearheaded by Harish Trivedi who thinks that Indian students of English literature need not be puritanically nativistic. They could study literature with a five-pronged approach, which he calls *pañcadhātu* or the five elements, to wit: English literature, literature in English from countries other than England, literature in English translation, literature of an Indian region in the local language, and a classical literature in its original language.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

My purpose in this unit has been to introduce you to some basic concepts of Indian Aesthetics. I have generalized and simplified each of them so that you are not unnecessarily put off by the remoteness of the concepts. But if you have some knowledge of your own grammar (Telugu, Oriya, Bengali, Hindi, etc), you will find it easy to grasp some of these ideas.

5.8 QUESTIONS

1. Write short notes on the following:
 - a. rasa theory
 - b. dhvani theory
 - c. sphota
2. In Kapoor's words, "all the subsequent literary theorists in the tradition found the combination of *rasa* and *dhvani* theories both adequate and sufficient to analyse the constitution of meaning in literature." Do you agree with this view? Try and analyse any literary work keeping in mind this statement.

5.9 GLOSSARY

Find below a list of words from Hindu aesthetics which you may need to refer to from time to time.

abidha : primary power of words to denote, to express a direct or literal meaning

advaita : nondualism; vedantic doctrine of the identity of *Brahman* with the universe or the individual self

alamkara : the cause (person or event) with reference to which a sentiment (*rasa*) arises

anukarana : representation (of an event, emotion or state of mind); imitation

bhasa : speech; language

bhasya : explanatory commentary

Brahman : the supreme spirit investing the universe

dhvani : suggestion; sound

dosa : flaw; shortcoming

mula : original; source, root; basic

nimmita : instrumental or efficient cause

nirguna : devoid of all attributes; the supreme spirit

rasa : the essence of anything; juice of plants; water; liquor; poison; an essential fluid of the body; taste; flavour; relish (one of the twenty-five *gunas*; attributes, in *vaishesika* philosophy); a poetic sentiment or state of being (in *rasa* theory); love

rasa-bhava : resultant sentiment and casual emotion

santa : tranquil (one of the nine *rasas*, states of being, in *rasa* theory)

sphota : the abstract linguistic sign (that which when articulated brings to the hearer's mind the cognition of an object)

sruti : term for the body for received literature, ie, the veda; a vedic text; hearing; a quarter tone or an interval in music; sound in general; the constellation *sravana*

upama : similarity; simile (a figure of speech); a likeness

upameya : the object of comparison

vak : speech, sentence

Vak : vedic God of speech.

Catharsis (Greek 'Purgation') : Aristotle uses the word in his definition of tragedy (Ch VI of *Poetics*). It means in a sense, that tragedy arouses powerful feelings in the spectator, that also has a therapeutic effect, the climax normally leading to a sense of release from tension, a sense of calm.

5.10 SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 6 RESISTANCE TO THEORY/HOW TO READ A READER

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Resistance to Theory
 - 6.2.1 Theory was always there
 - 6.2.2 There Always Was Resistance-1
 - 6.2.3 There Always Was Resistance-2
- 6.3 Paul De Man's Answer
- 6.4 Resistance at the Present Time
- 6.5 How to Read a Reader
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Questions
- 6.8 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose in this unit is to trace the history of how critics have from time to time expressed their misgivings about meta-criticism or theory. I also want to tell you about why such objections have been raised. For it is not easy to brush these objections away simply by describing them as the resistance of conservative forces to anything that is new.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Though there does not seem to be much opposition to theory now, the situation was quite different in the late 1970s and the '80s. For example, in 1976, M.H. Abrams, a liberal humanist, wrote about deconstruction, launching a trenchant attack on it from the point of view of the traditionalist school to which he belonged. In the essay, "The Deconstructive Angel", he argued that the deconstructionists rely too much on the communicative power of language which they theoretically deny. A controversy followed with some practitioners of deconstruction as they tried to argue that such paradoxes and contradictions are a common feature of any use that we make of language. Some years later, and at a very high level of sophistication Paul de Man (1919-1983), a deconstructionist, summarized and tried to expose the politics behind such opposition in his now famous essay, "Resistance to Theory". In what follows, we will examine the context of the controversy.

6.2 RESISTANCE TO THEORY

In 1982, Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michael published an essay entitled, "Against Theory" in the *Critical Inquiry*. Seven responses to that essay as well as a rejoinder from Knapp and Michael appeared in the June 1983 issue of the journal. These latter, along with two new essays by Richard Rorty (by now a well-known pragmatist philosopher) and Stanley Fish (you may be familiar with his Milton and reader-response criticism), and a final reply from the two original authors was published in book form. However, for the time being, it is easy to see at some stage at least the falsity of the opposition. After all, as per the broad definition given above, and as we have seen in the very first unit, theory has always existed. But because it has done so in the form of unspoken, undefined assumptions, what now comes to us

in a more programmatic and systematic form appears as theory. In fact, I have used the term theory in the sense of contemporary theory.

Before the invasion of "Theory" of the latter kind what reigned supreme in academic literary criticism were the *Scrutiny* school of Leavis and "The New Criticism". These two schools influenced most of your teachers and their pedagogic methods. And the schools themselves were influenced by the works of T. S. Eliot. Frank Raymond Leavis was averse to the idea of "theorizing" his critical practice. He did talk about "the words on the page" and "close reading" of the texts, and about the predominance of cultural values in specific works which make them belong to "The Great Tradition". And thus his brand of literary criticism too had theoretical underpinnings whether or not Leavis admitted to that. Similarly, though the New Critics talked about the autotelic nature of art, and concentrated on the verbal aspects of literary artifacts, which had no teleological status, none of them developed a systematic theory. It was only in the 1960s that historians of literary criticism such as Murray Kreiger saw a common theoretical framework running through the so-called New Critics. Thus there is no point in grumbling about the preponderance of theory now. The second thing to be noted is that even when these "pre-theory" schools held sway, other forms of criticism were being practiced simultaneously: such as Russian formalism, and psychoanalysis.

I have referred to two debates above. There were many more. As is the case with most debates, part of the controversy is over the question of just what is at issue. What is theory, in the study of literature or in other disciplines? What is at stake in being for or against theory? What sort of values and interests are being challenged (and endorsed) by the anti-theory arguments of those who are sometimes called the New Pragmatists" (Fish, Knapp, Michaels, Rorty) in literary study?

6.2.1 Theory was always there

What existed as theory from times immemorial can be better understood as "criticism"/"history"/"philosophy"/as an antithesis to "creation" as it is to be found in many of the "apologies for poetry". Even Wordsworth, writing his *Preface*, calls criticism a secondary and much less significant engagement of a poet in comparison to his preoccupation with poetry. Arnold in that sense was more of a "theorist", and among the earliest apologists for criticism, though Eliot called him a propagandist for criticism (rather than a critic). Just as there was always some kind of theory or the other, there also was some form of resistance however feeble to such theorizing about literature. We shall see Paul de Man taking this issue up in his essay. Before the nineteen sixties, he says, the predominant trends in North American literary criticism were "certainly not averse to theory, if by theory one understands the rooting of literary exegesis and of critical evaluation in a system of some conceptual generality" (p.357). He points out how even the most low-key practitioners of literary criticism used concepts like tone, organic form, allusion, tradition, historical situation and the like. In some other cases critics showed an interest in theory by giving their works names that announced their theoretical preoccupation: *Understanding Poetry* (Brooks and Warren), *Theory of Literature* (Wellek and Warren), *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Abrams). Yet very few of them would have accepted the title of a theoretician in the post-sixties sense of the term.

6.2.2 There Always Was Resistance-1

The best way to historicise "Resistance" would be to look at some of the contemporary documents. If you do that, you will notice how some of the chief objections are related to the "difficulties" associated with these theories. Opponents of theory generally feel ill at ease when confronted with theoretical jargon. In trying to defend theory, some critics have also tried to systematise the objections. It would

be helpful to go to some of them, for example, Geoffrey H. Hartman's "How Creative Should Literary Criticism Be?"

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The essay begins with the same kind of bewilderment one notices in some of the essays in the 1920, of Eliot and Richards in particular. For Hartman says:

In the past few years, as if the literary scene were not confusing enough, a new battlefield has emerged. Critics... send their wits and vocabularies charging against "deconstruction," "structuralism," "revisionism", and other foreign-sounding heresies. Yet this warfare baffles the bystander, who wonders what the study of literature is all about. Do we have to fight over how literature should be read? Can't we just relax with a good or entertaining book?

After making these preliminary observations, Hartman goes on to give a few instances of critics who had trained their guns on the newest of the new: "One critic, Gerald Graff, has taken on the so-called Yale school no fewer than four times (twice by courtesy of *The American Scholar*); an Australian critic emblazons his essay in *The London Review of Books* with the title "The Deconstruction Gang"; Alfred Kazin, lamenting the state of American writing in the recent issue of *The New Republic*, deplores "the triumph of deconstructionism" and "the fictitious superiority of 'creative' critics over the poems they discuss"; while William Pritchard, in *Hudson Review*, talks of a hermeneutical mafia" that contaminates good English prose with philosophy and particularly with "the abominable Hegel." In England, Hartman pointed out, literary theory has become the focus of heated public debate. "Structuralism and Dry Rot" was the headline of an attack in *The Observer* charging literary critics with cruelly reducing human nature to pseudo-mathematical formulas. "The spark that ignited such outbursts this past February, when not only the *Times Literary Supplement* but also daily papers carried articles on the subject, was a controversial decision by the appointments committee of Cambridge University to deny tenure to an avant-garde critic."

Then Hartman goes on to ponder whether and what reasons could be working behind such quarrels. Hostile answers to these questions are, he says, that "criticism tends to be envious of art or philosophy." It, therefore, tries, he feels, wrongly to imitate them—to be, on the one hand, "logical and rigorous and, on the other, free and perverse. Or that criticism has been affected by market economy, and so is less intellectual than it is entrepreneurial." What this implies is that academic critics want a piece of the action or a method to increase their "rate of production".

This is the reaction of the conservative critics, who dislike the style of new theory-based criticism. They also feel offended by the tendency of the new theoretical critics to involve themselves in an analysis of the language instead of concentrating on an evaluation of the artist and his contribution to society. According to Miller, this is a mistake, as these newer critics are able to uncover the same "powerfully social or supra-personal forces that T.S. Eliot... had called 'tradition' and set in opposition to 'individual talent'." Hartman felt that the two warring factions among critics who had drawn their battle-lines then were separated by their respective styles. The new styles were necessitated by the changes in terms of style in post-modern fiction.

Here, I am not very sure that Hartman's observation is very accurate. I have gone into the difference between the older and new forms of criticism, the latter being more conscious of ideological and/or methodological aspects of their critical position than were the earlier critics. Also, their scepticism enables them to play with their own ideas and language, makes them cynical even, or disables them from making very definite statements about beauty and truth. They are sometimes not even sure that beauty and truth are worthy or real goals. Roland Barthes, for example, says that all discourses, including interpretations, are equally fictive, none stand apart in the place

of truth. But perhaps Hartman was right about the style of the poststructuralists sharing traits with postmodernist fiction. One of the best examples is the later work of Barthes, when he reads the realistic novel *Sarrasine* by Balzac. This reading is a critical performance tending towards creative writing. "Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote" is a story by the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges in which the narrator relates how Menard by copying *Don Quixote* verbatim could produce an entirely original story through the new technique of reading. This paradoxical but very earnest boast is not a merely witty dig at poor readers, but an example of how a short story can also be a piece of literary-theoretical criticism. You have to read the story yourself to be able to appreciate the point I am trying to make. Thus, postmodernist writing and poststructuralist criticism appear to be the two sides of the same coin. You can find the story in Borges's *Labyrinths*.

6.2.3 There Always Was Resistance-2

Resistance to theory has come from different quarters, depending on which individual or group of critics have felt threatened, or whose position is being undermined. For example, traditionally most critics have attached "values" of some kind or the other to literature which they thought were transcendental, applicable to all times and climes. Hence Arnold's "touchstones". Now, many of the theories, such as marxism, deconstruction, reader-response, and some others have seriously questioned the validity of such claims. They either maintain that values are relative, or deny the presence of immanent values. Yet other traditional critics have assumed that literary texts hold meanings in them, and are subject to interpretation. Many theories as we have seen deny this kind of immanence. Thus it is that, and I have given you only two instances of traditional critics finding "theory" inconvenient. The other allegation that the anti-theory brigade has leveled from time to time is that "theory" is full of jargon, and is deliberately confusing. Theory often is metacriticism, and takes us away from literature proper, and takes enjoyment away from literature. Some of these objections are not serious enough, nor critical enough, and can be ignored. However, more considered and acute attacks have been made/raised, and need to be answered and have been answered with a good deal of intellectual seriousness.

Earlier approaches to literature were based on certain assumptions, other than that of transcendental values, such as those of strict categories of gender, individual fixed selfhood, etc. Many of these we used to regard as the basic "givens" of our experience. Theorists of diverse persuasions have made us aware that these are fluid, unstable categories, rather than fixed and reliable essences. For example, in the case of gender, and in Simone de Beauvoir's famous phrasing: One is not born a woman, one becomes one. At the same time many feminists, particularly the Anglo-American school, refuse to use theory on the ground that in academic institutions it is dominated by men; it is presented by them as being hard and intellectual. They still maintain an interest in traditional critical concepts like theme, motif, and characterization. They seem to accept conventions of realism, and treat literature as a series of representations of "reality".

Unlike the traditional critics (the humanist school), theorists generally believe that all thinking and investigation is necessarily affected and largely determined by prior ideological commitment. The notion of disinterested inquiry is therefore untenable: none of us, they would argue, is capable of standing back from the scales and weighing things dispassionately: rather, all investigators have the thumb on one or other side of the scales. Every practical procedure (for instance, in literary criticism) presupposes a theoretical perspective of some kind. To deny this is simply to try to place our own theoretical position beyond scrutiny as something which is "common sense" or "simply given". Opponents of theory find it easy to scuttle this argument by pointing out how the argument itself and any analysis or ideological criticism might be accused of the same predetermination.

Contemporary theory also holds that language itself conditions, limits, and predetermines what we see. Thus, all reality is constructed through language, so that nothing is simply 'there' in an unproblematic way. Everything is a linguistic/textual construct. Language does not *record* reality, it shapes and creates it, so that our whole universe is textual. Further, for the theorist, meaning is jointly constructed by both reader and writer. It is not just 'there' and waiting before we get to the text but requires the reader's contribution to bring it into being.

Under the above conditions it would be futile to offer a definitive reading of any text. Theorists also for the same reasons distrust totalizing notions. The idea of great books, the canonical texts, is to be distrusted because they are born in particular/specific socio-political-economic situations. To give you an example of the last, I quote from Catherine Belsey's "Literature, History, Politics". Criticizing the traditional way of looking at literature she says,

The sole inhabitant of the universe of literature is Eternal Man (and the masculine form is appropriate), whose brooding, feeling presence precedes, determines and transcends history "When we read Chaucer's early poems we feel the author's awareness of how complex and involved the events and circumstances are, of how they defy any single interruption". Discuss.' (Oxford Honors School of English Language and Literature, 'Chaucer and Langland', 1980) Miraculously, Chaucer's awareness of the complexity of it all precisely resembles mine, ours, everyone's. Every liberal's, that is, in the twentieth century: a modern as it precedes and determines the truths inscribed in the English syllabus, the truths examination candidates are required to reproduce.

These are generalized summaries of the grounds of objections. We can take up specific controversies. One of the many strong objections came from, as I have said before, M. H. Abrams. The best way to summarise that controversy may be to quote Abrams' own summary of it. He goes on to quote a number of statements of Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* to the effect, as Miller puts it, that reading is never the objective identifying of a sense but the importation of meaning into a text which has no meaning "in itself." For example: 'Ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them. "In fact interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something. On the face of it, such sweeping deconstructive claims might suggest those of Lewis Carroll's linguistic philosopher, who asserted that meaning is imported into a text by the interpreter's will to power:" (Lodge--Abrams 267).

6.3 PAUL DE MAN'S ANSWER

Paul de Man wrote a lucid statement a year before his death taking the trouble to explain why traditional scholars have resisted theory. He begins by noting that teaching is not so much inter-subjective as a cognitive process in which the self and other are only "tangentially and contiguously involved." He goes on to say that "The only teaching worthy of the name is scholarly, not personal...." Scholarship has to be teachable. In the case of literature, such scholarship involves historical and philological facts as the preparatory condition for an understanding, and methods of reading or interpretation. "As a controlled reflection on the formation of method, theory rightly proves to be entirely compatible with teaching, and one can think of numerous important theoreticians who are or were also prominent scholars." He further argues that for a method that cannot be made to suit the 'truth' of its object can only teach delusion. Various developments suggest, he says, that such a difficulty is an inherent focus of the discourse about literature. It is because of these uncertainties that the hostility directed at theory manifests itself. This also happens in the name of critical and aesthetic values. The most effective of these objections will denounce

theory as an obstacle to scholarship, and consequently to teaching (p.356). After this he embarks on the task of showing whether and why this is the case. According to him, such resistance is a symptom of anxiety caused by their subscription to a false concept of representation. After recognizing this, de Man scornfully dismisses the opposition, and then turns the argument against himself: the resistance to theory is only a displacement of a much deeper resistance, or contradiction, in theory itself.

However, it would be interesting to see what de Man does by way of addressing the entire issue and historicising the theoretical turn, if you permit me the phrase. First, he says that a general statement about literary theory should address such questions as the definition of literature, asking what is literature. It should also begin by discussing the distinction between literary and non-literary uses of language, as well as between literary and non-verbal forms of art. These difficulties lead to a situation where the very attempt to treat literature theoretically may as well resign itself to the fact that it has to start out from empirical considerations.

He then goes on to say, using "empirical considerations", how "we know that over the last fifteen to twenty years, a strong interest in something called literary theory and that in the United States, this interest has at times coincided with the importation and reception of foreign... influences". We also know, he says, that there is a decline in such interest in recent times (1982). This is not *because of* "resistance". On the other hand, he says, the ebb and flow makes the depth of the resistance so manifest. Interestingly enough, he observes that "it is a recurrent strategy of any anxiety to defuse what it considers to be threatening by magnification or minimisation by attributing to it power of which it is bound to fall short."

6.4 RESISTANCE AT THE PRESENT TIME

In his Presidential address at the MLA conference, J. Hillis Miller spoke eloquently but ironically about the "Triumph of Theory". He frequently referred to De Man's essay "Resistance to Theory", and said that resistance had given way to triumph. But the triumph also involves a new kind of resistance from within "Theory", as de Man suggested.

After nearly two decades of the vogue of theory it is impossible to pretend that theory does not exist. It is impossible, whether we are resistant to theory or not, to talk about literature in the same way as the pre-theory practitioners of criticism did. This latter, we say, were in a state of pre-theory innocence. To give you an example, no one can now talk in terms of essences, without qualifying their statements. I have noticed in seminars that the moment someone utters a sentence like "Essentially this means...", they qualifies it by saying, "Of course, it is dangerous to use such words as 'essence' nowadays..."

6.5 HOW TO READ A READER

One of the main reasons, we have just seen, why there has been so much resistance to theory is the latter's difficulty. Though the original intentions are noble, commentators, in trying to explain, paraphrase, summarise, or simplify these theorists, often complicate or misrepresent original writings. I am myself guilty of having done that in this block. So, the best thing to do would be to read them in the original. But this is easier said than done.

I reproduce below, often paraphrasing, Barry's tips on how to read theoretical works of theorists like Derrida, De Man or Foucault. If you use them, you might find reading theory a less frustrating experience than you would, if you go through the guides. This reading technique is known as 'SQ3R (or, RRR)'.

'S' stands for *survey*; 'Q' for *questions*; the three 'R's for *read, recall, review*, in that order. Thus when you are up against a difficult work first make a rapid survey of it, noting its main argument. Remember that information is not evenly spread throughout a text. It tends to be concentrated in the opening and closing paragraphs (where you often get useful summaries of the whole), and the 'hinge points' of the argument are often indicated in the opening and closing sentences of paragraphs. 'Q' makes you an 'active' reader rather than a passive one, and gives your reading a purpose.

For 'R1' use a pencil if the copy is your own to underline key points, query difficulties, circle phrases worth remembering, and so on. Do not just sit in front of the pages. If the book is not your own jot *something* down on paper as you read, however minimal.

For 'R2' jot down some summary points without looking up what you have read. Ask yourself whether your initial questions have been answered. If not jot down some of the difficulties that remain.

For 'R3' allow some time to elapse after the last reading, maybe the following day. Before reading the book again review by putting down what you have gained from earlier readings. Try to remind yourself of the question you set your self, the points you jotted down at the recall stage. If this produces little result, refer to your notes. If they make little sense, then repeat S, and do a fast R1 concentrating on the first and last paragraphs.

6.6 LET US SUM UP

We have examined in this unit some grounds on which theory received resistance. I have also provided you with some of the answers that apologists for theory came up with. I have given you the context in which both of these took place. This as you may have observed is a kind of battle for supremacy, of power in academic institutions. I leave it to you to judge whether the resistance was justified; and also the relative merit or otherwise of claims and counterclaims.

6.7 QUESTIONS

1. From what you have read so far, criticism or theory as you would have it has always existed. What do you think is the reason behind the whole debate of meta-criticism?

6.8 SUGGESTED READING

Abrams, M.H. "The Deconstructing Angel" in Lodge

Peter Barry, *Issues in Contemporary Critical Theory*. Macmillan Casebook, 1987.

Lodge, David. Ed. *Modern criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Longman 1988.

Ahmed, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1992.

Baldick, Chris. *The Social Mission Of English Studies 1848-1932*.

Widdowson, Peter. *Re-reading English*.

Palmer, D.J. *The Rise of English Studies*.

NOTES