
UNIT 1 SOME BASIC ISSUES

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 An Era of 'Posts'
- 1.2 Subjectivity
- 1.3 Representation and Representability
- 1.4 Otherness
- 1.5 Where do we go from here?
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Questions
- 1.8 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to give you an idea (a bare minimum idea) of some of the basic issues that contemporary literary theory has come up against from the early sixties to the late eighties. Some of the issues have already been touched upon at some length in the blocks on Feminist Criticism, Ideological Criticism and Deconstruction. And yet a kind of overview is needed at this point even if occasionally some kind of duplication becomes unavoidable.

1.1 AN ERA OF 'POSTS'

Poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonial criticism are some of the 'posts' that go into the making of contemporary theory. Three broad strands that go into poststructuralism are deconstruction (already dealt with in Block 7) psychoanalysis (to be taken up by in this Block) and Foucault's views on discourse and power. While postmodernism is a broader umbrella term which covers a wide range of areas from politics to music and architecture, poststructuralism stands for a variety of critical practices and theoretical agendas that arose out of structuralism as both a reaction to and modification of many of its (structuralism's) tenets. It is mainly since the mid-1960s that poststructuralism in its many forms has asserted itself as the leading radical critique of earlier concerns with language, culture and mind.

The block on deconstruction has already tackled many of these issues and the unit on psychoanalysis in this block will tackle some more. That takes care of Derrida and Lacan. As for Foucault, his view of power is somewhat at variance with the classical Marxist view of power. Classical Marxists have been of the view that power is always in the hands of those who control the economic 'base', the means of production and is exercised primarily either through the State's judicial and legislative functions or through the exploitation of the worker. Foucault takes the position that theories of government and the traditional analyses of their mechanisms do not exhaust the field where power functions and is exercised. We shall talk more about Foucault in the unit on postcolonial theory.

As for postcolonialism, it refers to a historical phase undergone by many of the world's countries (in Asia and Africa mainly) after the decline of European empires by the mid-twentieth century. When people of so many Asian, African and Caribbean countries were left to take stock of their postcolonial culture and take a closer look at the cultural, economic, legal and linguistic effects of colonial rule (once

empires got dismantled), the postcolonial era started and new national identities came up in a big way. That, however, is too vast a field and a subsequent unit in this block will, therefore, restrict itself to a part of colonial discourse analysis/postcolonial theory.

Colonialism, modernism and structuralism are not quite dead and what is needed is to have a changed and meaningful relationship with their residual forms.

1.2 SUBJECTIVITY

In the past century, we have witnessed a remarkable growth of philosophical and psychological theories that take the nature and processes of the human mind as their starting point. Developments like psychoanalysis have highlighted the role of unconscious processes and there has been an erosion of the importance of 'facts' or 'objects' and the fixity of 'things'. The conception of the individual as a unified 'subject' has been abandoned and the subject is now seen as a product of linguistic or discursive practices. The individual is no longer seen as possessed of full control or initiative (agency). In humanist and some Marxist theories the subject is seen as capable of thought and hence capable of considerable choice and action. Most varieties of poststructuralism are critical of such an identity of agent and subject.

The recent position, by and large, is that 'subjects' are seen as constructed through discourse or ideology and hence incapable of acting or thinking outside the limits of that construction. The word 'ideology' needs to be explained a bit here. Many senses of the term have emerged in the Marxist tradition. At its simplest level ideology refers to the forms of social consciousness (political, religious, aesthetic, etc.) which both legitimise the ruling class and express their interests. The Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci came up with idea that the ruling classes exercise a 'hegemony' through an ideological domination which includes a mastery over the people's 'common sense' of things. In this context, the views of the French Marxist thinker Louis Althusser are significant. He believed that we are all the 'subjects' of ideology which requires us to take our places in the social structure. This interpretation (the central operation by which ideology assigns to the individual human being an identity as a 'subject') works through the material 'state apparatuses' in law, religion, education etc. Althusser defines ideology as a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real condition of existence. This imaginary consciousness helps us to make sense of the world and also obscures or represses our real relationship with the world.

Ideology in any case, has been dealt with at length in Block 5 so we can leave it at that. Suffice it to say, that a variety of factors are seen by contemporary theory as affecting subjectivity.

There is no denying that literary study in recent years has moved a little away from an orientation toward language as such and moved toward history, culture, society, politics, institutions, gender conditions, the social context and the material base. Even so, language remains important. Let us now move to some basic issues in contemporary theory mainly as they relate to language.

1.3 REPRESENTATION AND REPRESENTABILITY

The general programme of poststructuralism was to posit freeplay, difference, otherness, deferral of meaning, and identity. The process by which a piece of writing is said to produce meaning is seen by deconstructionists as subject to constant

subversion by a number of factors. What is sought to be exploited to the full is the endless freeplay leading to a contradictory (or at the least 'undecidable') relationship between the literal and figurative levels of the meanings of the text. This is accompanied by the difficulty of choosing between the competing and contradictory meanings of texts. Jonathan Culler points out that what deconstruction calls into question is our inclination to use notions of unity and thematic coherence to exclude possibilities that are manifestly awakened by language and that pose a problem.

One of the notions that came up powerfully in American deconstruction (especially in the work of Paul de Man) was that the specificity of literary language resides in the possibility of misreading and misinterpretation and that the wisdom of the text is self-destructive. It has to be noted that this self-destruction is infinitely placed in a series of successive reversals. There are hidden articulations and fragmentations within a seemingly 'unified' text. These need to be foregrounded by the literary critic.

Tropes (figures of speech like the metaphor) pervade language. They exert a force which destabilizes logic and thus denies the possibility of a straightforwardly literal or referential use of language. In this way, both representation and representability are subject to the rhetorical character of language and a gap is bound to remain always between what is sought to be stated and what actually comes through, because signification as a process is strikingly fluid.

The state of affairs is made still more complicated by notions like 'death of the author' gaining currency under the influence of the work of people like the French thinker Roland Barthes. Barthes is against the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, the source of its meaning, and the only authority for interpretation. In Barthes's view, the author is at best a location where language crosses and recrosses. Language itself, in this view, is an infinite storehouse of citations, repetitions, echoes and references. Readers are free to take their pleasure out of the text and to follow the vagaries of the signifier (the word is used to put across an idea) as it slides away, evading the grasp of the signified (the referent).

1.4 'OTHERNESS'

The word "other" has become current in critical theory and you will find it used often to signify the marginalised or the colonised. Jacques Lacan, when he uses the word 'other' without a capital 'O', means by it, the imaginary self which is first formed during the mirror stage when the infant confronts his or her own image. When used with a capital letter the term the 'Other' refers to the unconscious. It is the symbolic place, the site upon which the subject is constituted, the something which it lacks but must seek.

In theories of ideology and in cultural studies, the 'other' is defined by the norms of a dominant social order dictated by sexuality, race or ethnicity. Similarly, in postcolonialism the colonial subject is contradictorily imagined as simultaneously demeaned and ennobled in ways which reflect internal divisions within the colonizer. As in so many other contexts, the polarities of 'us' and 'other' are largely unstable.

Otherness has been extensively invoked by postcolonial theory. It is important for postcolonial critical discourses to take into account the Otherness that constitutes the symbolic domain of psychic and social identifications. The very act of articulating cultural differences calls into question and at the same time acknowledges the Other, neither reducing the Third World to some homogeneous Other of the West nor celebrating the astonishing pluralism of human cultures. 'Otherness has to be carefully deployed as a weapon and it should not be overdone as sometimes happens in contemporary theory. The Lacanian angle on otherness is that it should be seen in conjunction with 'desire'. More of that in the unit on psychoanalysis.

1.5 WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

'Meaning', 'reading', 'representation', 'identity', 'subjectivity', 'authorship' have all been questioned by contemporary theory. Deconstruction, in conjunction with some other strands of poststructuralism, along with the skepticism that goes into postmodernism, has led to a climate where 'logics of disintegration' have dominated. The note of caution sounded by James E.B. Breslin in his 1965 work *From Modern to Contemporary* is still quite relevant. Breslin stated:

Drinking from the heady waters of the Derridean critique, a literary critic, now empowered with the means of revealing the limits not just of the language of competing critical schools but of the language of western thought itself might well feel elated until he remembers that his method, breeding suspicion of all systems, leaves him disillusioned, impotent and empty within the present form of a structure he himself has characterized as totalitarian (p.260).

Also under attack from poststructuralism and postmodernism has been the liberal humanist tradition as a whole. Again one rejoinder to deconstruction is worth reproducing. In his 1983 book, *Counter-Modernism in Current Critical Theory*, Geoffrey Thurley states:

The deconstructionist who tries to show that a text is in contradiction with itself and thus, in some way, demonstrating the necessary failure of discourse to achieve 'closure' or definite meaning is likely to forget that no matter what meanings the text juxtaposes, aligns or harmonizes, they constitute a whole which requires interpretation and which is, in a serious sense, as incapable of contradicting itself as of referring to itself (p.157)

A different set of problems come up in the matter of the interpretative anarchy which results from giving readers absolute freedom to 'read' texts in any way they like. Critics like Culler have suggested a check through the 'convention of reading' but this anarchy can go too far at the cost of authorial intention.

These are some of the things that have come in the wake of literary theory. These have partly destabilized the relatively much more placid field of literary study as it stood during the heyday of New Criticism. With its analytical, speculative and interdisciplinary bias, literary theory has opened up the field and has made it much more self-reflexive than it was before. These are positive gains. The debate over the nature and function of reading and writing that came on the heels of structural linguistics and cultural analysis has coincided with a desire to understand how other systems of signs offer frameworks which determine how we read and make sense of our experience and how we produce meaning 'in the world' and construct our own identity. There has also been a general thrust in the direction of 'demystification' of various kinds. Canon-formations of earlier times are either giving way or allowing room for considerable decanonising. This means that the awe with which certain writers and their works were looked at is no longer there in the same way. 'Literariness' as such (the notion that the literary or the 'poetic' function of language has some special status) is also losing ground.

The shrillness of the debates is sometimes disconcerting. Theory should be used to make us more alert to nuances of various kinds of texts and even of 'agendas' (hidden or otherwise) accompanying them but some room for openness must remain. Also, let theory not become more important than the creative text.

Formalisms of various kinds, experimentation of the modernist variety, close textual analysis do all have their uses and so does holding on to poetry or literature as a space that needs some guarantees against threats of extinction. At the same time popular literature also has its own value. Our approach should be more inclusive and less rigid, though rigour should not be abandoned at all.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

Literary theory has opened up new spaces for readers as well as writers. Meaning, representation, reading, authorship have all been problematized in the wake of poststructuralism and sweeping generalisations of various kinds about literature, literariness and other related matters are no longer fashionable. Some skepticism has come along with these developments but the gains too have been many. Context now is again getting as much attention as text did during the heyday of New Criticism. There is now greater awareness of the way discursive formations are constructed and how they operate in the world at large. 'Politics' of various kinds of writing and various critical stances is sought to be singled out. Reading itself is no longer a simple straightforward thing. Literature is not simply an innocent account of pink sunsets and yellow roses. It is also about politics and hidden agendas. One is on the lookout for a number of things one did not bother too much about a few decades ago.

Theory should be used with temperance, without shrillness and without extreme, hardened positions. Attention to the 'textuality' of the text (the ways in which its linguistic features call attention to themselves in their own right) is a must. Certain epochs in literary history are being looked at with some hostility (modernist experimentation, for example). That hostility will have to be toned down somewhat. At the same time greater openness should be there to take in issues related to gender, race and ethnicity.

1.7 QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions in your own words. You may like to refer to the earlier Blocks in the course.

1. How has 'subjectivity' been affected by developments in literary theory in the last three to four decades?
2. What difference is there between otherness (without capitalization) and 'Otherness' (with capitalization)?
3. In which direction does literary theory need to move if it is not to push out literature as a category altogether?
4. Has literary theory taught us greater awareness of the linguistic dimension of texts? Does that have a precedent in structuralism?

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

James E.P. Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Paul de Man, *Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

UNIT 2 POSTMODERNISM: THE BASICS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Departures from Modernism
- 2.2 Jean Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard
- 2.3 The View from within Literary Criticism
- 2.4 *Midnight's Children* as a postmodernist text.
- 2.5 Points of Convergence with Poststructuralism
- 2.6 Implications for Us
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Suggested Readings
- 2.9 Key Words

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to familiarize you with the basics of postmodernism. The views of two French thinkers (Lyotard and Baudrillard) and of two literary critics (Ihab Hassan and Linda Hutcheon) would also be briefly discussed. The postmodernist features of Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* will be touched upon as also postmodernism's points of convergence with poststructuralism. Special attention will be paid to the mood of skepticism that has been brought about by the cumulative impact of these two critical approaches.

2.1 DEPARTURES FROM MODERNISM

Modernism is a cover term for certain tendencies in early twentieth century art and literature. The motivating slogan at the back of these tendencies was 'make it new'. You have already looked at texts like *The Waste Land* (T.S. Eliot) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (James Joyce) as part of your British Poetry and British Novel courses. That should give you some idea as to how texts such as these looked different and 'new' as compared to those written earlier. Experimentation was always looked upon favourably

The heyday of Modernism was the period between 1910 and 1930. Postmodernism fully came into its own in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. What marks it is a mood of radical indeterminacy and a tone of self-conscious skepticism towards previous certainties in personal, intellectual and political life. Modernism also has skepticism but of a less absolute kind. Also, postmodernism is satisfied with surfaces whereas Modernism did strive for a certain kind of 'depth'. Postmodernism's fascination is with popular art forms and its mood is less elegiac than that of Modernism. Postmodernism does not fully abandon modernism's mood of alienation. However, whereas the modernist writer was more keen on trying to wrest a meaning from the world through myth, symbol or formal complexity, the postmodernist writer greets absurdity or meaningless existence with an indifference which combines resignation, fatigue and playfulness. Most postmodernist narratives have great self-reflexivity which means that they double back on their own presuppositions, assumptions and ways of telling the story.

2.2 JEAN FRANCOIS LYOTARD AND JEAN BAUDRILLARD

Jean Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard have provided the philosophical framework for postmodernism. Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition* has proved to be the major text for debates on postmodernism. Baudrillard's book *Simulations* (first translated into English in 1983) theorized the 'loss of the real'. Lyotard's main argument is that the 'truth claims' and assumed consensus on which a lot of history and its 'grand narratives' stand are an illusion. The 'grand narratives' (talk in terms of progress through rationality) are untenable and repressive. They lack credibility. They impose restrictive boundaries on an otherwise pluralist cultural formation. They delimit discourse and exclude or marginalise voices that do not suit the dominant groups.

Baudrillard's main contention is that 'the real' is now defined in terms of the media in which it moves. The pervasive influence of images from television and advertising has led to a loss of the distinction between the real and the imagined. The same is true of the distinction between reality and illusion and between surface and depth which have also disappeared.

To help us make better sense of these developments Frederic Jameson offers the phrase 'the cultural logic of late capitalism' for the cultural and social condition prevailing in advanced capitalist societies since the 1960s, the period in which capitalism entered a new phase of crisis.

One related danger is 'commodity fetishism'. By this is meant the continuous celebration of the products of late twentieth century capitalist society. That attitude almost approves of our inability to break free from the great communicational networks encompassing the world in which we find ourselves caught as 'subjects' (the term 'subject' points not only to individuality but also to the fact of being subjected or subordinated to non-subjective determinants).

2.3 THE VIEW FROM WITHIN LITERARY CRITICISM

At present, two literary critics can be considered important chroniclers of postmodernism. The first is Ihab Hassan. His 1975 book *Paracriticisms* equates postmodernism with anti-elitism and anti-authoritarianism. He visualizes art as becoming communal, participatory, optional and irony becoming self-consuming play. The writer he had in mind most of the time was Samuel Beckett. The theme of the absent centre is crucial to Hassan's work.

The second critic is Linda Hutcheon, the author of *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1989), who sees postmodernist fiction as subversive and complicit at the same time. She places a lot of value on its parodic and self-critical mode. She makes a lot of the play she finds in novels like the Canadian, Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* and sees postmodernists using irony in ways different from the way the modernists do. Her use is clearly more inclusive. Hutcheon sees postmodernist fiction as "historiographic metafiction" and envisions it as a mode which self-consciously problematises the making of fiction and history. Conventions are used, abused and subverted in postmodern literature through the use of irony and parody.

2.4 MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN AS A POSTMODERNIST TEXT

Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1983) which is concerned with the 'life' of Saleem Sinai who was born at midnight on August 15, 1947 is a good example of a postmodernist text. Rushdie seeks to challenge the conventional narrative through blurred boundaries of discourse, through textual play, through explicit or implicit parody and through the hybridization of language. Chaotic multiplicity and plenitude is celebrated as are creative tensions between personal and national identity. The narrator's self is subject to fluidity. His dealings with Padma are sometimes mocking and sometimes loving. He keeps mocking his own self all the time. The hold of realism is loosened through fantasy. The 'local' is celebrated as we find in the loving care which Rushdie bestows on details of Bombay life. Irony is playful and liberating. The family's fortunes and the nation's fortunes are subjected to the same flippancy. Most of the lineages, origins, cultural and religious practices, political manipulations and the working of media all are subjected to a playful treatment. Mimicry also has an important role in the proceedings. Ideas about origins, centre, presence and historical explanation itself are undetermined all the time. More than this, an element of the mock-heroic is also at work. Exaggerations of various kinds and the element of bathos (anti-climax), introduced at crucial points in the narrative are all part of the overall playful thrust. Desire and nostalgia merge in such a way that the 'subject' caught in their net emerges as quite fluid and provisional. Events of the Emergency period and of the war of Bangladesh liberation are given a playful treatment and the parodic element is ever-present. Dreams mingle with reality, mystery with magic and truth with fantasy.

Some other notable postmodern texts also need to be mentioned. Allen Ginsberg's poem 'Howl', Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, Gunter Grass's novel *The Tin Drum* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* all have a palpable presence of postmodern features in them. Sometimes the name given to fiction of this kind is 'magic realism'. This term refers to the techniques of combining the realistic depiction of events and characters with elements of the fantastic often drawn from myth, dreams and fairy tales. Mostly there is a lot of comment on the way the narrative itself got made and on the status (reliability or otherwise) of the narrator himself/herself.

2.5 POINTS OF CONVERGENCE WITH POSTSTRUCTURALISM

The major point of convergence between poststructuralism and postmodernism is that both are seen as part of the 'logics of disintegration', (the title of Peter Dews's 1987 book) where he sees Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan together as being the major figures putting forward these logics of disintegration. So some of those who do not look favourably on both postmodernism and poststructuralism take the sweeping position that there is little to choose between the two. They say that in 1979 (the year of the publication of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*) poststructuralism changed names and found its act replaced by postmodernism. That may not be a very accurate way of putting it but the validity of this common criticism of the two trends remains. The common criticism is that both contribute to the logics of disintegration.

Here we need to know a little about 'modernity'. This is a name for the post-feudal era which thinkers like the German Jurgen Habermas treat as one of progressive enlightenment or rationalization. One could say that we have long been under the sway of reason in the pursuit of rational laws and procedures. By choosing the words

'postmodernism' and 'postmodernity' to characterize the contemporary era, Lyotard was implicitly criticizing Habermas. Lyotard's basic position is that in the contemporary historical situation the old European master-narratives of progressive subjective enlightenment and rational liberation (especially liberal humanism and Marxism) no longer apply. Truth can no longer be seen as the possession of a rational subject, nor is it a property of a reality that could be described objectively, using objective scientific methods. The so-called 'truth' and 'reality' are determined by the effectivity of knowledge within a particular economic situation dominated by corporations possessing the power not only to shape the world but to say what counts as a scientific truth regarding that world. Most of these awarenesses are reinforced by what Baudrillard has to say about virtual reality or the fact of 'the real' being defined in terms of the media in which it moves. The work of Derrida, Lacan, Foucault and Roland Barthes collectively undermines subjectivity as agency and 'truth' as enabling.

2.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR US

The implications that this kind of a scenario has for us in the 'third world' or in developing countries are far from reassuring. Most of the time we end up being dictated to (directly or indirectly, crudely or subtly) on what constitutes 'reality' and 'truth' in a single-super-power world i.e. a world dominated by the United States of America and its close allies. Consumerism and commodity fetishism have also contributed to our being largely at the receiving end of 'the postmodern condition.'

Another danger is that of the 'degree zero of contemporary general culture'. Thus one listens to reggae; watches a western; eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner; wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong (*The Postmodern Condition* p.76). The hybridization of cultural forms can hypothetically lead to a scenario where some Hindu young men, somewhat fundamentalist in outlook, dance to the beat of updated Sufi music, the full significance of which may be lost on them.

In its extreme Baudrillardian form, the 'loss of the real' may seem to give legitimacy to a callous indifference to disaster and suffering. Think of Baudrillard's notorious comment in which he stated that the Gulf War (involving Iraq on the one hand and western powers on the other) never happened, that what 'really' took place was a kind of tele-visual virtual reality.

Also, marginalized people like the Blacks or those who are doubly marginalized (like Black women) can never feel comfortable in a postmodern setting unless they are given a greater say in the processes of development. In that sense, postmodernism is rightly seen by some Black feminist critics as something primarily for and by comfortable white intellectuals. In any event, anywhere in the world, postmodernism's recycled emptiness and superficiality can always be seen as a cultural crisis.

And yet, to most of us, any absolute wishing away of the effects of postmodernism as a condition is not quite feasible. The experiences of living in a global civilization are forcing a kind of unavoidable relativism upon us. On the positive side, postmodernism is a release from restrictive assumptions and elitist hierarchies. It encourages popular culture and makes us realize that there are as many realities as there are cultures and that the overall scene has become a bazaar of realities.

In any event, holding on to 'history' in a monolithic sense is becoming increasingly difficult. Ours has largely become an era of instantaneous history where technology is capable of making the future obsolete even before the present has vanished. Ideas about origins, centre, presence and historical explanation are continually being

undermined. There is a pluralizing and a dispersal at work about which we cannot do much. We might well say with Yeats; "Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold" — we live in a world with several centres and several margins and all of them inter-related in exceedingly complex and ever-changing ways. Ruptures, intertextuality etc. can create space for new and varied forms of bonding which fully accommodate difference, the global and the local.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

Modernism was an impulse for novelty in the early 20th century literature and arts. It flowered between 1910 and 1930 mainly through the work of the high Modernists like James Joyce and T.S. Eliot. Postmodernism's concern is with surface style and postmodern writing has greater self-reflexivity.

Lyotard and Baudrillard have offered a philosophical framework for postmodernism, the former with his stress on the need to be incredulous towards grand narratives and the latter with 'the loss of the real' to virtual reality created largely by the new information and communication technologies. Ihab Hassan and Linda Hutcheon are two literary critics who have theorized about postmodernism.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* is a representative postmodernist text. It has self-reflexivity, magic realism, fictionality, parody and hybridity of styles. It also makes full use of 'play' and takes liberties with 'history' as it is generally understood.

Poststructuralism and postmodernism have reinforced each other in the area of the 'logics of disintegration'. Subjectivity and agency and the possibilities of change have suffered erosion in the face of their onslaught. Rationality and scientific thought — two cornerstones of 'modernity' — have also suffered erosion. A number of things which postmodernism stands for are not very palatable to peoples of the so-called 'Third World' where suffering is a real thing and not part of some virtual or discursive reality.

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. In what respects is postmodernism different from Modernism?
2. Why is Jean Francois Lyotard distrustful of grand narratives?
3. In what terms does Jean Baudrillard spell out "the loss of the real"?
4. What are the postmodernistic features of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*?
5. How do both postmodernism and poststructuralism contribute to the 'logics of disintegration'?

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Peter Dews *Logics of Disintegration*, London, New York: Verso, 1987

Ihab Hassan *Paracriticism Urbana*: Illinois University Press, 1975.

Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 1988.

The Politics of Postmodernism, London: Routledge, 1989.

Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

2.10 KEY WORDS

grand narratives:

Theories like Marxism and trends like liberal humanism which try to explain issues in totalizing terms.

Hypernality/loss of the real:

In Baudrillard's thought it is synonymous with the most developed form of simulation – changed relations of the image to its real-life referent. Such images are free from all reference to the real.

postmodernism:

In a broad sense it is a term for a cultural condition prevailing in advanced capitalist societies since the 1960s.

poststructuralism:

It is a continuation as well as a critique of structuralism. Structuralism put forth the idea that meanings are produced within language or other modes of signification. Poststructuralism shares this idea with structuralism but questions the idea of a closed system. 'Deconstruction' is one of the major forms of poststructuralism.

UNIT 3 PSYCHOANALYSIS: FREUD AND LACAN

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Freud and Lacan : Introductory Remarks
- 3.2 Freud's Main Ideas
- 3.3 Lacan's Main Ideas
- 3.4 The 'case' of Stephen Dedalus
- 3.5 The Impact of Psychoanalysis
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Key Words

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Our purpose in this unit is to give you a basic idea of what psychoanalytic criticism is and of notions like identity, sexuality, 'the unconscious' and 'desire' within the framework of the main ideas of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. These two are the leading figures in the field of psychoanalysis whose theories have had a lot to do with literature and with literary theory as it has developed in our century.

3.1 FREUD AND LACAN: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

First of all, the question — what is psychoanalytic criticism? Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* defines it as "a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature" (p.96). Freud had developed certain theories about how the mind works and how sexual instincts impact on human behaviour. By interpreting dreams and allowing patients to make free associations of ideas, the psychoanalyst could get some glimpse of the working of the unconscious side of the mind. Broadly then, the psychoanalytic critic would also try to unravel the unconscious elements in the mind of the author, the characters. However, psychoanalytic criticism is much more complex than this simple description would have you believe. And as we look further at the ideas of Freud and Lacan you will know what we mean.

Sigmund Freud (1851-1939), an Austrian, was a practicing psychoanalyst. In his early career he examined cases of hysteria. At a later point, identity, sexuality, and the unconscious also became his concerns. His biggest contribution has been that he gave us new and powerful ways of looking at human thought and behaviour.

A re-reading of Freud's theories in the light of linguistics was offered by the French thinker Jacques Lacan (1901-81). The most significant part of his work is on subjectivity and desire. 'Otherness' and 'lack' are tied up with these. Lacan's style is quite knotty but often the complexity is a result of the idea with which he happens to be struggling at that time. He too was a practicing psychoanalyst. His writings were published in French in the 1930s but the full impact of his work on the English-speaking world came much later. The 1966 publication of his *Ecrits* in English is an important event in this regard.

Here our concern is mainly with those parts of Freud's thought which have influenced literary theory the most. A number of these have been mediated, in recent

times, by Lacan's thought. So, in a sense, Lacan is of as much value to present day literary theory as Freud because his work substantially brings in the linguistic dimension to psychoanalysis. The linguistic aspect is extremely crucial to a large part of literary theory as we know it today.

3.2 FREUD'S MAIN IDEAS

Freud's view of the 'the unconsciousness' will be our starting point. From these we shall move to child psychology, sexuality and the interpretation of dreams.

Freud believed that the larger part of the individual's mental processes were unconscious. On account of the powerful taboos attached to certain sexual impulses, a number of them come to be 'repressed' i.e. actively excluded from conscious awareness. At the same time, there are a number of things in our mental make-up on which we do not have much conscious control. Many conscious processes also become latent soon after being conscious for a short period. That does not rule out the possibility of their becoming conscious again.

One variety of 'the unconscious' is that which gets transformed into conscious material more easily and under conditions which are available to us more frequently. The other is where such a transformation is not that easy. In some cases the transformation does not come about at all. Freud's concern is more with the second variety of 'the unconscious'.

Psychoanalysis as therapy is also referred to as a kind of 'talking cure'. Freud came upon a method of analysis in which patients would say whatever came to their mind regardless of how seemingly meaningless it was. Freud's special interest was in patients with neurotic symptoms which pointed to unresolved conflicts between their unconscious inclinations or feeling and the repressive demands of the ego.

That brings us to the three 'psychic zones' as they were spelt out by Freud. These are 'the ego' 'the id' and 'the superego'. 'The id' is crucial because it is tied up with the libido i.e. sexual energy. 'The id' is in fact the reservoir of the libido. It knows no 'good' or 'evil'. It goes for the pleasure principle which is the primordial life principle. All it has is an impulse to obtain satisfaction for instinctual needs. As such, it is largely the source of our desires and our aggressions. It does not have much regard for moral restraint, social conventions, legality or ethics.

In view of these potentialities of 'the id' other psychic zones are needed to protect the individual and society. One of these, 'the ego', is a kind of rational governing agent of the psyche. 'The ego' is largely governed by 'the world out there'. It regulates the instinctual drives of 'the id' so that release may be found for them in non-destructive behaviour patterns.

The third 'psychic zone' is 'the superego' which is a kind of moral censoring agency. This one is the advocate of the leaning toward perfection. When 'the ego' tries to restrain 'the id', it does so on account of practical considerations. The superego, in comparison, brings to the proceedings a touch of idealism. In that sense it is tied up with 'the higher things' in life. So, one could establish a correspondence of sorts by linking 'the id' to the pleasure principle, 'the ego' to the reality principle and 'the superego' to the morality principle.

Child psychology and sexuality are among important aspects of Freud's thought. Freud saw the child passing through a series of 'phases' each marked by the dominance of a particular 'erogenous zone' i.e. a portion of our system where pleasure comes to be largely localized. These 'phases' are phases in erotic development in the child's first five years or so. The three zones are the oral zone,

the anal zone and the genital zone. These zones have to do not only with pleasure in stimulation but also with the gratification of vital human needs like food and expulsion of excreta. During the first phase the child derives satisfaction through sucking and this is pleasurable. The next leading sensations for the child are anal. Expulsion brings relief to the child by removing the source of tension. Then comes a stage of preoccupation with the genitals. The name for this zone is 'the phallic erogenous zone'.

Around the age of five, the child's devotion to his mother and his identification with his father start proceeding side by side until his sexual wishes in regard to his mother start asserting themselves. This is when what has been called 'the Oedipus complex' starts manifesting itself. His father now comes to be seen as an obstacle. The wish that starts taking shape is to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother. Further manifestations of 'the Oedipus complex' are fear of castration and identification of the father with authority.

We now come to Freud's ideas about the interpretation of dreams. We shall stick to only the essentials of his work in this area.

A dream is seen by Freud as a disguised fulfillment of a suppressed or repressed wish. In that sense, it comes to be a kind of 'compromise' between the demands of impulses and the intensity of the various repressing forces. What needs to be kept in mind here is that dreams are only one part of our access to 'the unconscious'. Jokes, bunglings, misreadings, failures of memory and unaccountable slips of the tongue all belong to the same category. In the case of jokes it applies more to jokes with a libidinal, anxious or aggressive content. Freud stressed that the interpretation of dreams is 'the royal road' to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind. In that sense the dream is only an extended study of the conscious, and, at the same time, an argument for the unconscious.

'Dream work', a key term in Freud's work *Interpretation of Dreams* refers to the process or piece of mental activity of which 'dream thoughts' (the latent content which gives the dream its sense or meaning) are converted into the dream-content. Condensation, displacement, representation and secondary revision are four activities that go into dream-work. Briefly, condensation comes about when the manifest dream has a smaller content than the latent one and is thus an abbreviated translation of it. The dream by itself may put on a disguise. Representation refers to the transposition of thought into imagery and 'secondary revision' is part of the mind's attempt to order, to revise, to supplement the contents of a dream so as to bring about an accessible or intelligible item (at a later point Freud excluded 'secondary revision' from 'dream-work').

Devices like displacement and condensation not only disguise the expressed fears and wishes contained in the dream, they fashion various kinds of material into something which can be represented in a dream i.e. images, symbols and metaphors. In other words, abstract ideas or feelings get converted into concrete images. The disguising of the repressed fears and wishes has a role in getting them past the censor which normally does not allow them to surface into the conscious mind.

3.3 LACAN'S MAIN IDEAS

We stated earlier in the unit that Lacan offered a re-reading of Freud's theories in the light of linguistics. In the 1950s and 1960s he developed a structuralist theory of psychoanalysis based largely on the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. The important thing to note in this connection is that Lacan did not import a stable linguistic theory into psychoanalysis. His goal, rather, was that the encounter

between Freud and Saussure should lead to a re-thinking of the work of both thinkers in the light of the other person's work.

One of Lacan's famous utterances is that the unconscious is structured like a language. By this he means that the unconscious used linguistic means of self-expression and that the unconscious is an orderly network, as complex as the structure of language. What the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language. 'The subject' is seen by Lacan as an effect of language in that its 'position' and 'identity' is constituted by language. Language mostly names that which is not present and substitutes a linguistic sign for it when the child starts entering the language system.

Three 'orders' (or cognitive dimensions) are central to Lacan's thought. These are distinctions developed by Lacan to describe the phases in the constitution of the psychic subject. The first, 'the Imaginary', is the dimension in which there is no clear distinction between subject and object; no central self exists to set the object apart from the subject. The 'Symbolic' order is the realm of language. It sets off the subject on a quest for the unobtainable lost object. The 'Real' is beyond language and abstractly defined in Lacan as a realm of the impossible. All that cannot be represented in the Imaginary and the Symbolic belongs here.

In Lacan's scheme of things, our being is founded not on unity but on rupture, the initial experience of being ripped out of a fullness of being and being separated from the object (the mother) that provided us with it. With the initiation of the Symbolic order, the original desire for the mother is repressed. It is like the signified being made absent by the signifier. That is because the signified as Lacan sees it, 'slides' beneath a signifier which 'floats'. Words and meanings have a life of their own and constantly obscure and override the supposed clarity and 'simplicity' of external reality. Language, as an intractable material in its own right, creates by its materiality a barrier between the signifier (the words) and the signified (their referent).

According to Lacan, that which introduces "lack" and "gap" into the operations of the subject is "the other". The subject can only be the unstable effect of meaning, never its master. In its 'otherness', in its exclusion from the imaginary, it is the cause of the lack which initiates desire. 'The other' guarantees the indestructibility of desire by helping to keep the goals of desire in perpetual flight.

'Desire' is that which begins to take shape in the margin in which 'demand' becomes separated from 'need'. In Lacan 'need' is that which can be satisfied by the acquisition of a specific object, and "demand" is that which is addressed to another and seeks reciprocity. Desire involves both 'need' and 'demand' but is not reducible to either. It is directed towards the fantasy constructions that govern the endless search for a satisfactory object in the world, a search that begins with the 'castration complex'. Another thing to note in this context is that 'the phallus', for Lacan, is a signifier of 'lack' – not an actual organ. It stands for 'the law of the father' and the fear of castration. It is experienced as separation and loss in relation to the maternal body.

As Lacan sees the symbolic order, the power of law is above all the power to establish relationship through speech and through the act of naming. The dominant figure of the father is conceived of not as a particular individual, but rather as an abstraction of the paternal role, which is characterized by its privileged possession of the mother and its function as the enforcer of the law. When the male child himself identifies with the father's role, his position is that having been forced to give up his claim to the mother, he receives in exchange his own claim to a place within the order of language and culture.

3.4 THE CASE OF STEPHEN DEDALUS

Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* helps us to make better sense of how a boy's identity emerges in Lacan's re-reading. A sense of separation and loss expands Stephen's language at the end of each cycle of the linguistic flow. His mind moves back and forth between an attractive maternal image and a threatening paternal one. There are 'sunderings' from both parents and these contribute to his growth when he sets off in a new direction to find another world after one of his worlds has been threatened. It involves a transformed maternity, a shifting of language. The 'sunderings' in Stephen's case are tied up with Lacanian notions about lack, desire and movement from the Imaginary to the Symbolic order.

In the same way it is possible to make better sense of the predicament of Prufrock in T.S.Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock" in the light of the Lacanian formulations on lack and desire. Prufrock's basic problem is that he is enmeshed in divergent pulls of desire and his awareness of various kinds of lack. These go into the making of his otherness and a general unease of otherness always surrounds him. A line like: "It is impossible to say just what I mean" points to the lack of a neat fit between the signified and the signifier.

3.5 THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Psychoanalysis has been helpful in an understanding of works such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and D.H.Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. A considerable part of literary language (especially poetic language) relies heavily on 'displacement', 'condensation' and on the metaphorical dimensions provided by them. If we believe with deconstructionalists like Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller that all language is innately figural then these features of literary language become all the more crucial to any understanding of the literary use of language.

A number of feminist critics find Freud's and Lacan's ideas problematic. There is a biologism in Freud's theories. What has been seen as especially objectionable is the Freudian notion that women on account of suffering from 'penis envy' (lack of the male organ) and 'castration complex' get defined negatively, in relation to a male norm.

Asserting the female body as plenitude, a positive force and a source of multiple physical capacities is one of the ways in which Feminist critics have countered Freud's crude sexism. Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, three French women thinkers, have tackled this issue quite capably. French feminist theory relies heavily on psychoanalysis.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Both Freud and Lacan are concerned with identity, growth, sexuality and with psychoanalysis as therapy. Lacan adds a linguistic dimension to Freud's insights. The unconscious is crucial to the thought of both these thinkers. Freud sees 'the ego' the 'id' and 'the superego' as three psychic zones. They tie up with the pleasure principle, the reality principle, and the morality principle. 'The Oedipus complex' related to what the child makes of paternal authority and with the way in which he sees his father as an obstacle. Dreams are important as a signifier for the unconscious.

Lacan's main contribution has been in spelling out notions like 'lack', 'desire' and 'otherness'. Modernist texts like Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" offer good examples of how some of these things actually work in literature.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. How does Freud chart the growth of an infant?
2. What are the three 'psychic zones' in Freud's theory?
3. Briefly sum up Freud's ideas about the interpretation of dreams.
4. What are the three 'orders' put forward by Lacan?
5. How are 'lack' and 'desire' closely connected in Lacan's theory?

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Malcolm Bowie, 'Jacques Lacan' in John Sturrock (ed.) *Structuralism and Since*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Sigmund Freud, (translated J. Strachey), *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin Books, 1973.

Jacques Lacan (translated A. Sheridan), *Ecrits: A Selection*. London: Tavistock, 1977.

Elizabeth Wright *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, London and New York: Methuen, 1984.

3.8 KEY WORDS

Oedipus Complex:

A reference in Freud's theory to the unconscious wish of every (male) child to have sex with its mother and to eliminate its father.

Phallus:

A term in psychoanalytic theory for the authority invested in the male. In Lacan it is the symbol of power associated with 'the law' of the male penis. It is rather the signifier of sexual difference in general.

Lack:

Lack is located in the fact of desire being founded on a primordial absence yet being committed to a necessarily futile quest for what is lacking.

Desire:

Desire is the gap between the demand for love and the appetite for satisfaction.

UNIT 4 POSTCOLONIAL THEORY: SAID, SPIVAK AND BHABHA

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 'The Holy Trinity'
- 4.3 Said on *Heart of Darkness*
- 4.4 The Importance of Postcolonialism
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Readings
- 4.8 Key Words

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall give you some idea of the wide field known as Postcolonial Theory; (in some cases 'colonial discourse analysis'; but the former term is more inclusive). Three key notions will be taken up by us. These are : 'Orientalism' (Said), 'Subalternity' (Spivak) and 'Mimicry' (Bhabha). These three major critics are often taken to be the 'Holy Trinity' of postcolonial theory and limiting ourselves to their work (a significant part of it in any event) is enough to give us a sense of some of the main issues thrown up by the field as a whole.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As stated earlier, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan are three French thinkers (they are mostly clubbed under 'poststructuralism') who have exercised a profound influence on almost all that has happened in literary theory in recent times. In the case of postcolonial theory, the man who has exercised the greatest influence on the field is Foucault. Said's work shows his influence in a very marked way. Spivak and Bhabha also draw from him. The more obvious influence on Spivak is that of Derrida and in Bhabha's case the more obvious influence is that of Lacan.

Since power is a major issue in postcolonial theory let us take a look at Foucault's view of power. Simply stated, 'discourse' (to Foucault) is a system of statements within which and by which the world can be known. Discourses are ways of constituting knowledge together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations that inhere in such knowledge and the relations between them. Power too is a relation and gets exercised within discourses in the ways in which these discourses constitute and govern individual subjects. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume One, An Introduction*, Foucault defines power as:

The multiplicity of force relations imminent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization, as the process by which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly as the

strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the State apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (p.92).

Postcolonialism involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its present effects both at the level of ex-colonial societies and of more general global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire.

What was it that gave rise to postcolonialism? Why was it that a study of the cultural dimension of imperialism became important? First, independence movements around the world put an end to colonialism. Yet the residual effects of imperialism continued to affect the cultures of the erstwhile colonies. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) is one such intervention in colonial discourse. By the 1980's a substantial body of commonwealth literature had emerged in which writers tried to make sense of the impact of colonialism. There was a greater awareness of the power relations between the West and Third World cultures. All these led to a study and analysis of colonialism and its after-effects.

4.2 THE HOLY TRINITY

Said's *Orientalism* which appeared in 1978 is a good starting point for us. Said sees Orientalism as a discourse by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-enlightenment period. Said states:

Taking the eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be defined as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it, in short Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient (p.3).

On page 3 itself, Said acknowledges that he had found it useful to employ Foucault's notion of discourse as described by him in *The Archeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*.

A very important statement which Said makes on page 12 of *Orientalism* is:

Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship or institutions, nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the orient nor is it representative and expressive of a nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'Orient World'. It is rather a distribution of geographical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological and philosophical text; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction but also a whole sense of 'interests'

Said's book establishes that stereotypes and general ideology about the orient as 'the other' have helped to produce myths about the laziness, deceit and irrationality of Orientals. By means of the discourse of orientalism, Western cultural institutions are responsible for the creation of those 'others'. The Orientals' very difference from the Occident helps establish that opposition by which Europe's own identity can be established. The knowledge of the Orient created by and embodied within the discourse of Orientalism serves to construct an image of the Orient and the Orientals as subservient and subject to domination by the Occident. The knowledge of 'subject-races' or 'Orientals' makes their management easy and profitable.

Knowledge of the Orient is generated out of strength and such strength-generated knowledge, in turn, 'creates' the Orient, the Oriental and his/her world. In most cases

the Oriental is 'contained' and 'represented' by dominating frameworks and the encoding and comparison of the orient with the West ensures in the long run that oriental culture and perspectives are a deviation and a perversion that justify an inferior status for the latter. The Orient is seen as essentially monolithic with an unchanging history, while the Occident is dynamic with an active history. Not only that, the Orient and the Oriental are seen to be passive, non-participatory 'objects' of study. The Orient, in that sense, was sought to be established as a textual construct. On page 36 of his book Said states:

Knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control.

The whole thing thus becomes an on-going project.

These then are the essentials of Said's formulations about 'Orientalism'. Let us now move to the essentials of Gayatri Spivak's notion of 'subalternity'. Spivak is a leading contemporary feminist deconstructionist who pays careful attention to issues of gender and race. Her use of the term 'subaltern' is influenced by the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci consistently referred to a subordinate position in terms of class, gender, race and culture. Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' addressed the way the 'subaltern' woman is constructed, as absent or silent or not listened to. The 'muteness' of women in postcolonial societies is the main issue which her work confronts. The main argument of her essay is that, between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of woman disappears not into a pristine nothingness, but into a marginal position between tradition and modernization.

Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' (of lower rank) for women, blacks, the colonized and the working class. Subalternity comes to suggest the repressive dominance of white Western thinking and an allegory of the displacement of the gendered and colonized (i.e. subaltern) subject, by the imposition of narratives of internationalism and nationalism. The violence inflicted by Western forms of thought upon the East is of great concern to Spivak. She takes 'the third world' to be a creation of the west that locks non-western cultures into an imperial representation. 'Worlding' is the name she gives to the process through which 'colonized space' is 'brought into the world; that is made to exist as part of a world essentially constituted by Eurocentrism.

In these kinds of formulations one of the possible pitfalls is attributing an absolute power to the hegemonic discourse in creating the native and not making enough room for the resistance of the native. That brings us to Bhabha, the third figure in 'the Holy Trinity' and to his key notion that is 'mimicry'.

'Mimicry' designates a gap between the norm of civility as presented by European Enlightenment and its distorted colonial imitation. It serves as the sly weapon of anti-colonial civility and is an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience. To Bhabha the operations of the unconscious in the imperial context are far from simple because desire for, as well as fear of, 'the other', does not allow the identities of the colonizer and the colonized to stay fixed and unitary. Colonial power undermines its own authority and can paradoxically provide the means for native resistance. The site of resistance, the strategic reversal of the process of domination that looks the colonial power squarely in the eye, is marked by 'hybridity', an 'in-between' space. It not only displaces the history that creates it, but sets up new structures of authority and generates new political initiatives. It undermines authority because it imitates it only outwardly.

On account of the difficulty of categorizing different cultures into universalist frameworks, Bhabha finds the idea of the 'nation' a little problematic. He thinks that the idea stems from the imposition of a rather arbitrary 'national' character upon a necessarily very heterogeneous collection of people(s).

4.3 SAID ON *HEART OF DARKNESS*

The thrust of Said's 1966 book *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* is somewhat different from his comments on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). On page 25 of the latter book, Said states:

This narrative is connected directly with the redemptive force, as well as the waste and horror of Europe's mission in the dark world. Whatever is lost or elided or simply made up in Marlow's immensely compelling recitation is compensated for in the narrative's sheer historical momentum, the temporal forward movement.

To Said, the imperialist politics and aesthetics which *Heart of Darkness* embodies was in the closing years of the nineteenth century an aesthetics, politics and epistemology which were almost unavoidable and inevitable. The strength of Said's reading in this case is in his balancing of the aesthetic and the political. That is something which one cannot say about the reaction of someone like Chinua Achebe who saw *Heart of Darkness* as 'out and out' a racist book.

In the same vein Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (which does not figure in your course) is seen by Said as a great document of its aesthetic moment, the realization of a great and cumulative process, which, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, is reaching its last major moment before India's independence; on the one hand, surveillance and control over India: on the other, love for and fascinated attention to its every detail (*Culture and Imperialism*, p.195)

These kinds of readings are more open than those which merely refute, challenge and oppose. Most 'high modernist' texts deserve and demand a reading of that kind in view of their complexity and of the irony that mostly goes into their making.

The general characteristic of reading in postcolonial criticism is that a text is 'read back' from the perspective of the colonized. Such reading characteristically rejects the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature and seeks to show its limitations of outlook especially its general inability to empathize across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference.

4.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF POSTCOLONIALISM

'Orientalism', 'subalternity' and 'mimicry' are important aspects of the work of the three critics. One of the problems that *Orientalism* (the book) suffers from is (that it assumes) too readily that an unequivocal intention on the part of the West was always realized through its discursive productions. The other two critics do not seem to give enough direct power and role to 'agency' on behalf of the colonized people. Also, Bhabha's style is so involved that an oppositional stance does not come through and is obscured by the meanderings of language.

And yet the cumulative achievement of the three critics discussed in this unit has been really admirable. There is all around us a new cultural politics of difference with all its inner complexities and subtle nuances. One of the challenges for postcolonial theory today is to come to terms with specific local conditions and with comparison that can be discerned in and between them. There is also the daunting task of trying to know the story of colonial and neo-colonial engagements in all their complexity. Finding a proper language and terminology for representing those engagements is another major challenge. The three critics taken up here have done more than most

others in indicating some of the directions that can be fruitfully followed, sometimes aided by poststructuralism and postmodernism.

Some more general charges, however, remain. Aijaz Ahmad an Indian critic objects that postcolonial theorists 'live and do their theories' in First World countries and that (in Ahmad's view) affects the impact of their work. Arif Dirlik sees the postcolonial intellectual as complicitous in feeding into the goals of the capitalist frame of postcolonial theory. Kwame Appiah argues that the 'post' of postcolonial theory and postmodernism are spaces created by capitalism to market cultural products in the developing world.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha are said to be 'the Holy Trinity' of postcolonial, theory. Having said that, it becomes important to point out that their work cannot be clubbed together in any homogeneous way. Each of them is different and important for the contributions s/he has made to the field. Said's main contribution to the field is the concept of 'orientalism' — the attempt on the part of the West to establish the East as lazy, deceitful and irrational. Spivak answers the question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' with a 'No'. Women are 'doubly effaced' in Spivak's scheme of things. Bhabha's theorizing about 'mimicry' builds on the potential for irreverence and mockery in the colonizer/colonized relationship. All three critics are influenced by Foucault's views on power and discourse. Additionally, Spivak is influenced by Derrida and Bhabha by Lacan. All three draw on other resources as well.

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. What is the main argument of Edward Said's book *Orientalism*?
2. How have Foucault's view on discourse and power influenced Said's *Orientalism*?
3. What does Spivak mean by 'subalternity'? What distresses her about the condition of women in colonial societies?
4. What does Bhabha mean by 'mimicry' in the colonial context?

4.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Edward Said, *Orientalism*. London: Routledge, 1978.

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Gary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1998.

Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffins (eds) *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Robert Young, *White Mythologies*, London: Routledge, 1990.

4.8 KEY WORDS

hegemony:

In the work of the Italian Marxist thinker Gramsci, the word is used to account for the way in which a ruling class maintains itself in power.

subaltern:

of lower rank.

mimicry:

The fact that the colonizer in his/her relationship with the colonized is always vulnerable to the irreverence and mockery beneath the seeming servility of the colonised.

UNIT 5 BEGINNINGS OF CULTURAL STUDIES AND NEW HISTORICISM

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 The Beginnings of Cultural Studies
- 5.3 The Beginnings of New Historicism
- 5.4 Conclusion
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Questions
- 5.7 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

Cultural Studies and New Historicism both mark a 'sociological turn' in literary studies. Sociological concerns were never absent from literary studies but these two trends bring them to the foreground. In this unit we shall give you some idea of the beginnings of these two trends. Section 5.2 will focus on the work of Raymond Williams and the Birmingham Centre and Section 5.3 will look at the work of Stephen Greenblatt, in particular New Historicism.

Matthew Arnold in the Victorian period and T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis in the twentieth century have also been 'culture critics' but our focus here is on cultural materialism as inaugurated by Raymond Williams.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Birmingham Centre of Cultural Studies concerned itself with contemporary English reality and cultural forms (including film and mass media). New Historicism focused more on the Renaissance with special attention to drama. The 'Foreword' to the 1985 book *Political Shakespeare* edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield helps us to place these developments in better perspective. Dollimore tells us that the term 'Cultural Materialism' is borrowed from its recent use by Raymond Williams and that its practice grows from an eclectic body of work in Britain in the post-war period which can be broadly characterized as 'cultural analysis.' That work includes the impressive output of Williams himself and more generally comprises the convergence of history, sociology and English in Cultural Studies.

What is it that cultural critics wanted to achieve? The cultural critics wanted to break the boundary between high and popular culture and the hierarchy that this implies. The cultural critics are also critical of the idea of a "canon". Instead of evaluating what is "great", the cultural critics wished to relate a literary text to its cultural context. As such cultural criticism is interdisciplinary for it involves studying a whole way of life — which includes the social, the political, the economic etc.

Michel Foucault was a strong influence on cultural critics and the new historicists. He sought to study cultures in terms of power relationships. Unlike the Marxists, he refused to see power as something exercised by the oppressor on the oppressed. He did not see power simply as something repressive or oppressive of one against another. He saw it as a complex of forces — ways of thinking, speaking etc.

Foucault is also important for focusing on the histories of women, the minorities and other marginalised persons in the study of culture.

New Historicism, specifically, was more concerned with the interaction between state power and cultural forms in the Renaissance. Theatre came to be seen as a prime location for the representation and legitimization of power. Lately 'New Historicism' has come to cover a wide range of approaches to the study of literature and history. New Historicism was a reaction to the excesses of deconstruction and brought back the focus from the vagaries of the free-floating signifier to the dynamics of power within cultural formations.

There is considerable overlap between the concerns of the cultural critics and the New Historicists. According to Greenblatt, New Historicism involves "an intensified willingness to read *all* of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts." The area of study goes beyond the literary to the non-literary of the same historical period and provides useful insights.

5.2 THE BEGINNINGS OF CULTURAL STUDIES

The Centre for Cultural and Community Studies was set up in Birmingham in 1964 and the names of Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall were associated with it. Raymond Williams had much to do with the founding (in 1964) of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies. Richard Hoggart's book *The Uses of Literacy* gave Cultural Studies a working class orientation. He 'read' everyday working class life, customs and habits as though they were literary texts. William's edict 'culture is ordinary' is at the heart of such a working-class orientation. The aestheticism, ahistoricism and apolitical position of groups like the New Critics were not seen in a favourable light by the Cultural Studies people.

Before looking at some crucial ideas of Williams, let us briefly look at some ideas of Dick Hebdige, a theorist of 'subculture'. His 1979 book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* concerns itself with the interconnected worlds of music, fashion and youth in the post-war period, especially the distinctive forms of clothing, speech and music that characterise groups like the punks. His interest was in the way young men and women resisted their assigned social roles through rituals of dress, dance and music. That provided a counterpart to the work routines of modern economic life. In this sense subcultures are a form of symbolic resistance to the pressures of living in capitalistic societies. Overthrowing the dominant culture is not as big a concern as seeking autonomy within it. Subculture thus comes to be a kind of distinctive clique within a larger social group.

Hebdige spells out his goals in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* in the following way:

Much of the available space in this book will be taken up with a description of the process whereas objects are made to mean and mean again as 'style' in subculture. As in Genet's novels, this process begins with a crime against the natural order, though in this case the deviation may seem light indeed – the cultivation of a quiff, the acquisition of a scooter, or a record or a certain type of suit. But it ends in the construction of a style in a gesture of defiance.. It signals a Refusal. I would like to think this Refusal is worth making (Hebdige in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds.) *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, p.1066)

Hebdige sees these signs as 'just so much graffiti on the wall' but to him graffiti itself can make fascinating reading. What his book *Subculture* tries to do is to decipher the graffiti, to ease out the meanings embedded in various post-war youth styles.

The major figure from cultural studies, for our present purposes, is Williams. From the vast body of his work we shall take out and concentrate largely on his famous concept of 'structures of feelings'.

Williams' was a challenge to cultural elitism from within the tradition of 'English' criticism. His stress is on 'lived actuality' or on 'social experience in solution' as he phrases it on p.128 of *Marxism and Literature*. Meanings and values actually possess a great value in Williams's scheme of things. These have a way of binding people together in that they furnish them with meanings that go into the making of interpretive resources at their command as individual members of society. They help them to arrive at a sense of a number of matters by redefining their relationship with one another.

On page 63 of the *The Long Revolution*, Williams states:

I would then define the theory of culture as the study of the relationship between elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships. Analysis of particular works or institutions is, in this, context, analysis of their essential kind of organization,
A key word in such analysis is pattern. It is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any cultural analysis begins, and with the relationships between these patterns which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned. (p.63)

What Williams calls 'the living result' of all the elements in the general organization is precisely what gets reflected in his phrase 'structures of feeling'. These 'structures of feeling' are tied up with the belief that we are aware of our 'particular sense of life' and our 'particular community' when we notice the ways in which we are different from each other even as we participate in a common culture. It was Williams' firm belief that any adequate analysis of culture requires a detailed study not just of each element in it but of the organization which is 'the complex of these relationships'. But when one talks of 'the nature of the organization' it should not be something abstract but 'the nature of the organization' as experienced. Emphasis should be on 'the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization.'

William's concern is more with 'forming and formative processes' than with fixed explicit forms. A 'structure of feeling' is concerned with 'meanings and values as they are lived and felt' and are always in a process of forming and re-forming. As such they suggest a possibility for change and opposition to dominant ideologies. It differs from ideology because it is, in a sense, pre-ideological or could be in tension with the dominant ideology's more systematic formulations. The phrase 'structure of feeling' names the thoughts and feelings of a representative generation and is indicative of 'a very deep and wide possession'. It follows from this that a new generation will shape its response to changed circumstances in a changed 'structure of feeling'.

5.3 THE BEGINNINGS OF NEW HISTORICISM

The newness of 'New Historicism' is posited against the backdrop of 'historicist' works like E.M.W. Tillyard's 1943 book *The Elizabethan World Picture*. Where New Historicists go beyond Tillyard is in their view that there is no fixed 'history' which can be treated as the 'background' against which literature can be foregrounded. To New Historicists, historical periods are not unified entities so the question of there having been a single Elizabethan worldview does not arise.

New Historicists try to intervene in the canonical literary text, detaching it from the accumulated weight of literary scholarship and seeing it in a new light. The concern is not only with the 'historicity of texts' but also with the textual nature of history itself. The following statement about New Historicism made by Richard Dutton in the 'Introduction' to *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama* is helpful:

It found the plays embedded in other written texts, such as penal, medical and colonial documents. Read within this archival continuum what they represented was not the harmony but the violence of the Puritan attack on Carnival, the imposition of slavery, the rise of patriarchy, the founding of deviance and the crashing of prison gates (p.8)

In this method of historical description an anecdote could well be 'read against' the orthodox history to reveal the codes of a given culture.

Since the beginning, New Historicism has moved in a number of directions so that today one can talk of new historicisms. We shall concentrate only on the beginnings, and with that goal in mind, we shall limit ourselves to Stephen Greenblatt with special reference to his 1980 work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. In this book, Greenblatt analyses the ways in which writers like Thomas More, William Tyndale, Thomas Wyatt, Edmund Spenser and Christopher Marlowe fashioned their self-identities through a network of social, psychological, political and intellectual discourses. A related argument is that in the Renaissance period there was a transformation in the social and cultural structures which changed the character of subjectivity. Thus when Greenblatt looks at Thomas More, he takes up More's identity, his representation and constructions of himself. More needed to be an astute political mover in the court and a genial family man at home. He was under a compulsion to embody the repressive, punitive powers of the state in public life and, at the same time, the Utopian father and husband in private life. To achieve this, he needed to fashion himself into different beings.

Greenblatt sees Shakespeare's plays as being centrally and repeatedly concerned with the production and containment of subversion and disorder. He has a special interest in a dialectic of subversion and containment. In his famous essay 'Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion' he offers the thesis that subversiveness is necessary for power to become visible and fearsome. He extends his argument to suggest that seemingly orthodox texts generate subversive insights which are an integral part of a society's policing apparatus. In general Greenblatt has a special interest in how far Renaissance texts offer a genuinely radical critique of the religious and political ideology of their day and how far is literature, in its apparent subversive character, a way of containing subversive energies.

Two other critics need to be mentioned here. Jonathan Goldberg's reading of *Measure for Measure* and Louis Montrose's reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* give us a good idea of how New Historicists generally read Shakespeare. Goldberg discusses *Measure for Measure* in his 1983 book *James I and the Politics of Literature*. His argument is that the dominant trap in *Measure for Measure* is the unfolding of government, the revelation of the politicization that links public and

private spheres. Literature and power in Goldberg's view, are rooted in language. According to him Shakespeare's contribution to the Jacobean period is to establish that the language of literature and of royal power is a shared language. Goldberg's overall concern is the issue of representation as the common ground of literature and politics.

As for Louis Montrose, his essay 'Shaping Fantasies' takes as its subject the construction of a powerful mythical identity for Elizabeth I through narratives and dramas which played out the 'shaping fantasies' of Elizabethan culture. Montrose also takes up the Queen's projection of herself as mother of the nation and that needed to be seen along with her projection as a virgin who was openly flirtatious and provocative. Montrose notes that Elizabeth was precariously placed as a woman at the head of a strongly patriarchal society and her power involved a series of contradictions and complications. These needed to be manipulated and managed all the time both on a symbolic and a bureaucratic level.

We can thus see that the issue of power remains central to New Historicism. Literary texts, for New Historicists, have specific functions within a network of power-relations in society. H. Aram Veeser in the 'Introduction' to the 1989 book *The New Historicism* edited by him offers a neat summary of assumptions common to most New Historicist work. This common ground made New Historicists identifiable loosely as a group. The assumptions are:

- That every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices.
- That every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
- That literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably;
- That no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature;
- That the critical method and language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.

In short, New Historicism presents a decentreed history of cultural diversity. The only trouble is that it has also inherited Foucault's skeptical outlook on possibilities of social change.

5.4 CONCLUSION

A broad New Historicist orientation is no doubt a help in understanding the degree to which literature participates in forming the dominant ideological assumptions of a particular time. The main trouble with this tendency as a whole has been that texts could be subjected to the most superficial and generalized readings as a result of an interest in the function rather than the interpretability of texts. There is the danger of not having enough sensitivity of the complexity of literary texts. On the side of activism, the problem with New Historicism is that even when presenting a decentreed history open to cultural diversity it tends to inherit Foucault's more pessimistic idiom where questions of agency (the ability to bring about change) are not foregrounded sufficiently.

In this 'Conclusion' let us also touch upon the kind of criticism that Williams's view of 'culture' is vulnerable to. Terry Eagleton, in his 1975 book *Criticism and Ideology* voices it thus:

Williams' work, in the characteristic mode of the early New Left, tended to a dangerous conflation of productive modes, social relations, ethical, political and abstraction of 'culture'. Such a collapsing not only abolishes any hierarchy of actual priorities,

reducing the social formation to a 'circular' Hegelian totality and striking political strategy dead at birth, but inevitably over subjectivises that formation (p.26)

This is a little too harsh because Williams's endeavour was to describe a form of critical activity in the Marxist tradition that remains materialist but avoids the trap of attempting to understand all cultural activities as mere effects of the economic 'base'. He was able to move beyond the reductive base-superstructure relations which saw literature as an effect of an already existing economic reality.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

Raymond Williams's work is crucial to the beginnings of 'Cultural Studies' in Britain as they took shape in the Birmingham Centre. Towards the beginnings of New Historicism, the contribution of Stephen Greenblatt is noteworthy. In 'Cultural Studies' (Birmingham) the work of Dick Hebdige on 'subculture' is also significant. William's key notion is 'structures of feeling'. His accent was on 'lived experience'.

New Historicism was concerned with the 'historicity of texts' and the textuality of history' within some kind of archival continuum. A key Greenblatt text is *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. In general, the production and containment of subversion and disorder is a favourite Greenblatt theme. Readings of Shakespeare along these general lines were taken up by critics like Goldberg and Montrose.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. What is Raymond Williams's contribution to the beginning of Cultural Studies at Birmingham?
2. What does Dick Hebdige concentrate on in his analysis of "subculture"?
3. Write a short note on 'structures of feeling' as spelt out by Raymond Williams.
4. What kind of relation between literature and power is put forward by Stephen Greenblatt?

5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, London: Verso, 1976.

Stephen Greenblatt *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Methuen, 1979.

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**Cultural Studies and
New Historicism**

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UNIT 6 LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY : A SUMMING UP

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Beginnings of criticism in English
- 6.2 Criticism in the eighteenth century
- 6.3 Romantic concerns in criticism and the nineteenth century emphases
- 6.4 Emergence of modernist thought around the First World War
- 6.5 Modernist criticism and New Criticism
- 6.6 Structuralism and Poststructuralism
- 6.7 Deconstruction as an approach
- 6.8 Postmodernism and after
- 6.9 Marxism and feminism
- 6.10 The 'post' in postcolonialism
- 6.11 Conclusion

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This is the last Unit of your course. We hope you've understood the arguments presented by different critical theorists, discussed in the previous Blocks. In this Unit we only plant to give you a summary of all the major critical concerns from Sir Philip Sidney down to the present. This will not only help you to recapitulate most of what you have done so far but it will also provide an overview of the tradition of literary criticism and theory as it has developed over the last few centuries.

6.1 BEGINNINGS OF CRITICISM IN ENGLISH

Sir Philip Sidney is one of the first critical voices in English seriously engaged with defining poetry in terms of beauty, meaning and human interest. His reference point was the Renaissance view of art that had necessitated an affirmation of non-medieval, secular art. More than half a century later, John Dryden probed in his criticism the question of heroic writing with a view to explaining the usefulness of "some instructive moral" in ancient classical writing. Dryden also explained some of the formal peculiarities of writing such as blank verse and rhyme and chose to introduce dignity or elevated thought through the use of the latter. However, English criticism till the eighteenth century was largely descriptive and self-justificatory.

As we understand, literary criticism or criticism of literature evolved from the practice of explaining, analysing, discussing or simply talking about plays, poems, novels. This implies that at a certain point of time, writing posed difficulties to the common reader and needed elucidation by an expert. At the same time, literary writing tended to influence ordinary people's behaviour by offering comment on the principles governing their lives. In many a situation, literary work became controversial and invited censure. Writers as such supported or opposed social interests through their writings and for that reason became prone to attacks from powerful sections in society. This was the case, for instance, in the seventeenth century England in the wake of great social upheavals. The example that comes to mind is the English Civil War, preceded by intense parliamentary debates and followed by divisions in opinion about the desirability of Restoration. How could literature remain touched by such developments?

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This helps us see why the eighteenth century gave rise to those considerations of poets and dramatists, those elaborate dissertations on literary trends by Samuel Johnson in the form of essays and 'Lives'. It appeared as though it became necessary for the English society of the day to uphold or reject certain kinds of vision in literature. Johnson found the comic vision in Shakespeare worthy of deep appreciation. The very idea of the comic and the tragic in literature owed its origin to a large number of writers and thinkers looking towards the ancient classical texts for inspiration and guidance. Those texts, particularly of Aristotle, had placed writing under well-defined categories such as comedy and tragedy. Literary criticism, the way we know it today, assumed its specific shape in the eighteenth century. At the core of this criticism stood the vision of the author and the role and function of literature, with Johnson expecting the writer to educate the reader and create a climate of positive social values.

6.2 CRITICISM IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The reigning eighteenth century critical opinion denied individuality, as we know the term, to the author whose job according to it was to protect, maintain and conserve the values of social expansion and progress. This critical opinion sought to impose on literature a kind of social code. Later, this opinion was taken as narrow and restrictive. Wordsworth's 'Preface to the Lyrical Ballads' is entirely devoted to critiquing the eighteenth century neoclassical view of literature according to which the writer was supposed to follow clearly laid down principles of expression and composition. Further, Wordsworth drew attention to the fact that the established writing of the period gave no credence to the lives of ordinary people. However, as Wordsworth showed in his argument, writing would have no deep meaning and appeal unless it established vital links with the common masses—the toiling millions in the countryside or the poor deprived folk in urban centres.

The second important thing in Wordsworth focussed on the individuality of the writer, his/her peculiar sensibility and mental make-up. The question of the writer evolving into a creative being in the process of living through his/her time had not been accepted as significantly in the eighteenth century. See the Romantic movement against its historical background which registered great courageous interventions (keep in mind the American War of Independence in the 1770's and French Revolution in the 1780's and 1790's) by organised masses to shape society according to new and more human-centred norms. At the back of Wordsworth's mind was the need of the writer to individually evolve his/her stand on wider social issues. It was suggested that the interests and concerns of a writer shaped the creative mind to work in a particular way. This is how Wordsworth explained his view.

6.3 ROMANTIC CONCERNS IN CRITICISM AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY EMPHASES

Look at some titles of the critical essays Matthew Arnold wrote – 'The Study of Poetry' and 'Function of Criticism at the Present Time,' for instance, and see whether this criticism written in the second half of the nineteenth century made specific points about changes that literature could effect during its time. Matthew Arnold's essays expect us to go into the appreciation of literature for the purpose of assessing and evaluating literature, as an important critical task. This clearly implies that Arnold was setting standards for what he considered good literature and that through this act he wished to tell the writer his/her role in the society of the time. On the whole, the nineteenth century critical thought in England is marked by this concern for

understanding and interpreting society and evolving a code for the educated middle classes in view of the cultural-ideological requirements of the day. Arnold's criticism did not mark any radical departure from the existing trends but he did specify the function of good writing as well as theoretical-intellectual work.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in English literature were a period of specific cultural evolution under which rational thought as an agency of change came to be firmly established. The development of prose from a medium of ordinary conversation to that of a sophisticated thoughtful activity and a complex representation of mental processes of highly sensitive individuals proves this point beyond doubt. We cannot overlook those forays in fictional writing (Fielding, Dickens, George Eliot, Thackeray) that embody several moral debates, discourses and analyses. At the same time, literature assumed such an independent identity that it became the focus of critical debate as never before, not merely in aesthetic terms but also in relation to the life of the common people with a mission and a sense of collective behaviour. Because of this, we cannot separate literature from those great movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that swept the whole continent of Europe. It was essential, therefore, that writers reflected more and more on the nature of their involvement and the way in which this involvement induced them to select one literary form in preference to another. The important word here is 'involvement', the deep concern that writers have about their surroundings — it is this that is at the back of all his/her creative endeavour. The nineteenth century English criticism is driven by this significant urge in a thinking and culturally active individual. Critical essays of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Ruskin, Water Pater and Matthew Arnold deal in their own peculiar ways with this issue.

6.4 EMERGENCE OF MODERNIST THOUGHT AROUND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

However, the case of the twentieth century criticism is different. It is not exactly an outcome of concerns for society and its problems such as inequality, deprivation, injustice, racism, gender difference and so on — things that had been the focus of critical comment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Strange though it may seem, the twentieth century criticism has remained obsessed with literature as an art, an aesthetic endeavour, in isolation from the surroundings in which literary works (novels, poems, dramas) are produced. A major critical influence in the early twentieth century was T.S.Eliot whose essays brushed aside the idea of history or social dilemmas and instead propagated contemporaneity and circular time in literature. Eliot was instrumental in taking literature away from an actually existing world into a domain that transcended time and place. His main emphasis was on man and his condition in a moral-religious universe. His kind of critical perception, in accompaniment with that of Ezra Pound shunned change and targeted social critique. It is also interesting to note that the early twentieth century criticism rejected Romanticism completely and looked for inspiration either towards the neoclassicism of the eighteenth century or Jacobeanism of the seventeenth century. Combine this with a distrust for the Renaissance values of humanism and rational approach and the picture becomes complete — of a critical mission that lauded permanence and unchangeability in preference to development and progress. Wasn't that strange?

These new critical biases of the early twentieth century had their roots in the First World War and the emergence of Socialist Russia projecting the ordinary worker's and peasant's capabilities. Suddenly it became clear to a significant part of the English writing and critical thought around that time that attacking radicalism in all its manifestations was essential to conserve and protect the entrenched class interests. Mark this difference in critical approach from the one that earlier thinkers and interpreters of literature had evolved and adopted. They swore by reform, change and

progress in environment, as against recognition of decay, human predicament or moral void. Also, for the first time, literary criticism became proactive and insistent, aggressive and intolerant in that it assumed the mantle of educating minds and sensibilities along certain well-defined principles and prejudices. 'Sensibility' denoted an upper class individual who sought enrichment through literature. Eliot's idea of sensibility, dissociated or well-integrated, moved further away from modernity, a Renaissance category, into medievalism where human beings were untouched by doubt and self-doubt.

I consider the point of the First World War important for two reasons: **one**, this point marked the final crisis of capitalism; **two**, it got inextricably linked with an alternative system called socialism under which the common ordinary people took the reins of power in their own hands and displacing privileged sections from centres of influence. For these reasons, western thought, ideological and philosophical, shifted from the nineteenth century humanism that swore by the concept of social roles. It is interesting to note that the whole of modernist thought took the peculiar psychological direction under which the individual occupied the centre of stage as never before. Here comes to mind the romantic individual of the nineteenth century who identified himself with the common people (Wordsworth) and questioned courageously the static inane ethos of bourgeois tradition. Instead, the modernist individual stood alone, denied the existence of a positive centre in society and took to self-pity. Think of the modernist criticism of T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound that sought to propound the idea of circular time as well as impersonality. Also examine the efficacy of psychology in understanding human behaviour. Under modernist critical thought, psychology alone determined the day-to-day actions and responses of the individual. In literature, the protagonist, mostly a male, thought and acted as an individual and consciously tried to set himself apart from the ordinary goings-on of the environment (Joyce, D.H.Lawrence, Hemingway). In fact, modernist thought and writing worked hand-in-hand, each strengthening the appeal of the other. Mark how assiduously and painstakingly modernist criticism analysed symbols, metaphors and images not just in poetry but also in prose works and gave the impression that the formation of images (not just in poetry but also in prose works) in the writer's mind, was more important than the object that the writer's mind captured.

6.5 MODERNIST CRITICISM AND NEW CRITICISM

More or less corresponding to English modernist criticism emerged New Criticism in America in the late twenties and early thirties. It took the historical concern of modernist criticism still further, in the sense that it delinked the writer from the work and laid an almost exclusive stress on the latter. According to New Criticism, the literary work constituted an independent world of its own with its own internal laws that needed to be recognised and understood by an intelligent reader. The New Criticism talked of tools and methods which helped the serious student to gain access to the work. Access in this context signified the meaning of the work which remained generally hidden from the eye of the reader. The reader was supposed to entirely free him/herself from the preconceived notion of good or bad, moral or immoral so that the particular meaning of the work became available. According to New Criticism, the literary work had its own identity, moral centre and significance, irrespective of the authorial intention. Please note that through modernism as well as New Criticism, the author got gradually pushed away from his/her own writing and that in the process, the work increasingly became a site for critical struggle to reach the literary meaning.

While considering modernism and New Criticism, we cannot afford to overlook the strong presence of political ideology in the venture which aggressively attacked the role and function of a writer in the environment of the day and analysed the work in isolation from its creator. Yes, words such as morality, tradition, integrity and

6.6 STRUCTURALISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

The impact of language-based theories was felt in Western criticism, of which English criticism became a part, in a big way in the nineteen sixties. I use "Western criticism" deliberately here because as far as I see it, English criticism from the nineteen sixties onwards did not remain confined to considerations of English or American writing. Instead, it took influences from trends in European thought and also started relating English writing to literatures of other countries. In this sense, English criticism liberated itself from narrow British cultural interests and reflected trends of a relatively globalised world. That it happened because of larger ideological-political pressures is another issue to which I would refer to later in this discussion. What I consider important at this point is that literature came to be analysed mainly in terms of language – words, phrases, interconnection between words, and so on. Old grammar (devoted to the study of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, etc. that had a specific place in the English sentence) were discarded in preference to what was called structures. This denoted that words did not stand for anything static and fixed as was supposed to be the case but operated through structures that helped in constructing meaning in a new life-situation.

In one sense, structuralism of this kind had its origins in the modernist concern for the work which pushed the writer to the background and expected the reader to take an alert interest in the work as a composition. But in a more significant sense, structuralism emphasised the existence of a full-fledged system under which meaning could be visualised as constructed. This also necessitated on the part of the reader an effort to grasp the rules of the system which governed the composition of a work, and its recomposition or reconstruction by the same reader. Another way of saying the same thing was that both writer and reader operated under a language system which had independent rules of its own and whose existence had a materiality and solidity. This changed the entire hitherto existing perception of literature and drew it out of the domain of the writer's life, a narrow subjectivist field of limited interests. Here, mark the modernist existentialist definition of this narrow subjectivist field which was impervious to any outside influence and whose individuality was not open to any outside rational interpretation or theorisation. Structuralism dealt a lasting blow to this existentialist view of literature and placed literary writing face to face with a language system that provided codes for the decipherment of its meaning. A new and exciting system of linguistic governance, structuralism also let the reader into the nature of change where old structures struggled among themselves and with the writer to compose and formulate a new meaning. In this struggle, the writer ceased to be the sole arbiter of meaning and lost his/her subjectivity to the existing determining codes.

Because of further developments in theory, today we find structuralism of this kind and variety rather primitive and almost exclusively language-centred. This was soon realised as critics and analysts debated the usefulness of this new approach to questions of culture, art and ideology. Poststructuralism was an outcome of these debates which found literature to be deeper and richer than the structuralist theory suggested. Yes, structures operated more perceptibly in the realm of culture and ideology where certain thoughts and feelings appeared taboo since they challenged the very rationale of prevailing notions. In a given scenario, linguistic structures formed only one of the many circles which interacted with one another and, therefore, made the game of decipherment of meaning still more complex. This necessitated the study of literary works in more precise terms for reasons of identifying structures of feelings and emotions embedded in them. Poststructuralism also sought to contend with the issue of determinism according to which the writer or reader operated in a

rigid framework, watching passively the interplay of structures as texts unfolded the drama of conflicts and antagonisms. In this sense, poststructuralism became self-reflexive and uncertain. Aware of its pitfalls and inadequacies, poststructuralism became open-ended so as to make way for other approaches to enter the field.

One can see the working of a hidden politics behind structuralism and poststructuralism which actively obstructed the writer in his/her pursuit of change in the social arena. Separating the writer from the work, a task already begun by modernism, these theories focussed on the individual writing in isolation from a larger trend, in culture or politics. There is no doubt that they succeeded quite substantially in taking literary writing out of the socio-ideological domain that revolved around a profit-oriented market. We clearly see most discussions on literature taking place not in the open, not in magazines, journals or newspapers or conferences attended by general readers but in specialized academic circles. Books by virtue of the esoteric nature of their content, can only be understood by a minority of 'critically equipped' people. I say this here to make a background for what happened in the subsequent period in the realm of criticism.

6.7 DECONSTRUCTION AS AN APPROACH

Deconstruction and postmodernism emerged with a flourish on the literary scene almost at the same time, in the nineteen seventies, in the English and European world. It was not a coincidence. There were compelling factors behind this development as the major arguments of the two approaches testify. It appears that neither structuralism nor poststructuralism were good enough to serve the cultural and ideological interests of capitalism of advanced Western societies. Even as structuralism took attention away from general literary trends and cultural issues, it did point towards the oppressive deterministic nature of the Western societies and offered a framework to explain a few of the maladies of modernist and other texts. Perhaps for this reason, Marxist criticism found a good deal of support from it for challenging bourgeois notions of individual freedom and initiative. Althusser's critical writings are a case in point. It may have become necessary for the vested ideological interests of the developed world, therefore, to entirely delink theory from its 'history,' from its progress in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and launch a wholesale attack on any creative-critical venture that one came across including literary writing and theory. There was a kind of intellectual passion and rigour in approaches such as modernist-existential, New Critical, structuralist and poststructuralist. All this was thrown overboard as the onset of deconstruction and postmodernism was announced. Aggressive rejection of everything became the byword of the whole imaginative, intellectual or academic venture from the nineteen seventies onwards. Frederic Jameson rightly associated this trend with what he called 'late capitalism.'

Deconstruction attacked the notion of one meaning, primary discourses, or purpose as so many subjective responses to a world which according to it (deconstruction) had no centre. Instead of talking about the presences, emphases or assertions in a text, it talked of absences, gaps and lapses. It de-recognised the reality or materiality of a process and put in its place notions or perceptions of a subject whose own veracity was in doubt. Finally, the argument became circular with deconstruction not being able to see its own relevance or trustworthiness. According to it, the text became a matter of playing games, a site on which any number of conflicts could be seen as happening, depending upon the nature, intention or preference of the player.

'Deconstruction' was a strange term. It clearly hinted at the creative intention of the author who gave a definite shape to his work in accordance with her/his perception or bias. Since the motive of the deconstructionist was to attack the subjectivity of the author and pave the way for his or her (deconstructionist's) own reading of the text, it

became necessary to posit multiplicity of meanings in a text. The assumption on which the deconstructionist argument based itself was that a work was a construction, a conscious act on the part of the author for making a specific representation of life. However, this representation did not conform to an objective ideal for the simple reason that it was a conscious individual construction. The way out, therefore, remained in the possible effort of the reader to look at the phenomenon from his or her own point of view and see its concrete possibility within the framework of the work. Deconstruction, therefore, investigated those areas in the text which remained hidden from view. The reader investigated the gaps in the text and worked towards a different construction, an alternative to the one that the original author had effected. In this sense, every reader saw in a literary text what he or she wished to see in it and reorganized the already organized material in consonance with one's own perception of the phenomenon. Put simply, every reader constructed one's own version of a text by questioning and rejecting (deconstructing) the author's construction.

6.8 POSTMODERNISM AND AFTER

The term 'postmodernism' is interesting in the sense that on the one side it denotes something that followed modernism as a necessary consequence of it and on the other merely the existence of modernism as a negative, irrational category. Thinkers and literary critics in the nineteen eighties and nineties were a little too language-conscious and used words to denote more than they ordinarily signified. The example we can take is of 'postmodernism' itself in which 'post' is more than "after" or "later", more than the "next phase" of an already existing trend. As we have seen, the word "modern" became current in a major way, in the early twentieth century in spite of the fact that there were long and heated debates about it in the eighteenth century. It was also then a negative word that had associations with the behaviour-pattern of an emergent bourgeois class. Aristocracy had the aura of tradition, well-entrenched values and accepted norms while 'modern' stood for new, rootless, unreliable, eccentric and unpredictable. The early twentieth century on the other hand, bestowed on the word 'modern' the attractive shade of the contemporary, actual and present that resonated in the world of reality. For this reason, it encompassed the whole of the existentialist movement that swore by the actual and the concrete.

Why then did the prefix 'post' become necessary for 'modern' in the last part of the twentieth century? In response to this question, I first refer to the other usage of the words earlier – modernist, modernity and modernism. The first two stood quite close to actuality and reality in life – something that existed in actual circumstances. The last, however, indicated a general trend covering the process of life over decades as well as an outlook that saw abstract notions of behaviour in specific situations. Modernism was a doctrine. Around the nineteen seventies, cultural-academic centres in the western bourgeois world became wary of 'modernism' because the word stood for a doctrine, howsoever subtle and ambiguous, that enabled the interpreter to gain entry to a phenomenon. As a doctrine, it could be accepted, controverted or rejected and the debate paved the way for an alternative paradigm – rational, consistent and reality-centred in a wider way than before. Modernism as an 'ism', interpreted in structuralist-poststructuralist terms generated a palpable critique of the Cold War, competitiveness and technology-centred approaches and increasingly became difficult or inconvenient for a system thriving on the cynical pursuit of consumerism and crass profitability.

The clever use of the prefix 'post' in 'postmodernism' enabled the new philosopher to deny or negate all that had happened earlier and say that we had reached the point of post-progress, post-history, post-reason, a realm in which consistency, connectedness, general truth or truths had lost validity. Postmodernism rejected the temporal and spatial, the notion of a past, present or future or the distinctness of behaviour-patterns in different cultures. 'Post' therefore, is not the simple,

descriptive 'post' (later, or next phase) but a negation of all life and history upto 'modernity' or 'modernism'.

In such a postmodernist phase, the western bourgeois world has used audio-visual media to question (if not decimate) the very notion of inequality, deprivation and injustice, mere words that mean something only in association with equality, availability and justice. The latter set, according to postmodernism, is vulnerable to questioning since it doesn't refer to any acceptable standard of reckoning. This is the deconstructionist's logic of perpetually questioning everything in order to assert the supremacy of illogicality and anarchy. For the postmodernist and deconstructionist, truth lies in the individual's apprehension of a phenomenon that would mean something different to another individual. With no theoretical (therefore, real) correspondence between two individuals, it is impossible to decode or decipher any general message in a text or verbal structure.

6.9 MARXISM AND FEMINISM

Quite convenient, if not altogether sustaining and life-affording to capitalist power-centres, postmodernism has, however, been challenged substantially by feminism and Marxism. Feminism, particularly of the radical variety, has not subscribed to the idea of an anarchy which denies an active role to a collective entity. Feminism has projected a common goal of equality between men and women and challenged structures that perpetuate the status-quo. While one variety of feminism has explored the hidden and suppressed areas of the female psyche, finding patterns of subsuming as well as rejecting and resisting, another has identified potentialities of cooperation and solidarity between groups and classes of women across ethnic, cultural as well as 'racial' boundaries.

Marxism has consistently drawn attention to oppressive agencies of the state in a modern environment that works to the detriment of individuals. It has gone deeper into the areas of culture and ideology where structures of a different kind operate. Marxist criticism in the twentieth century has effectively focused on the historical context and laid foundations of a realistic appraisal of trends and works. For this reason, it was able to decisively liberate discussions on literature from cyclical time and self-generating myths to put them firmly on the grounds of social analysis. At the same time, it also did a great deal of self-questioning to free itself from dogma. In fact, Marxist literary theory has opened up to the new critical developments in a significantly new way and interrogated them to see their possible relevance to existing cultural pressures. Enriching itself from a number of insights offered by the different twentieth century approaches, Marxism has been able to evolve sharper and more cogent perspectives on literature than before. Examples of this enrichment and evolution abound. New Criticism's emphases on the concreteness of literary representation, structuralism's and poststructuralism's insistence on linguistic and cultural structures as well as deconstruction's recognition of the many alternate paradigms in a text, have all contributed to a new consideration of issues by Marxism. Postmodernism recognizes such agencies but argues against any collective intervention to replace or overthrow them. The interesting fact is that postmodernism hides its cynical face behind the self-same agencies it pretends to question and gets support from them in attacking common enemies such as feminism and Marxism.

6.10 THE 'POST' IN POSTCOLONIALISM

I consider postcolonialism as essentially a new face of postmodernism. Postcolonialism, too, slurs over the existence of colonialism today, even when it

grudgingly accepts the historical phenomenon of the colony in the pre-Second World War phase. As a term, 'postcolonialism' is supposed to take cognizance of the socio-cultural phenomena in former colonies and consider issues that confront the third world today. It takes note of the strange admixture of orthodoxy, nationalism, feminism, ethnic peculiarities and modernism. The emphasis here is on multicultural aspects of societies in the postcolonial era that defy the logic of injustice, oppression and inequality. Postcolonialism relies on theories that constantly shift focus and question the validity of easily acceptable solutions. Because of this insistence on complexity and multivalence, it cleverly steers clear of the presence of the colony in a new form in our world and moves into the hazy anarchic area of failed intentions, ironies and vacuous existences.

The deconstructionist, postmodern and postcolonial discourses reflect in their aggressive stance the persistent efforts for survival of a moribund system and structure. Their attack in the modern world on unity and connectedness (they only mean united action of the masses to establish a rational and just system) from the point of view of small, scattered and peripheral areas of life and for the cynical purpose of providing that history has finally reached a dead end. This can be understood only under the perspective of the clash between destructive anarchy and positive change.

6.11 CONCLUSION

This course brings to you the development of thought in English criticism from the early descriptive-explanatory approaches to the broader historicist-rationalist ones which stand committed to make sense of a world in disarray. Its relevance to the study of literature is immense and literary theory in its questioning and self-questioning mould is sure to take imaginative-literary endeavours towards non-hierarchical, equality-centred and gender-sensitive goals.