PG EG S4-01 (DSC)

TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER-IV

LITERARY AND CRITICAL THEORY I

ENGLISH

Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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DSC 1: Literary and Critical Theory I

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This is the first **Discipline Specific Core (DSC) Course** of Semester IV. In this Course, we shall read about Literary Theory and Critical Theory in terms of its various approaches and concepts. When we read through the units in this course, we shall gain more insights into the theoretical and critical trends included in this course. Since, it is not possible to write in significant detail about the theoretical approaches, we have, in this course, only tried to provide you with the very basic information regarding each of the approaches. Besides, the units are only informative and no attempt has been made to critically analyse the approaches.

Modern Theories of Criticism describes traditional types of literary theory and of applied criticism from Aristotle through the early 20th century. However, since World War I, and especially since the 1960s, there have appeared a large number of innovative literary theories and methods of critical analysis, including revised and amplified versions of the earlier forms of Marxist criticism and Psychoanalytic criticism.As M. H. Abrams in his Glossary has pointed out, we can have the following table of the approximate time when these modes became prominent in literary criticism:

1920s and 1930s Russian Formalism

1930s and 1940s Archetypal Criticism.

1940s and 1950s New Criticism; Phenomenological Criticism.

1960s Structuralist Criticism; modern forms of Feminist Criticism; Stylistics.

1970s Theory of the Anxiety of Influence; Deconstruction; Discourse Analysis; various forms of Reader-Response Criticism; Reception Theory; Semiotics; Speech-act theory.

1980s Dialogic Criticism; New Historicism; Cultural Studies.

1990s Postcolonial Studies; Queer

In DSC 6 of Semester 2, we have already discussed Literary Criticism up to New Criticism in sufficient details. However, as intended, the units 1-15 of this course shall help you to discuss what is usually known as Literary and Critical Theory. But these units are never supposed to be complete in itself. Because, the vast world of literary theories can never be narrowed down like the way we have tried in the different units of this Course. However, we have made all possible attempts to simplify the things so that you understand them and apply them in your analysis of a literary text. Certain paragraphs are directly adapted from certain important books in the field. This has been done to help you have some direct impression on what the different theorists and their critics have to say regarding a particular theoretical trend. For a better understanding of Literary and Critical theory, we have recommended certain books enlisted in the Reference at the end of each Block. You will do really well, if you can get

hold of the books referred and read them of your own, and try to see for yourself the world of theory and how it has enriched the various processes of interpretation in the last decades of the 20th century.

This course is divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** shall deal with Theoretical Approaches I, **Block 2** shall deal with Theoretical Approaches II, and **Block 3** shall help you to discuss some Theoretical Concepts.

Block 1 contains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following. While discussing Literary and Critical Theory it is very important to understand the basic premises of the theoretical approaches, besides making an attempt at tracing the growth and development of Literary and Critical Theory. This Block therefore begins with an introductory unit on the Rise of Theory as a way of interpretation in the field of literary studies.

Unit 1: The Rise of Literary and Critical Theory discusses the meaning of Literary and Critical Theory, how they developed, what they do or how they have influenced and provided scope to analyse literature and literary practices.

Unit 2: Russian Formalism shall discuss some basic ideas of Formalist criticism with reference to Russian Formalism which became prominent in the early part of the 20th century. Formalist criticism is not interested in the feelings or the biography of poets, nor is it concerned with the responses of readers. We shall learn that Formalism is concerned mostly with artistic structure and form that influenced the way we should engage ourselves with literary works.

Unit 3: Structuralism discusses Structuralism that refers first to a broad intellectual movement signifying various ways of theorizing in the 'human sciences' of the 20th century; and then, to a particular set of approaches to literature and other cultural art forms which flourished in France during 1960s. It tries to map the structures that are the actual carriers of meaning and the various relations between the elements within those structures. Structuralism bases its premises on the 'constructed' nature of all human activity and its products.

Unit 4: Post Structuralism & Deconstruction deals with Poststructuralism which is both a continuation and critique of Structuralism. A term that became a popular critical and theoretical usage during 1970s, it is not a unified school of thought or movement. What makes Poststructuralist theory a relevant way of looking at the contemporary world of change is the 'erasure' or weakening of divisions between 'signifier' and 'signified', reading and writing, literature and criticism. As we finish reading the unit, we shall not only be able to discuss Post structuralism and its major exponents but shall also make ourselves comfortable to understand the difficult concepts usually studied along with Post structuralism.

Unit 5: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism shall introduce us to New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. New Historicism designates a kind of writing marked by components such as rejection of the compartmentalisation of disciplines, attention to economic and historical contexts of culture, self-

reflexivity in the act of writing about culture, and intertextuality of texts and discourses and so on. Cultural Materialism, on the other hand, is a theoretical approach to literature that stresses the interaction between cultural creations such as literature and their historical context that also includes social, political and economic elements.

Block 2 contains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 6: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism shall discuss Psychoanalytic Criticism that adopts the methods of "reading" employed by Freud and later theorists to interpret texts. It argues that literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses.

Unit 7: Phenomenological Criticism shall deal with the idea of Phenomenological criticism, which appears to be an important segment in literary studies. The German thinker and philosopher Edmund Husserl established phenomenology as a philosophical perspective in analysing human consciousness and its effectiveness in getting into touch with different objects. It championed the cause of things and phenomena as experienced in one's consciousness.

Unit 8: Hermeneutics and Reader Response Theory shall discuss Reader Response that gained importance in around 1980s. At the centre of Reader Response Theory are the responses of readers to a text over a given period of time. As literary theory, Reader Response focuses on the reader (or "audience") and their experience of a literary work, in contrast to other schools and theories that focus attention primarily on the author or the contents or the form of the work.

Unit 9: Reception Theory shall deal withReception Theory, which refers to the school of criticism that explores the many and often divergent ways in which literary works are received following their initial publication. Hans Robert Jauss gave birth to the concept of 'aesthetic distance' to explain the differences between the immediate reception of a work and its contemporary profile.

Unit 10: Marxist Criticism shall try to discuss Marxist criticism in which *social class* and *class relations* function as central instruments of analysis. Marxist criticism and theory as an intellectual perspective provides a wholesome counterbalance to our propensity to see ourselves and the writers that we read as completely divorced from the socio-economic circumstances.

Block 3 againcontains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 11: Post Colonialism discusses Postcolonialism and tries to grasp the difficult ideas often discussed under Postcolonialism. Whereas it tacitly assumed common ground between the cultural products of the former colonies and the culture of the metropolis, postcolonial theory and criticism emphasises the tension between the metropolis and the former colonies. At the heart of Postcolonial studies, there is

also a critique of Eurocentrism and a strong focus on those who have become the victims of Eurocentric thought, attitudes, politics and exploitation.

Unit 12: Feminisms deals with Feminism that came into vogue in English usage around 1890s with women's conscious struggle to resist patriarchy and to disturb the established patriarchal culture, to assert a belief in sexual equality, and to eradicate sexist domination in the transformation of society.

Unit 13: Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theory shall provide an idea on Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theory. The knowledge systems, over the years, have inscribed or promoted an ideology where man is considered to be the superior gender in comparison to woman. These knowledge systems, relying on its sources, have a significant role in maintaining the hegemonic gender discourse. we shall learn that the most common characteristic of the feminist, as well as queer theorists, are questioning the origins of patriarchy, starting with the definition of the commonly used terms, 'gender' and 'sexuality'.

Unit 14: Eco criticism deals with a discission onhow ecocriticism has been seen as the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyse texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature.

Unit 15: Post Theory shall deal with post-theory which is a term used in literary and cultural studies to describe a shift away from the dominance of grand, all-encompassing theoretical frameworks—such as Structuralism, Poststructuralism, Marxism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, etc.—that characterised much of the 20thcentury. Learners after reading this Unit shall learn that it is not a rejection of theory itself, but rather a critical stance towards the overreliance on theory for interpreting texts or cultural phenomena.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READINGS" which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: THE RISE OF LITERARY AND CRITICAL THEORY

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Rise of Literary Theory

1.4 The Rise of Critical Theory

1.5 Influence of Theory on Literary Practices

1.5.1 Reading from the 'Preface' of *Literary Theory: The Basics*

1.5.2 Reading from the 'Introduction' in David Lodge & Nigel Wood

1.5.3 Reading from "The Return to Philology" by Paul de Man (Norton Anthology)

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.9 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the terms 'Literary Theory' and 'Critical Theory'
- discuss how these theories developed
- write about what these theories do
- discuss how such theories influenced literary practices in the 20th the century

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is an introductory unit of the course on Literary Theory, which is also the first Course in MA English 4th Semester. In this unit, we shall try to discuss the meaning of Literary and Critical Theory, how they developed, what they do or how they have influenced and provided scope to analyse literary practices. These are important issues but not so easy to understand. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, in their groundbreaking *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory: Key Critical Concepts* has offered the

following comments: “Literary theory is an unavoidable part of studying literature and criticism. However, theory especially when it takes the form of ‘isms’ can often be intimidating or else, frankly, boring.” Critical Theory, on the other hand, reflects assessment and critique of society and culture by applying knowledge derived from social sciences and the humanities. As a term, Critical Theory has two meanings with different origins and histories: the first originated in Sociology and the second originated in Literary Criticism, whereby it is used and applied as an umbrella term that can describe a theory founded upon critique; thus, the theorist Max Horkheimer described a theory as critical insofar as it seeks “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them.” As we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to identify most of the major theoretical schools or tendencies in contemporary criticism, and then to understand how they developed and how they have been suggesting different ways to interpret literature.

1.3 THE RISE OF LITERARY THEORY

Julian Wolfrey, in his *Introducing Literary Theories: A Guide and Glossary* states that historically, literary theory, as a convenient term or label, defines works influenced by the practices, discourses and texts of Feminism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Linguistics, Semiotics (the study of signs) and continental philosophy of the last 40 years of the 20th century, including the ideas and approaches gathered together under the label Structuralism and Poststructuralism. This last term is a particular example of a now widespread ‘ism’ generated during the late 1960s in the Anglo-American academic world for the purpose of identifying a quite often radically heterogeneous range practices of critics, philosophers, historians and psychoanalysts. Literary theory, owned as belonging to both literary criticism and literary studies, has come into being as a subject on the curriculum during the same period. Literary Theory has been therefore the name given to a number of different, differing, occasionally overlapping or related ways of reading and interpreting, and is defined thus for economical purposes,

first within the university, and subsequently beyond the university, in publishers catalogues, in reviews, journals and news media.

Here, we can also refer to what Terry Eagleton has to say about Literary Theory. In his 'Introduction' to *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Eagleton writes, "Theory was a way of emancipating literary works from the stranglehold of a 'civilised sensibility', and throwing them open to a kind of analysis in which, in principle at least, anyone could participate. Those who complain of the difficulty of such theory would often, ironically enough, not expect to understand a textbook of biology or chemical engineering straight off. Why then should literary studies be any different? Perhaps because we expect literature itself to be an 'ordinary' kind of language instantly available to everyone; but this is itself a very particular 'theory' of literature. Properly understood, literary theory is shaped by a democratic impulse rather than an elitist one; and to this extent, when it *does* lapse into the turgidly unreadable, it is being untrue to its own historical roots."

From the above we understand that Literary theory is the name given to a range of disparate critical practices and approaches, which are used by members of the humanities in the exploration of literary texts, films, and aspects of contemporary and past cultures. Literary theory is also the name given to the teaching of such practices and approaches in the universities across the world, particularly in the English departments. Theory is, thus, an umbrella term, which brings together insights from Feminists, Marxists and from those who teach literature but are interested in certain branches of Linguistics, Psychoanalysis or Philosophy.

LET US KNOW



20th century literary criticism and theory developed in terms of simultaneous developments in allied fields. From your reading of Course 4 of Semester 2, we have already, discussed a range of ideas in New Criticism, Formalism, and in the work of critics like T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and I. A. Richards, among several others. We also noted that the sequence of developments in literary criticism of the 20th century is not easily charted

along a well-defined time-line. So, even while some critics were formulating important concepts in the study of literary texts, other developments in Europe, for example, were giving rise to newer, more radical concepts, which often come under what may be called Literary Theory. Subsequently, there developed even more radical concepts such as—Structuralism, Post structuralism, Deconstruction, Postmodernism, New historicism, Foucault's Discourse-theory and so on, all of which emerged from a concern with discourses, texts, or language. All these meant that disciplines like philosophy or historiography, the preoccupation was with language or linguistic constructions, rather than with historical fact, and all these have their own particular reasons for emergence.

However, we should pay particular attention to the fact that Literary Theory itself has become a potent discipline cutting across boundaries to decide "the conduct of enquiry in numerous other fields of thought." We see this extended influence in areas like ethnography, psychoanalysis, political theory, gender-studies, theology, anthropology, postcolonial historiography, and ethics and so on. Literary theory is fashionable, exciting, and liberating in many ways. With 'literary theory', we can afford to discuss literary texts in newer ways and to explore new concepts. In many ways, literary theory has become one of those disciplines that have thrust English literary studies into fresh interdisciplinary areas giving it a formidable reputation of analytical ability.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Provide the meaning of literary theory.

Q 2: How does Terry Eagleton define the concept of Literary Theory?

Q 3: How has Literary Theory influenced interpretations of literary texts?

1.4 THE RISE OF CRITICAL THEORY [Taken from David Macey's book]

The term Critical Theory can be loosely used to refer to a whole range of theories which often take a critical view of society and the human sciences or which seek to explain the emergence of the objects of knowledge. However, more significantly, the term also refers to the major strands in the works of the Frankfurt School and particularly to the works of Theodor Adorno and M. Horkheimer. However, it is Jurgan Hebermas who is the most important contemporary spokesman of critical theory. Horkheimer in his inaugural address in 1931 to Institute for Social Research broadly defined critical theory as a human activity that takes society as its object, and that attempts to transcend the tensions between individual spontaneity and the work process relationship s on which our society is based. Critical theory takes as its starting point the works of Marx and Freud, and an analogy is often drawn between the Marxist theory of ideology as illusion and the individual delusions analysed by Freud in The Future of Illusion (1972) where he speaks of the middle class Viennese girl's delusion that a prince will come and marry her. Critical theory would seek to dispel her delusion by giving her a critical and self-critical awareness of why such a marriage is improbable.

Raymond Guess (1981) who made a systematic survey of the works of Habermas and the Frankfurt School, stated that Critical Theory is emancipatory and provides guide to human action and unlike a scientific theory, is self conscious, self critical and non-objectifying. Critical Theory takes the form of a critique of ideology that seeks to explain why social agents accept or consent to systems of collective representations that do not serve their objective interests but legitimate the existing power structure. The object of a critical theory such as Marxism is to supply the knowledge of the necessity of transforming the present social order into a classless society. It does not however predict the inevitability of that transformation and merely points to what ought to be done rather than to what will happen.

The goal of critical theory is to preclude the emergence of such a society by demonstrating that a transition to a freer and more fulfilling society

is objectively or theoretically possible, and then by demonstrating that the existing state of society is unsatisfactory and frustrating that it ought to be transferred. The important proviso is that transformation can come about only if social agents can accept the theses of critical theory as a form of self-consciousness that can act as a guide to emancipator action.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What does Critical theory usually do?

Q 5: State the goal of Critical Theory?

1.5 INFLUENCE OF THEORY ON LITERARY PRACTICES

We shall, in this section, try to understand the impact of Literary Theory on literary practices through a reference to some extracts taken directly from some of the representative texts in the field.

1.5.1 Reading from the 'Preface' of *Literary Theory: The Basics* by Hens Bertens

There was a time when the interpretation of literary texts and literary theory seemed two different and almost unrelated things. Interpretation was about the actual meaning of a poem, a novel, or a play, while theory seemed alien to what the study of literature was really about because its generalisations could never do justice to individual texts. In the last thirty years, however, interpretation and theory have moved closer and closer to each other. In fact, for many contemporary critics and theorists interpretation and theory cannot be separated at all. They would argue that when we interpret a text we always do so from a theoretical perspective, whether we are aware of it or not, and they would also argue that theory cannot do without interpretation.

The premise of *Literary Theory: The Basics* is that literary theory and literary practice–the practice of interpretation–can indeed

not very well be separated and certainly not at the more advanced level of academic literary studies. One of its aims, then, is to show how theory and practice are inevitably connected and *have* always been connected. The emphasis is on the 1970s and after, but important earlier views of literature get their full share of attention. This is not merely a historical exercise. A good understanding of, for instance, the New Criticism that dominated literary criticism in the United States from the mid 1930s until 1970 is indispensable for students of literature. Knowing about the New Criticism will make it a lot easier to understand other, later, modes of reading. More importantly, the New Criticism, like other more traditional approaches to literature, has by no means disappeared. Likewise, an understanding of what is called structuralism makes the complexities of so-called poststructuralist theory a good deal less daunting and has the added value of offering a perspective that is helpful in thinking about culture in general.

In the field of literary studies a whole range of approaches and theoretical perspectives, political and apolitical, traditional and radical, old and new, operate next to each other in relatively peaceful coexistence. In its survey of that range of positions, *Literary Theory: The Basics* tries to do equal justice to a still actual tradition and to the radicalness of the new departures of the last decades. We still ask 'what does it mean?' when we read a poem or novel or see a play. But we have additional questions. We ask 'what does it mean to whom?' And 'why does it mean what it means?' Or, more specifically, 'who wants it to have this meaning and for what reasons?'

1.5.2 Reading from the 'Introduction' in David Lodge & Nigel Wood's *Anthology*

What is Structuralism—or perhaps one should ask, what was Structuralism? In the opinion of many qualified judges, structuralism is a thing of the past – was already in terminal decline by the time the English-speaking world became aware of its

existence in the late 1960s. We live in the age of post-structuralism—but to understand *that* we must know what came before. Structuralism is, or was, a movement in what Continental Europeans call 'the human sciences', which sought to explain and understand cultural phenomena (from poems to menus, from primitive myths to modern advertisements) as manifestations of underlying systems of signification, of which the exemplary model is verbal language itself, especially as elucidated by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. One can trace a line from Saussure to the Russian Formalists, from the Russian Formalists (via Roman Jakobson) to the Prague Linguistic Circle, and from there to the structuralist anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the eruption of *la nouvelle critique* in Paris in the 1960s.

'Theory' has more than one meaning in this context. Structuralism has generated in literary critics a much greater interest in, and anxiety about, the theory of their own subject (what is sometimes called, after Aristotle, poetics) than was formerly the case, at least in Britain and America. However, the recent theorisation of literary studies has borrowed its terms and concepts very largely from other disciplines — linguistics, psychoanalysis, philosophy, Marxism. In the process, literary criticism has been drawn into the vortex of a powerful new field of study in which all these disciplines are merged and interfused, and which goes under the general name of 'theory'. The aim of this collective enterprise would appear to be nothing less than a totalizing account of human consciousness and human culture (or else a tireless demonstration of the impossibility of such a project). A good deal of what goes on in university departments of language and literature nowadays, and is written in journals ostensibly dedicated to literary criticism, is contributing to Theory in this wide sense.

This development, predictably, has created strains and stresses within the institutional structures that contain and maintain the academic study of literature. In the Foreword to *20th Century*

Literary Criticism felt obliged to rebut the view that students should be discouraged from reading criticism because, by supplying them with ready-made interpretations and judgments, it was likely to blunt their capacity for independent response to primary texts. The complaint more commonly heard today is that modern criticism's obsession with theory undermines the study of literature in a more fundamental way, by questioning its very foundations, such as the idea of the author as origin of a text's meaning, the possibility of objective interpretation, the validity of empirical historical scholarship and the authority of the literary canon.

By no means, all of modern critical theory is hostile to these traditional humanist principles, but much of it certainly is, and it is easy to understand the anxiety that provokes this complaint. A premature and dogmatically enforced exposure to post-structuralist theory can be confusing and disabling to the student. I am sure, however, that the answer is not to try and ignore or suppress the existence of theory. We have eaten the apple of knowledge and must live with the consequences.

Literary criticism can no longer be taught and practised as if its methods, aims and institutional forms were innocent of theoretical assumptions and ideological implications. What is essential, however, is that the new theoretical self-consciousness should be earned, not borrowed, that it should be based on a study of the seminal texts that gave rise to it. These are, for the most part, difficult texts, and coming to grips with them, seeking to understand them, is an educative process in itself, whether or not one accepts their conclusions.

There are numerous guides to structuralism and post-structuralism now available, and introductions to the work of individual critics and theorists. These publications are often extremely useful, but they are no substitute for the texts upon which they comment, though paradoxically they are often cheaper and easier to obtain. There are also several critical anthologies, which represent particular

types of criticism, such as deconstruction, or reader-response criticism. *Modern Criticism and Theory* aims to provide within the covers of a single book a selection of important and representative work from

1.5.3 Reading from "The Return to Philology" by Paul de Man (from *Norton Anthology*)

The quarrelsome tone that hangs over the debates on the teaching of literature can often be traced back to the advent of contemporary literary theory. This is certainly not surprising. Whenever new approaches or techniques are being advocated, a very understandable ill-humour overcomes those who feel they may have to modify or to reconsider well-established pedagogical habits that served them well until the most recent troublemakers came along. However, the polemical response in the case of contemporary theory, and especially of some of its aspects runs deeper.

It feeds not only on civilised conservatism but on moral indignation. It speaks with an anxiety that is not only that of a disturbed tranquillity but of a disturbed moral conscience. Nor is this mood confined to the opponents of theory. Its protagonists, in most cases, are just as nervous. When they appear not to be, their self-assurance often seems to be dependent on utopian schemes. The well-established rationale for the professing of literature has come under fire.

Small wonder that it chooses to shoot back. Ever since the teaching of literature became an autonomous academic field (and we are frequently reminded that this is a fairly recent development, going back no further than the late nineteenth century) it has justified itself as a humanistic and historical discipline, allied to yet distinct from the descriptive sciences of philology and rhetoric. Its ambitions, however, go beyond mere description. It not only has its own national and comparative history but, since it deals with a relatively stable canon of specific texts, it should be a model for the other historical

sciences whose subject matter is less clearly defined. Moreover, it has the task of determining the meaning of texts and this hermeneutic function establishes its kinship with theology.

Finally, as a depositor of human experience of considerable variety and scope, it gains access to questions of moral philosophy-questions of value and of normative judgment. Its technical and descriptive aspects as a science of language dovetail with its historical, theological and ethical function. The professor of literature has good reasons to feel appeased; his scientific conscience is satisfied by the positive rigor of his linguistic and historical knowledge while his moral political and (in the extensive sense) religious conscience is assuaged by the application of this knowledge to the understanding of the world, of society and of the self. The didactics of literature could legitimately hope to be exemplary for interdisciplinary humanistic studies. Neither is this hope incompatible with literary theory and literary criticism: some forms of theory especially those, which continue a tradition of aesthetic speculation that, in the field of English, can be traced back to Coleridge to fully confirm these expectations.

Literary theory raises the unavoidable question whether aesthetic values can be compatible with the linguistic structures that make up the entities from which these values are derived, Such questions never ceased to haunt the consciousness of writers and philosophers, They come to the fore in the ambivalent rejection of rhetoric at the very moment that it was being used and refined as never before, or in the assimilation of the considerable aesthetic charge emanating from rhetorical tropes to the aesthetic neutrality of grammar, It is by no means an established fact that aesthetic values and linguistic structures are incompatible, What is established is that their compatibility, or lack of it, has to remain an open question and that the manner in which the teaching of literature, since its beginning in the later nineteenth century, has foreclosed the question is unsound, even if motivated by the best of intentions, What also

ought to be (but is not) established is that the professing of literature ought to take place under the aegis of this question, From a purely methodological point of view, this would not be difficult to achieve, It would invoke a change by which literature, instead of being taught only as a historical and humanistic subject, should be taught as a rhetoric and a poetics prior to being taught as a hermeneutics and a history. The institutional resistances to such a move, however, are probably insurmountable. For one thing, it changes departments of English from being large organisations in the service of everything except their own subject matter into much smaller units, dedicated to the professional specialisation that Professor Bate deplores, It also requires a change in the rationale for the teaching of literature, away from standards of cultural excellence that, in the last analysis, are always based on some form of religious faith, to a principle of disbelief that is not so much scientific as it is critical, in the full philosophical sense of the term, One sees easily enough why such changes are not likely to occur. Yet with the critical cat now so far out of the bag that one can no longer ignore its existence, those who refuse the crime of theoretical ruthlessness can no longer hope to gain a good conscience. Neither, of course, can the theorists-but, then, they never laid claim to it in the first place.



1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this introductory unit, we have tried to discuss the concept of Literary and Critical Theory and how they have influenced literary interpretations through a reading of some important extracts taken from Hens Bertens, David Lodge & Nigel Wood and Paul de Man respectively. We have learnt that Literary Theory, which became popular in the 20th century, is a body of ideas and methods we use in the reading of literature. Thus, by literary theory, we actually refer not to the meaning of a work of literature but to the rules or theories that reveal what literature can mean. Literary theory refers to the description of the underlying principles, or tools,

by which we attempt to understand literature. We have understood that Literary theory has formulated the relationship between author and work. However, with the emergence of Critical Theory, we have understood, that a particular work of art becomes more a product of a society and culture than an individual author and in turn, that text helps to create the culture to which it belongs. Our understanding of Literary and Critical Theory will help to discuss understand the following units of the Course in a better way.



1.7 FURTHER READING

Bertens, Hans. (2007). *Literary Theory: The Basics*. (2nd Edn.). New York: Taylor and Francis.

Habib, M.A.R. (2005). *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present.* UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (2003). *Modern Criticism and Literary Theory: A Reader.* New Delhi, Pearson Education Ltd.

Macey, David. (2000). *Dictionary of Critical Theory.* London: Penguin Books.

Makaryk, Irena R. (Ed.). (1993). *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms.* Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Vincent B. Leitch. (Gen Ed.). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton and Company, Inc.



1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Literary Theory refers to different, differing, and overlapping ways of reading and interpreting… …it is the name given to a range of disparate critical practices and approaches, used for the exploration of literary texts, films, and aspects of contemporary and past cultures… …it is also the name given to the teaching of such practices and approaches in the universities across the world.

Ans to Q 2: Theory was a way of emancipating literary works from the stranglehold of a 'civilised sensibility', and throwing them open to a kind of analysis in which, in principle at least, anyone could participate.

Ans to Q 3: Literary Theory has become a potent discipline cutting across boundaries to decide the conduct of enquiry in numerous other fields of thought… …literary theory is fashionable, exciting, and liberating in many ways… …this has enabled us to discuss literary texts in newer ways.

Ans to Q 4: Critical Theory refers to a range of theories which often take a critical view of society and the human sciences… …seeks to explain the emergence of the objects of knowledge… …also refers to the major strands in the works of the Frankfurt School and particularly to that of Theodor Adorno and M. Horkheimer.

Ans to Q 5: The goal is to preclude the emergence of a society by demonstrating that a transition to a freer and more fulfilling society is objectively or theoretically possible… …it seeks to demonstrate that the existing state of society is unsatisfactory and frustrating that it ought to be transferred.



1.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What does literary theory usually do? Write a note on the rise of literary theory.

Q 2: What are the causes in the emergence of Critical Theory. Discuss.

Q 3: In what way, have literary and cultural theories influenced the interpretation of literature?

Q 4: With the emergence of Critical Theory, we have understood, that a particular work of art becomes more a product of a society and culture than an individual author. Discuss.

Q 5: Literary theory refers to the description of the underlying principles, or tools, by which we attempt to understand literature. Discuss.

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UNIT 2: RUSSIAN FORMALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Introducing Russian Formalism

2.4 The Russian Formalist Critics

- 2.4.1 Roman Jakobson (1896-1982)
- 2.4.2 Yuri Tynyanov (1894-1943)
- 2.4.3 Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984)
- 2.4.4 Boris Tomashevsky (1890-1957)
- 2.4.5 Boris Eichenbaum (1886-1959)
- 2.4.6 Vladimir Propp (1895-1970)
- 2.4.7 Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975)

2.5 Major Concepts

- 2.5.1 Literariness
- 2.5.2 Form and Content
- 2.5.3 Fabula and Syuzhet
- 2.5.4 Defamiliarisation

2.6 Reception of Russian Formalism

2.7 Let us Sum up

2.8 Further Reading

2.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.9 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- trace the traditions of Formalist criticism
- make a list of the major figures of the movement and understand their contributions
- examine the concepts popularised by the critics and theorists in question

- discuss Russian Formalism as an important trend in Literary Theory

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have tried to understand the concept of Literary and Critical Theory. In this unit, we shall discuss some basic ideas of Formalist criticism with reference to Russian Formalism. Formalist criticism became prominent in the early part of the 20th century, and is usually defined against the subjectivist theories of literature as propounded by the Romantics. Hence, we must understand that Formalist criticism is not interested in the feelings or the biography of poets. Nor it is concerned with the responses of readers. Instead, it is concerned with artistic structure and form. There are two best-known schools of formalist criticism—Anglo-American New Criticism and Russian Formalism. Like Anglo-American New Criticism, Russian Formalism initially concentrated on poetry. However, the interesting point is that the Russians who developed the so-called *Formal Method* were almost unaware of the developments in England and America. It is only when the prominent Formalist, the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) and his friends began to be translated into English in the late 1950s and 1960s that the English-speaking world started to give importance to their wholly different approach to literary studies. What we shall have learnt in this unit is not the historical comprehensiveness of Russian Formalism but its upholding of a particular *way* of 'reading' literature that would not only influence literary studies in the subsequent periods but would also affect the subsequent developments of literary theory.

2.3 INTRODUCING RUSSIAN FORMALISM

Throughout the later 19th century and early 20th century, sociological considerations were dominant in the critical climate of Russia as the Russian critics dwelt extensively on the connection of literature with issues of social well-being. For instance, Vissarioni Belinsky (1811- 48) maintained that literature should contribute to social betterment while at the same time remaining artistic. Nikolay Dobrolyubov (1836-1861) even maintained that

social and political demands should overshadow the aesthetic in literature. Dimitry Pisarev (1840-68) had denounced Pushkin, as he believed that Pushkin's works are harmful to social progress. Thus, you should note that Pushkin and Gogol were at the centre-stage of critical debate in the mid-19th century. It was however, Pavel Anenkov (1813-1887) who brought out Pushkin's works and tried to defend the autonomy of art and the dualistic ideal of the artistic and the political against the views of the Russian critics. Anenkov's friend Alexander Druzhinin (1824-64) stated that the socially beneficial role of art was only possible when it ceases to be the principal aim of arts. Against such long-standing political and intellectual debates, it is important to discuss the role played by Russian Formalism. Before 'formalism', literary analysis could not be seen as a discipline in itself but part of academic research. The French Symbolist Movement offered a highly subjective and impressionistic mode of criticism. The Formalists, on the other hand, entered the scene with a reaction against the subjectivism of the Symbolists, pleading instead for a scientific mode of literary study.

Initially, the Formalist critics offered a distinctive view of language, and underlined the distinctiveness of literary language against ordinary language. In the subsequent times, the distinction between plot and story was extensively examined. Russian Formalism shared ideas with Anglo-American New Criticism in taking a literary text as an autonomous entity and hence, the proper object of study. The second decade of the 20th century saw the emergence of two circles of literary thinkers and linguists in Russia namely "Moscow Linguistic Circle" based in Moscow, and the OPOJAZ often known as the "Society for the Study of Poetic Language" based in St. Petersburg. The former circle was formed in the capital city of Russia in 1915. It was founded by the eminent linguist and scholar, Roman Jakobson. The other members of the group were Grigory Vinokur, Peter Bogatynev, Osip Brik and Boris Tomashevsky. The second circle OPOJAZ was formed in St. Petersburg in 1916 of which Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Boris Eichenbaum and Viktor Vinogradov were the members. Although the Russian critics were nevertheless associated in their intellectual efforts, their intellectual co-operation gave birth to several volumes of essays,

entitled “Studies in the Theory of Poetic Language” (1916-23). However, the issue on which both the two circles converged was the specificity of literature. Following this, both linguists and literary theorists were compelled to ask: What is literature? What constitutes its uniqueness, or its special mode of being?

LET US KNOW



Russian Formalism vs New Criticism:

There seems to be many things common between Russian Formalism and American New Criticism because of their similar emphasis on ‘close reading’. The Russian Formalists regarded themselves as developers of a science of criticism and were more interested in the discovery of a systematic method for the analysis of poetic texts. They emphasised a differential definition of literature as opposed to the New Critical isolation and objectification of the single text.

Viktor Shklovsky in his essay “Art as Technique” (1917) made an example of poetry by stating that poetry clearly exhibits the tendency to make our contact with the written word difficult. Consequently, he characterised poetic language as speech consciously constructed for the purpose of drawing attention to the very fabric of expression. This was a radical view adopted by Shklovsky as it debunked a tradition that associated literary craft with a special kind of thinking. Thus, literature started offering itself as a legitimate object of systematic scholarship. The goal of such scholarship was to study the very devices that distinguish artistic writing from all other modes of discourse. Subsequently, Roman Jakobson summarised their mission by stating that he and his colleagues should devote themselves fully to the study of the device by drawing attention not on literature per se, but on ‘literariness’—that is, the function or quality that make a text artistic.

While poetry, with its highly crafted idiom, was privileged by the formalists in their initial search for the distinctive properties of literature,

they were also well aware of the significance of a formalist analysis of prose texts. For instance, Shklovsky tried to show that the principle of impeded form is applicable to works of fiction as well. He even stated that the principles of plot construction are analogous to those of sound instrumentation in verse—whereas the goal of poetry is to make perceptible its own verbal construction, the purpose of narrative fiction, is to make perceptible its own plot construction, how the story is made. The soul of plot construction, according to Shklovsky, was **staircase construction**: the advancement of the story not by a straight line, but along a roundabout course on which gradation becomes possible through repetition. Thus, he developed the views on narrative fiction based on the opposition of Fabula and Sjuzhet, translated roughly as “story” and “plot”. Fabula is the story “told straight”. Sjuzhet, on the other hand, is this same story, not as it might have happened in real life, but in its literary presentation: with all the twist and turns.

The formalists were not really interested in exploring at length the peculiarities of past traditions, even less in tracing lines of development from past to present. For them history mattered mostly insofar as it offered them a series unfolded in time, a concatenation of interrelated facts. They focused primarily on the sequences that demonstrated how one literary phenomenon is engendered by another on the principle of opposition. They held the view that that if anyone wanted to find out what is specific to a given literary work, one must examine its formal properties. Therefore, it is not necessary to take into account how large the historical and social factors are in shaping a literary work. Secondly, the formalists resisted the mimetic theory of literature, which propounded literature as the result of imitation of reality.

The end of Formalism came in the years 1929–30 following Stalin’s consolidation of power. In his efforts to bring ideological purity, he set out to expose and eliminate ideological deviations in all branches of thought. Viewed previously as the ideological opponents of Marxism, the formalists now became simply ideological enemies, whose destruction was a higher priority than the serious engagement with their arguments. Some, like

Shklovsky, wrote self-critical reflections, acknowledging the defects of their approach. Others, like Tynyanov, retreated from literary criticism. While, others, including Eichenbaum and Tomashevsky, adapted to the demands of the new orthodoxy and continued to work as literary scholars within the Stalinist establishment. Extinguished in the Soviet Union, formalism enjoyed an afterlife of some sorts through the activities of the Prague Linguistic Circle.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In what way, do you think, Formalism was against subjectivist views of art?

Q 2: What are the similarities and differences between Russian Formalism and New Criticism?

Q 3: Name the two circles of Formalism in Russia.

Q 4: Do you accept that the Formalists contributed towards the study of poetry only?

Q 5: How did the prominent Formalist critics finally react to Stalin's views?

2.4 THE RUSSIAN FORMALIST CRITICS

The following is a discussion of the major Russian critics whose contributions gradually shaped what we now call Russian Formalism.

2.4.1 Roman Jakobson (1896-1982)

Roman Jakonson was one of the most influential linguists, literary theorists, and semioticians of the 20th century. He was born in Russia in 1896. He entered Moscow University in 1914, completed his study at the University of Prague, and later taught at Masaryk University from 1935 until the Nazi occupation in 1939. He was the founder of **Moscow Linguistic Circle** in 1915 and was also associated with the OPOJAZ. He founded the **Prague Linguistic Circle** where he started studying the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de

Saussure's work. In 1939, he fled to Scandinavia, then immigrated to the USA in 1941 and stayed there till his death in 1982. He rendered a considerable impact on the study of linguistics in general. His role in the formation of Russian Formalism and in the post war development of Structuralism, established him as one of the pioneering figures of literary and cultural theory. His advocacy of the idea that the study of language is essential to the study of literature made him one of the most influential figures in the "linguistic turn" in Critical Theory.

Jakobson developed his linguistic approach to literary theory by constructing a scientific basis for distinguishing literature from all other forms of linguistic communication. Together with other formalists like Iury Tynianov and Viktor Shklovsky, he developed the theory of "literariness" of literary writing inviting scrutiny of the phonological, semantic, and metrical "devices" of the work. This linguistic approach to literature represented a radical break with the historical and biographical modes of literary analysis popular at that time. Jakobson viewed that poetics cannot be separated from linguistics. Incorporating the concepts of synchrony and diachrony, he explains that literary study is concerned with elements of the literary text that persist at a given point of time.

However, Jakobson's contribution to the formalist movement lies in the analysis of 'literariness'. He attempted to define what makes a verbal message a work of art in linguistic terms. 'Literariness', about which you will get to read in the following section of this unit, was a major concern for the formalists from the very beginning of the movement. In the essay "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics" Jakobson explored this fundamental 'formalist' idea using a wide range of illustration and example. Closely linked to this concept is a theory of poetry. Besides, in this famous essay Jakobson identifies metaphor and metonymy as two fundamental ways of organizing discourse.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Discuss Jakobson's Linguistic approach to Literary Studies.

2.4.2 Yuri Tynyanov (1894-1943)

Born in Latvia, Tynyanov graduated from Petrograd University in 1918. Besides his identity as a 'formalist' critic, Tynyanov was also regarded as an authority on Pushkin. The question of what counts as literature and what does not, was one of his major pre-occupations. He held the view that a text being 'literary' depended on its relationship with both literary and extra-literary orders. Thus, you should note that his concept of a literary system is that a text may be literary and non-literary depending on the nature of the literary systems within which it is set. The initial position of the Formalists was to discuss the aesthetic and historical. Gradually, they pleaded for the study of the devices and techniques, which account for the "literariness" of a given work of art. By 1924, Tynyanov introduced a systematic and functional perspective into literary studies. The most distinguished work of Tynyanov in this regard was *Theses on Language*—a collaborative effect with Jakobson.

The following points he raised in the book are important for the 'formalist' movement.

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

2.4.3 Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984)

Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky was a Russian literary theorist and critic, and writer of experimental prose. As you are already informed, he was also one of the initiators of Russian Formalism. Stimulated by his experience of Russian Futurism, he gave Formalism many of its crucial concepts and key words. His theoretical works and analyses of literature and film influenced crucial developments in Prague Linguistic Circle, Morphology, and Structuralism. Shklovsky coined the term "ostranenie" (estrangement), one of the most important "devices" of poetic language and an essential concept for the "scientific method" of formalist textual analysis.

Born in St. Petersburg in 1893, Shklovsky completed his education at the University of St. Petersburg. In 1923, he moved to Germany to settle there permanently. There he published two novels: *A Sentimental Journey* (1923) and *Zoo* (1923). He came back to Russia and started serious engagement with literary criticism. As a result, his two critical works—*On the Theory of Prose* (1925) and *The Technique of the Writer's Craft* (1928) came out. Like other writers of that period in Russia, he too was under pressure from Soviet authorities. He attempted to adopt Socialist Realism— the official doctrine in literary culture in post-revolutionary Russia. Echoes of such an undertaking can be heard in essays such as "Movements to a Scholarly Error" (1930).

Inspired by Russian Futurism and its experimental use of language (by Mayakovsky and others), Shklovsky developed his own original theses on literature. It occurred in 1913, in the St. Petersburg avant-garde artists' nightclub and cabaret, the **Stray Dog**, where he presented a paper on "The place of futurism in the history of language" to a mixed audience of bohemian intellectuals. Shklovsky developed a fundamental methodology for analyzing literary devices, which defined the task of formalist criticism. Along with Boris

Eichenbaum, Yury Tynyanov, Osip Brik, and the linguist Lev Yakubinsky, he became a member of **Society for the Study of Poetic Language** (OPOYAZ) which was known for being the forum for debating and for publishing on formalist subjects.

In cooperation with Jakobson's **Moscow Linguistic Circle**, Shklovsky and the OPOYAZ developed a full-fledged formalist theory. His seminal essay "Art as Technique" first published in an OPOYAZ anthology in 1917 can be regarded as the **"manifesto of formalism"**. Here he illustrates how, in contrast to common language, poetic language achieves its "resurrection" through a device what may be called 'ostranenie' (making strange in Russian) or 'defamiliarisation' (in English). 'Ostranenie' in literature has a double effect. You will note that Shklovsky's influence has been wide ranging. Bertolt Brecht, who used the term "Verfremdungseffekt" ("alienation effect") in his theoretical writing on theatre in 1936, probably came across Shklovsky's term 'ostranenie' while visiting Moscow in 1935. In Prague, Jan Mukarovsky developed Shklovsky's formalist thoughts into structuralism, as did Yuri Lotman in Tartu, Estonia, with his structural-semiotic method.

Since, the mid 1960s, as the formalist theorists were being introduced to the West and as interest in Marxism and revolutionary Russia was being renewed, Shklovsky's works began to be translated and widely disseminated among a diverse field of scholars and critics.

LET US KNOW



Viktor Shklovsky's essay "Art as Technique" is crucial to the Formalist movement in Russia because it served as a manifesto of the earlier Formalist schools. The essay offers many radically different views on the nature of art and literature. The concept of 'defamiliarisation' expounded in this essay, gained widespread currency giving the 'Formalist School' the status of a movement.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Mention the significance of Shklovsky's essay "Art as Technique."

Q 8: What are the key concepts and words popularised by Shklovsky?

2.4.4 Boris Tomashevsky (1890-1957)

A graduate from the University of Liege Tomashevsky studied 17th and 18th century French poetry at Sorbonne. He also studied Russian philology at St. Petersburg University and joined 'Opojaz' in 1918. From the mid-1920s, he taught poetics and stylistics at Leningrad University. He played an important role at the OPOJAZ by developing a theory of versification. There he wrote *Russian Versification. Metrics* and many articles like "The problem of verse rhythm", "Verse and Rhythm" and so on. *Russian Versification. Metrics* is a concise introduction to the problem of Russian versification.

Tomashevsky makes the same plot/story distinction that we find in Shklovsky, but considers also the importance of theme and motif in the construction of narrative. His essay "Thematics" examines the difference between plot and story, 'limited' and 'objective' narrators, and relationships between characters and so on. For Tomashevsky, theme summarises and unifies the work and engages the reader's interest, while motifs are elementary and irreducible particles of theme. Importantly, it is the relationship between themes and motifs that gives fiction its narrative form. The distinction between 'free' and 'bound' motifs illustrates the link between plot and theme. Bound motifs are connected in what he calls causal-chronological order, and give a story its coherence. Free motifs, on the other hand, are not necessary to the narrative and may be omitted, but they often contribute to and determine plot structure. Artistry in narrative is the result of the ordering and arrangement of free motifs interspersed among 'bound' motifs.

Thus, what is important about Tomashevsky is that his rigorous conception of theme provides the foundation for his analysis of other aspects of narrative fiction. For example, how theme drives the plot, allows for conflict, creates tension, enables character development, and allows for variation in point of view become important source of debate.

2.4.5 Boris Eichenbaum (1886-1959)

Boris Eichenbaum was another leading figure among the Russian formalist critics. His famous essay "Theory of the Formal Method" (1926) surveys the history and the central theoretical concepts of Russian Formalism. At St. Petersburg University, Eichenbaum initially planned to become a medical doctor but switched his studies to language and literature. He graduated in 1912. His involvement with the formalist movement represents only one phase. Since 1928, his work shifted from the analytical approach of formalism to a series of biographical studies of the great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). Like all of his colleagues under the Stalinist era, he knew that if he wished to continue writing criticism, he would have to support Socialist Realism. The final volume of his **Tolstoy Project** appeared only posthumously, and the draft of another volume was lost during the German army's siege of Leningrad during World War II.

In "The Theory of the Formal Method" Eichenbaum takes stock of the first decade of work of the formalist movement. He states that many opponents criticised their focus on literary language and formal innovations. Most notably, the Marxist Leon Trotsky, an early leader of the Russian Revolution as well as a powerful writer on history and literature, castigated them for their lack of attention to the social significance of literary works. Besides, those who joined under the mantle of formalism were not a tightly unified school but a heterogeneous movement. Eichenbaum also emphasises Viktor Shklovsky's role as the leader of the formalist movement. Such an

understanding of Eichenbaum's role as Russian Formalist provides valuable insights into our discussion of the history of Formalism.

2.4.6 Vladimir Propp (1895-1970)

Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp was a Russian Formalist scholar who analysed the basic plot components of Russian Folk Tales to identify their simplest irreducible narrative elements. In 1932, Propp became a faculty member at Leningrad University (formerly St. Petersburg University). After 1938, he shifted the focus of his research from linguistics to folklore. He chaired the Department of Folklore until it became part of the Department of Russian Literature. Propp remained a faculty member until his death in 1970.

His *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) is a major contribution to 'formalism' as well as an important step towards the poetics of fictional narrative. Narrative, Propp says, is characterised by its syntactic structuring. He sees narrative not in terms of character but as constituted by 'functions' that the characters have within the plot. Propp identifies certain functions that confer uniformity on the tales. He concludes that a character is attached to a certain function. The functions are distinguishable and they are constant elements independent of their agent. The number of functions Propp distinguishes is thirty-one.

He also concluded that all characters in the 100 tales that he analysed could be resolved into only seven broad character types which are as follows:

The villain — struggles against the hero.

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

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

The princess and her father — gives the task to the hero, identifies the false hero, marries the hero, often sought for during the narrative. Propp noted that functionally, the princess and the father cannot be clearly distinguished.

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

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

False hero — takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess.

[Adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Propp]

In a particular fairy tale, one character might be involved in more than one sphere of action. In the same vein, many characters can be involved in a single action. Such an analysis of Propp's ideas regarding Russian folktales may help your understanding of Russian Formalism to a considerable extent. Propp's focus is on elements of the construction of the narrative. The characters or figures in the folktales are seen as 'signifiers' or as coded functions. The various combinations give us the Syuzhet. Such concepts immensely contribute to our understanding of Structuralism.

2.4.7 Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975)

Mikhail Mikhaylovich Bakhtin is a Russian theorist. He is increasingly being recognised as one of the major literary theorists of the 20th century. He is famous for his influence on what is known as discourse analysis. He is perhaps best known for his radical philosophy of language, as well as his theory of the novel based on concepts such as "dialogism," "polyphony," and "carnival". Forced into internal exile around 1929, Bakhtin was an obscure figure in his native Russia. However, in the West he was discovered only in the 1960s. Bakhtin's writings were produced during momentous upheavals in Russia like the Revolution of 1917 followed by a Civil War (1918–1921), famine, and the repressive dictatorship under Joseph Stalin. While Bakhtin himself was not a member of the Communist Party, his work has been regarded by some as Marxist in orientation, seeking to provide a corrective to the abstractness of extreme Formalism. Despite his critique of Formalism, he has also

been claimed as a member of the Jakobsonian formalist school, as a Post structuralist, and even as a religious thinker.

Bakhtin's major works as translated into English include *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (1990), *Rabelais and his World* (1965; trans. 1968), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929; trans. 1973), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1930s; trans. 1981), and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986). Some of his early writings, such as "Art and Responsibility" and "Author and Hero," offer a phenomenological account of the intersubjective connection of human selves in language. Bakhtin's interest in the nature of language was formed in part by members of his Circle. Thus, the authorship of some of the publications of the Bakhtin Circle is still disputable. For example, *Freudianism* (1927) and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929, 1930), were published under the name of V. N. Volosinov. A further title, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928), was published under the name of P. N. Medvedev. Linguists like V. V. Ivanov claim that these texts were in fact written by Bakhtin. Bakhtin's major achievements include the formulation of an innovative and radical philosophy of language as well as a comprehensive "theory" of the novel as you will find in his essay "Discourse in the Novel".

Bakhtin pointed out that traditional stylistics had ignored the social dimensions of artistic discourse, which had been treated as a self-subsistent phenomenon, cut off from broader historical movements. Moreover, traditional stylistics have not found a place for the novel, which, like other "prosaic" discourse, has been viewed as an "extra artistic medium," an artistically "neutral" means of communication on the same level as practical speech. He acknowledges that in the 1920s some attempts were made (he appears to be thinking of the Russian Formalists) to recognize "the stylistic uniqueness of artistic prose as distinct from poetry." However, Bakhtin suggests that such endeavours merely revealed that traditional stylistic categories were not applicable to novelistic discourse.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: How is Vladimir Propp connected to Russian Folktales?

Q 10: What are the seven character types that Propp identifies in folktales?

Q 11: How is Bakhtin connected to Formalism?

2.5 MAJOR CONCEPTS

You must have understood by now that the Russian Formalists were pre-occupied with the question of form. Perhaps the most important questions they raised and resolved were—what makes a work of literature 'artistic' and 'literary'? What is the object of literary and critical study? How is the study of artistry of a given work related to language? Let us now discuss some of the key concepts of Russian Formalism in the following subsections.

2.5.1 Literariness

The Formalist critics were preoccupied with the literary quality of a given work. For them, 'literariness' elicits the distinction between literary language and the language of practical discourse. Roman Jakobson held the view that the object of literary study is not literature per se, but 'literariness'—that is to say—the sum of special linguistic and formal properties that distinguish literary texts from non literary texts. For example, as 'poetic' language focuses on the 'message' for its own sake, a verbal message, on the other hand, calls attention to itself. Thus, the relation between 'sign' and its 'referent' is disturbed. You must however understand that 'poetic' function does not necessarily refer to poetry only. Instead, it points to any verbal message that foregrounds the signs more than making them a vehicle for meaning. It also suggests a basic organizing principle underlying all verbal discourse. Jakobson says, "Poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into that of combination."

In poetry, a particular word is selected from among a stock of equivalent words. The chosen words are then combined not according to the grammatical rule of combination, but according to the same principle of equivalence. Along the axis of combination, this equivalence is created through various means such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, parallelism, or other rhetorical devices. These two ways of organizing verbal discourse are likened to 'metaphor' and 'metonymy'. Jakobson not merely expounds the metaphoric and metonymic principles, but tries to understand different 'genres' and types of literary work in these terms. Poetry exhibits the principle of metaphor whereas metonymic principle is the very heart of prose literature. Thus, we can see that the issue of 'literariness' marginalises the content element of a given work of art.

2.5.2 Form and Content

The Formalists were manifestly oriented towards the idea of 'form'. Cursorily speaking, 'form' includes all formal aspects, compositional elements, constitutive principles, as well as the rhetorical devices that go into the making of a literary text. You perhaps remember that the neo-classical critics defined 'form' as a combination of component elements that could be used to maintain decorum, that the Romantic poet Coleridge too upheld that 'organic form' in the creative process is just like a growing plant, where the parts are inseparably related to the whole. Even the New Critics used the term 'structure' synonymously with 'form'. Thus, what prevailed throughout the different phases of critical tradition is the dichotomy between 'form' and 'content'. It is important to note that the formalists resist the idea that 'form' is a container or an envelope. Instead, they define 'form' as something concrete, dynamic and self-contained. Form determines structure and meaning. Even 'form' is itself understood as 'content'. From early on, the Russian Formalist critics distanced themselves from the traditional distinction between 'form' and 'content'. Although in early formalist writings explicit

definitions of 'form' and 'content' are limited, gradually, formalist discourse moved into a theoretical field and reached a common understanding that combined 'form' with the concept of 'material' and not with 'content'.

According to Formalism, it is the 'form' that remains to be studied as the proper object of literary study. However, you should note that they often avoided providing any definitive meaning of the term, preferring terminology less burdened with prior significations and thus less susceptible to ambiguity. Thus, the formalist notion of 'form' developed not so much as the result of explicit definitions, but as the corollary of concrete attempts to grasp and analyze the elusive artistic nature of texts. This, more than anything else, was the pursuit that shaped and distinguished the Formalist movement. The Russian Formalist Boris Eichenbaum noted that the question of Form eventually became synonymous with the question of literature.

2.5.3 Fabula and Syuzhet

The conceptually related terms fabula and sjuzhet, rendered into English approximately as "story" and "plot," were elaborated by the Russian formalists within their overall theory of narrative prose. In formalist usage, the two terms acquire significance markedly different from that of their English equivalents, as well as from their traditional meaning in Russian. Thus Sjuzhet is best understood as plot construction (or emplotment), viewed formally, while Fabula is grasped as the sequence of events that make up a story (or storyline), but viewed outside the artistic process of narration. The distinction between the two allowed the formalist theoreticians to make significant headway in their study of narrative fiction.

In similar manner, we can also refer to Shklovsky's distinction between story and plot. The story is the basic succession of events that the artist is disposed to. Plot, on the other hand, is the distinctive way in which the story is organised so as to 'defermiliarise' the familiar materials. Plot, therefore, has to do with the 'form' of a novel.

As Syuzhet (or plot) works upon the Fabula (or story), and 'defamiliarises' familiar material, one Fabula can give rise to a number of Syuzhets. It is interesting to find that such a formulation is also akin to structuralism. This story/plot dichotomy was carried forward by structuralists and subsumed in their theories of narrative. Vladimir Propp is an important link between these two movements. Vladimir Propp was greatly inspired by the distinction between Fabula and Syuzhet, and his *Morphology of the Folktale* is evident manifestation of formalist influence. Here, Propp studies many Russian folktales and fairy tales and reveals that underlying all of them, there is only one story. The individual tales (Syuzhet) are variations upon a basic Fabula.



LET US KNOW

As stated in the previous section, one important area of exploration in Russian Formalism was the language of prose fiction. This brings us back to the concepts of Fabula and Syuzhet explicated by Boris Tomashevsky. *The Dictionary of Narratology* however, defines Fabula as 'the set of narrated situations and events in their chronological sequence'. Syuzhet, on the other hand, implies a logical ordering of events and situations. Fabula is a straightforward account of events and situations an ordering of which has nothing to do with the artistic effect to arouse suspense. Syuzhet, on the other hand, is the artistic re-arrangement of the representational elements.

Influential Western theories have relied more on analogous dichotomies to analyze the structure of fictional texts: "histoire" vs "recit" (Gerard Genette), "story" vs "discourse" (Seymour Chatman), "fabula" vs "story" (Mieke Bal) and so on. The isolation of these two aspects has enabled, on the one hand, the exploration of the narrative structures that underlie the endlessly varied stories we tell; on the other hand, it has furthered inquiry into the different modalities of narrative presentation (order, point view, voice, mood, and so on).

2.5.4 Defamiliarisation

The term was first introduced in 1917, by Shklovsky in the article "Art as Technique" published in the journal of **Studies in the Theory of Poetic Language**. Defamiliarisation, which quickly became a key concept for Formalist literary criticism, works by making everyday objects unfamiliar and thus recovering for the audience "the sensations of life". Shklovsky, beautifully identifies defamiliarisation as the artistic technique "to make the stone stony". You should note that Shklovsky introduced the term in opposition to Russian symbolist theories of art, which abandoned the familiar rather than try to awaken its audience to fresh perspectives on the world of the mundane. Defamiliarisation, in Shklovsky's use, thus becomes a theory about artistic perception. Art defamiliarises images, ideas or situations which are otherwise familiar to us and thus impedes our perception. Art and literature assume significance only against the backdrop of ordinary habitual perception. It is important to note that the Formalists were much occupied with the formal aspects of literature or the literary devices that make a work 'literary'. As Tony Bennett puts it in *Formalism and Marxism*: "the formalists sought to reveal the devices through which the total structure of given works of literature might be said to defamiliarise, make strange or challenge certain dominant conceptions ideologies even, although they did not use the word of the social world."

Shklovsky opposes his notion of defamiliarisation to an "economic" theory of language according to which statements should express the most information in the fewest words and to an artistic method according to which art clarifies "the unknown by means of the known". Accordingly, defamiliarisation may be understood as part of the debate over the role of art in Western society since Romanticism – whether art simply provides an accurate representation of reality or plays a more transformative role in the shaping and understanding of that reality. Shklovsky's

concept of defamiliarisation in his essay "Art as Technique" thus provided Formalism with one of its key concepts for defining and appreciating a literary work.



LET US KNOW

Shklovsky's ideas rendered strong influences on a wide diversity of thinkers and artists. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht developed the concept of 'Verfremdungseffekt' – translated as "alienation effect" – in his "epic" or "dialectical" theatre, owes a great deal to Shklovsky's ideas of defamiliarisation. Brecht employed 'verfremdungseffekt' to reflect his belief that a play should never encourage its audience to think of themselves as passive spectators of a realistically presented scene but should draw attention to its framing, its constructedness, in order to incite audience members actively to make judgments about the events and characters depicted in the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: What is understood by the term Literariness?

Q 13: Which are the fundamental ways through which an artist may 'defamiliarise'?

Q 14: Discuss the relation between Fabula and Syuzhet.

2.6 RECEPTION OF RUSSIAN FORMALISM

From this unit, you have learnt that Formalism has been one of the important methods for analysing art in the early 20th century Russia, Europe, and North America. Its influence on the humanities, particularly the study of literature can never be denied. You must have understood by now that Russian Formalism was not a uniform movement. It comprised diverse theoreticians whose views were shaped through methodological debates on the distinction between poetic and practical language. The diverging and converging forces of Russian Formalism gave rise to the **Prague**

School of Structuralism in the mid-1920s and provided a model for the literary wing of **French Structuralism** in the 1960s and 1970s.

After Post structuralism, the basic Formalist assumption that there is something distinctive about literary language and that it differs substantially from ordinary uses of language, has been contested. The possibility of multiple meanings is not a specific property of literary language but a common trait in any language. Again, such diverse trends as post-colonialism, Feminism, Neo-historicism are all, in indifferent ways, reactions against the Formalists exclusive focus on the insularity of the literary text. What then is of lasting influence in Formalism one may ask. Most importantly, it is their linking of literary study with linguistic investigation. In subsequent critical trends, the question of language has become an issue of paramount importance, although different critical school study different aspects and questions such as gender, power, subjectivity, and so on. These are all conducted through an acute investigation of language. The Formalist, however, remained a neutral designation to a group of thinkers in later times. Leading post-revolutionary Russian thinkers such as Anatoly Lunacharsky, Nikolai Bukharin, and Leon Trotsky repudiated the Formalist project for its adherence to the formal aspects of literary texts at the cost of its wider historical and social dimensions. In fact, the Formalists hardly reconciled formalist and stylistic analysis with wider socio-historical issues until the arrival of Mikhail Bakhtin into the critical arena.



2.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Formalism, as developed in Russia, is a theory about language and a methodology for reading literary texts. There are many things common between Russian Formalism and Anglo American New Criticism. Although developed independently and there is no such direct historical relationship between the two, there are several similarities. For example, both movements expressed an interest in considering literature on its own terms, instead of focusing on its relationship to political, cultural or historical externalities. Both focused on the literary devices and the craft of the author. In this unit, we have read about the

major exponents of the Formalist Movement who tried to define and explore the sphere of literary phenomena as an autonomous domain with laws and regularities peculiar to it alone. They made popular theoretical concepts like Literariness, Defamiliarisation, Form vs Content, Fabula and Syuzhet and so on. Although short lived, Russian Formalism gave rise to the **Prague School of Structuralism** in the mid 1920s, and also provided a model for the literary wing of **French Structuralism** in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the Formalists were also criticised for their exclusive focus on the text at the cost of the larger socio-historical issues involved with the production of a text.



2.8 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

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

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Before 'formalism', literary analysis could not be seen as a discipline in itself… …but the French Symbolist Movement offered a highly subjective and impressionistic mode of criticism… …the Formalists, reacted against the subjectivism of the Symbolists, pleading instead for a scientific mode of literary study.

Ans to Q 2: Both trends took a literary text as an autonomous entity and hence, the proper object of study… …both emphasised 'close reading'… … the Russian Formalists regarded themselves as developers of a science of criticism and emphasised a differential definition of literature as opposed to the New Critical isolation and objectification of the single text.

Ans to Q 3: "Moscow Linguistic Circle" based in Moscow, and the OPOJAZ or the "Society for the Study of Poetic Language" based in St. Petersburg… …the former was founded by Roman Jakobson, Grigory Vinokur, Peter Bogatynev, Osip Brik and Boris Tomashevsky… …the second circle OPOJAZ was founded by Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Boris Eichenbaum and Viktor Vinogradov.

Ans to Q 4: No… …they also made a major contribution to the theory of prose with the help of the concept of Skaz… …Skaz stands for a style of literary narration that strives to approximate the characteristics of oral delivery… …as a type of narration Skaz points to its own production: the intonation, linguistic patterns, and verbal peculiarities of the fictional storyteller.

Ans to Q 5: The end of Formalism came with Stalin's consolidation of power… …the formalists became Stalin's ideological enemies… …Shklovsky, started writing self-critical reflections, acknowledging the defects of their approach… …Tynyanov, retreated from literary criticism…. …Eichenbaum and Tomashevsky, adapted to the demands of the new orthodoxy within the Stalinist establishment.

Ans to Q 6: Jakobson developed his linguistic approach to literary theory by constructing a scientific basis for distinguishing literature from all

other forms of linguistic communication… …he developed the theory of "literariness" of literary writing inviting close scrutiny of the phonological, semantic, and metrical "devices" of the work… …this linguistic approach to literature represented a radical break with the historical and biographical modes of literary analysis.

Ans to Q 7: "Art as Technique" is crucial to the Formalist movement in Russia… …the essay offers many radically different views on the nature of art and literature… … it made an important 'statement' of the early Formalist method by announcing a break with the early 'aesthetic approach' and by providing a methodology of criticism and the purpose of art.

Ans to Q 8: Shklovsky gave Formalism many of its crucial concepts and key words… …the concept of 'ostranenie' (making strange in Russian) or 'defamiliarisation' (in English) is the most important.

Ans to Q 9: Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) is a major contribution to 'formalism' as well as an important step towards the poetics of fictional narrative… …he sees narrative not in terms of characters but as constituted by 'functions' that the characters have within the plot… …he concludes that a character is attached to a certain function and the total number of functions Propp distinguishes are thirty one.

Ans to Q 10: The villain… …The donor… …The (magical) helper… …The princess and her father… …The dispatcher… …The hero or victim/ seeker hero… …False hero.

Ans to Q 11: Mikhail Bakhtin is known for his discussion of the Novelistic discourse… …he is famous for his influence on what is known as discourse analysis…. …He was not directly related to formalism but provided a corrective to the abstractness of extreme Formalism…. …Thus, despite his critique of Formalism, he is claimed as a member of the Jakobsonian formalist school.

Ans to Q 12: The term was coined by Roman Jakobson… … **'**literariness' elicits the distinction between literary language and the language of practical discourse… …the object of literary study is not literature per se, but 'literariness'—that is the sum of special linguistic and formal properties that distinguish literary texts from non literary texts.

Ans to Q 13: The three fundamental ways to defamiliarise are: by distorting syntax and heightening diction to make the subjects more extraordinary or unsettling… …by avoiding common expressions and names of familiar objects or activities in favour of phrases and descriptions that highlight the strange… …by using "parallelism," for importation into one genre of the terms, methodology, or content typical of another.

Ans to Q 14: Fabula and Sjuzhet, rendered into English approximately as story and plot… …Sjuzhet is best understood as plot construction (or emplotment)… …Fabula is grasped as the sequence of events that make up a story (or storyline), but viewed outside the artistic process of narration.



2.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Give a brief idea of the concerns of the Russian Formalist Critics with regard to ideas of language and literary text.

Q 2: Describe the works of the Russian Formalists with special reference to their ideas of 'form' and 'content'. Explain, in what ways, they were different from the Anglo- American New Critics.

Q 3: Highlight the contributions of the Russian Formalists to literary studies with reference to the role of art, and the relation of art to social reality.

Q 4: Discuss the growth and development of Formalism with reference to Moscow Linguistic Circle and OPOJAZ. Do you think that Formalism came to an end following Stalin's consolidation of power?

Q 5: What are the different concepts popularised by the Russian Formalist critics? Discuss.

Q 6: In what ways, did Russian Formalism influence the later developments in Literary and Critical Theory?

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UNIT 3: STRUCTURALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Introducing Structuralism

3.4 Major Thinkers of Structuralism

- 3.4.1 Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)
- 3.4.2 Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009)
- 3.4.3 Roland Barthes (1915-1980)
- 3.4.4 Jacques Lacan (1901-1981)
- 3.4.5 Gerard Genette (1930-)
- 3.4.6 Jonathan Culler (1944-)
- 3.4.7 Northrop Fry (1912-1991)

3.5 Important Concepts

- 3.5.1 Structure
- 3.5.2 Text
- 3.5.3 Binary Opposition
- 3.5.4 Sign, Signifier and Signified

3.6 Reception of Structuralism

3.7 Let us Sum up

3.8 Further Reading

3.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.10 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- define the term 'structure'
- trace the unique historical and intellectual background out of which Structuralism emerged
- make a list of the Structuralist critics
- find out the differences between Structuralism and Poststructuralism as approaches to Literary Studies

- make an assessment of the notion of Structuralism as an influential theoretical trend.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the 3rd unit of the course on Literary Theory. In this unit, we shall discuss Structuralism which is a theoretical concept that refers first to a broad intellectual movement signifying various ways of theorizing in the 'human sciences' of the twentieth century; and then, to a particular set of approaches to literature and other cultural art forms which flourished in France during 1960s. Taking its ideas from linguistics, and in its analyses of culture and its institutions from structuralist anthropology, it focuses on the conditions that make meaning possible, rather than on meaning itself. It tries to map the structures that are the actual carriers of meaning and the various relations between the elements within those structures. Structuralism bases its premises on the 'constructed' nature of all human activity and its products. We should note that a structure is the principle of construction and the object of analysis understood in terms of any 'system'. Any element in a structure derives its meaning on the basis of its selection from a 'system' of options and is consequently defined against other possibilities. Such an understanding of 'meaning' radically establishes the point that it is derived not from nature or God, but from an arbitrary man-made system of cognition.

3.3 INTRODUCING STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism can be said to have formally begun with the *Course in General Linguistics,* a series of lectures delivered by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) at the University of Geneva. Although published posthumously in 1960, this book provided a new definition of the 'object of linguistics'. It has been unanimously accepted that the models for structuralist ideas can be traced in Ferdinand de Saussure's pioneering linguistics, which centers not on individual utterances but on the underlying rules and conventions that enable language to operate. Saussurean structuralism analyses the social or collective dimensions of language,

focusing on grammar rather than usage; rules rather than actual expressions; and *langue* (the system of language) rather than *parole* (actual speech). This linguistics is concerned with the infrastructure of language common to all speakers at a given time (which operates on an unconscious level), and not with surface phenomena or historical charge. Thus, it attends to the synchronic (that which exists now) not the diachronic (that which exists and changes over time). Saussure wanted to show that **'language has its own potentials' and can exist 'outside the individual'**. For him, Language is a self authenticating system and is not determined by the physical world. Whatever one sees in language is simply the connection of a meaning to a particular sound-image. This is what helped Saussure to define the scope of **Semiology**.

But any attempt to understand the intellectual background of Structuralism is never complete without a reference to Anglo American New Criticism and Russian Formalism—two of the most significant theoretical trends which provided grounds for the future development of Structuralism. In the previous unit, you have read in some detail about Russian Formalism, which should help you to understand Structuralism in a more convenient way in this unit. The New Critics of around 1930s focused on the meaning of a literary text. Both the New Criticism of the United States and Practical Criticism of United Kingdom opted for providing 'interpretations'. The New Critics paid a particular attention to the formal aspects of literature, which they believed, contributed largely to its meaning and their attempt at 'close reading' made their effort easier. You should be reminded of I. A. Richard's book *Practical Criticism* where he claimed: **"All respectable poetry invites close reading."** Gradually, this motto became important for every new critic, as they could finally understand the point that with the help of irony, paradox, ambiguity, and complexity each word of a poem could be scrutinized in detail with regard to all its denotations and connotations.

Simultaneously with the New Critics, during the first half of the twentieth century, the literary theorists of Russia and Czechoslovakia developed a theory of **'literariness'**. They argued that it was 'literariness' that differentiated literary texts from other forms of writings like an

advertisement, or a newspaper article. Dealing with this they focused on the formal aspect of literature and the sort of language it employed. The Russian Formalists suggested that what makes the language of literature different from non-literary language is the employment of a range of devices that produce a defamiliarising effect. Later, they turned towards the more specific functions of those devices. Borrowing much from the Russian Formalists, the Prague Structuralists began to see a literary text as a structure of differences. Finally, they propounded that a literary text differs from other texts because of its orientation towards itself, its own form and not towards any outside sources.

What do the Structuralists usually do? They may help in examining the underlying structure of a specific genre such as the detective novel. They may try to reduce the enormous diversity of characters whom we meet in stories and in novels to a limited number of roles that always occur in fixed relations to each other. They may study the narrative aspects of texts (and of film, historical writing, commercials, and other cultural products that make use of narration) in order to systematize the narratological possibilities and the narrative strategies – that are available to a writer.

However, the most pertinent issue underlying such an intercontinental background of Structuralism, is a new awareness of the ways of receiving literary works. Structuralism challenges some of the most beliefs of the common readers. Going against the assumption that the text is a place where we can form a communion with the author's thoughts and feelings, Structuralism finally asserts that the author is 'dead'. Pioneering concepts and methods of Structural linguistics and Anthropology have strongly influenced how modern theory and criticism understand cultural phenomena. Out of Structuralist methodology has emerged the discipline of Semiotics or Semiology, a field that studies sign systems, codes, and conventions of all kinds, ranging from human to animal languages, the language of fashion and food, the codes of diagnostic medicine to those of written literature.



LET US KNOW

What Structuralist Critics Do? [*Adapted from Peter Barry*]

1. They analyse (mainly) prose narratives, relating the text to some larger containing structure, such as: (a) the conventions of a particular literary genre, or
   (b) a network of intertextual connections, or
   (c) a projected model of an underlying universal narrative structure, or
   (d) a notion of narrative as a complex of recurrent patterns or motifs.
2. They interpret literature in terms of a range of underlying parallels with the structures of language, as described by modern linguistics. For instance, the notion of the 'mytheme', posited by Levi-Strauss, denoting the minimal units of narrative 'sense', is formed on the analogy of the morpheme, which, in linguistics, is the smallest unit of grammatical sense. An example of a morpheme is the 'ed' added to a verb to denote the past tense.
3. They apply the concept of systematic patterning and structuring to the whole field of Western culture, and across cultures, treating as 'systems of signs' anything from Ancient Greek myths to brands of soap powder.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What, according to you, is a structure?

Q 2: Who introduced Structuralism as an important theoretical approach?

Q 3: Relate Structuralism with New Criticism and Russian Formalism.

3.4 MAJOR THINKERS OF STRUCTURALISM

The practice of Structuralism is usually related to thinkers like Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, Louis

Althusser, Jacques Lacan, Gerard Genette, Jonathan Culler and so on. Let us, in this section, try to examine very briefly the contributions of some of the important thinkers who should be acclaimed for their innovative thinking which finally established Structuralism as a significant approach in literary studies.

3.4.1 Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)

Since it is not possible to discuss the contributions of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in detail in this section, I will refer only to the key points regarding his contributions to Structuralism. Ferdinand de Saussure is well known for his book *The Course in General Linguistics.* You should note that this book is based on student notes, and was compiled by his colleagues in 1916 after Saussure's death. Saussure who soon came to be known as "the father of modern linguistics" influenced mid-twentieth century thought in a wide variety of fields. In the late eighteenth century, the European study of languages had been revolulionized by the encounter with Sanskrit (brought about by the British colonization of India). Comparison among Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin suggested a common ancestor of all three, which scholars dubbed Proto-Indo-European. The generation of Saussure's teachers, popularly known as the Neogrammarians, had begun to explore the rules of affinity and transformation in a more truly historical way. Saussure, however, was going to change it. After spending a year studying in Berlin and receiving his doctorate from the University of Leipzig in 1880, he became a senior lecturer at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes (School for Advanced Study) in Paris, where he began by teaching Gothic and Old High German, later adding Sanskrit (which he had studied since 1874), Latin, Persian, and Lithuanian. In 1891, he accepted a professorship at the University of Geneva, teaching there for the rest of his life. It was in 1906 that, after the death of a colleague, he was asked to add "general linguistics" to his teachings in historical and comparative linguistics.

What was Saussure's new theory of language? Saussure was almost convinced about the **"arbitrary"** (purely conventional) nature of the sign. Since there are thousands of human languages, the relation between words and things cannot be based on natural resemblances. Saussure's own theory illustrates this point through his terms *langage, langue,* and *parole* which have never been satisfactorily translated into English. *Le langage* (in English, "language") is a general human faculty, that which enables us to speak of "body language" or "the language of fashion." Language, for Saussure, is a structured system of conventional signs, studied in their internal complexity as if frozen in time (synchronically) rather than as changing over time (diachronically). Saussure further explained the study of language in terms of 'sign', 'signifier' and 'signified', which are explained in the next section.



LET US KNOW

La langue, which in English is also called "language," is the name for specific languages *(la langue anglaise,* the English language); but it is also the most general term for language itself, the term Saussure uses to name the object of linguistics. La *langue* in this sense does not exist: it is a theoretical object abstracted from the structures of specific languages. *La parole* (speech) is what Saussure calls "the executive side": the concrete 'utterances' that constitute all acts of language. These individual utterances are excluded from his theory of language insofar as they only "execute" possibilities that exist in language already, or depart from it for creative purposes without fundamentally changing it.

Saussure then goes on to say that *everything* in language is **relational** as he states "in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are

only differences *without positive terms"* (Saussure's emphasis). In other words, neither ideas nor sounds exist prior to their combination. This description of a difference that does not depend on the prior existence of knowable entities is one of Saussure's most radical declarations. Saussure used an interesting example to explain what he meant by saying that there are no intrinsic fixed meanings in language—that of the 8.25 Geneva to Paris express train, as he states: "What is it that gives this train its identity? It isn't anything material, since each day it will have a different engine and carriages, different drivers and passengers, and so on. If it is late, it won't even leave at 8.25. Does it even have to be a train? I once asked at Southampton station for the Brighton train, and the ticket collector pointed to a bus standing outside the station and said, 'That's it'. It was a Sunday, and because of engineering works on the line, a bus service was being used to ferry passengers beyond the sections being worked upon. Sometimes, then, a 'train' *doesn't* have to be a train." Saussure's conclusion is that the only thing, which gives this train its identity, is its position in a structure of differences: it comes *between* the 7.25 and the 9.25, that is, its identity is purely relational.

In Saussure's conception of language, the 'sign' is not only **arbitrary** but also linear (he thus uses a spatial term for what is in fact temporal, the succession of signs as they unfold in time during speech). Signs are combined like links in a chain to form the line of language according to two relations: the *syntagmatic* (all units present in their articulation) and the *associative* (all related units present in the mind but absent from the actual sequence). This distinction, later called *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic,* would form an important part of Roman Jakobson's theory of metaphor and metonymy. For Saussure, some syntagmatic relations beyond mere grammatical rules count as *language* rather than *speech.* Far from being freely chosen by each speaker, they constitute the "idioms" that a newcomer must master in order to "know" a language. Saussure believed that the proper object of linguistic study is the

system, which underlies all signifying practices, and not the individual utterances. In his views, words are not merely symbols which correspond to their referents, but 'signs' which are made up of two ingredients—'signifiers' and 'signified' whose relationship is always arbitrary. The elements of language derive meaning not because of the connection between the word and the thing but because of a system of relations. This means that there is no one to one relationship between the word and the object it signifies.



LET US KNOW

The contribution of Saussure is invaluable for us as his concepts like—arbitrariness of language, langue and Parole, diachrony and synchrony, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship etc. revolutionized contemporary studies on linguistics. However, a clear understanding of such concepts will further enhance your capacity to understand what he was actually trying to say. Attempting to answer the question: What is the object of linguistic investigation? Saussure made a fundamental distinction between Langue and Parole. Gradually, this distinction became a model for all Structuralist theories.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What are the contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure to the study of language?

3.4.2 Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009)

The French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss rose to prominence in between 1950s and 1960s. Taking inspiration from Ferdinand de Saussure who had defined language as a system of signs and linguistics as a branch of Semiology), Levi-Strauss argued that the objects of Social Anthropology (cultural phenomena such as kinship systems and rituals) consist of communications, not just

functions. Reframing Anthropology as a study of Culture rather than cultures, Levi-Strauss underscored the discipline's implications for history, politics, art, literature, economics, and philosophy, dramatically transforming anthropology's profile in the academy. Within the discipline many scholars have contested the empirical validity of his analyses of kinship, totemism, and myth and have accused Levi-Strauss of engaging in a kind of metaphysical colonisation. Though the structuralist method that Levi-Strauss pioneered has been superseded, the analogy he proposed-that cultural phenomena constitute exchanges of messages and that cultural codes may be analysed as languages-remains a tacit working assumption of many forms of cultural theory.

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

In New York Levi-Strauss met the Russian Roman Jakobson and attended his lectures on linguistics. This encounter affected him as a "revelation": "Jakobson revealed to me the existence of a body of doctrine that had already been formed within a discipline, linguistics, with which I was unacquainted."

Jakobson was elaborating Saussurean linguistics that language does not consist of positive terms with meaning in and of

themselves, but instead is a system of relations in which each term is defined by its difference from other terms. Suggesting, "the kinship system is a language," Levi-Strauss proposed adapting the methods of structural linguistics to the analysis of kinship and other cultural phenomena. His *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* was published in 1949. In his view, the prohibition of incest, which seems to be a universal rule in human society, is designed not to ward off biological or psychological damage but to make women available for "trade" by men of their group with men of other groups.



LET US KNOW

It is important to compare the structural analysis of myth by Levi-Strauss to the 'morphological' study of folktales by the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp. Both kinds of analysis influenced structuralism. Propp studied a large number of Russian folktales and found that, despite their differences, they all made use of a small number of functions (hero, helper, villain, test, prohibition, etc.) arranged in a predictable order. Narrative order was a function of unfolding linear time: the narrative had a beginning: a middle, and an end. For Levi-Strauss, in contrast, the linear (or diachronic) ordering of a myth is less important than the systematic (or synchronic) pattern of repetitions, which can exist in different versions or different arrangements without disturbing the mythic system.

Levi-Strauss deviated from this tradition in two different ways- firstly by adopting the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp's ideas on myths; he tried to show how the most diverse myths of a culture, having no connection with each other, could also be read as variation upon one and the same basic pattern. He calls the units of myth as mythemes (just like we have phonemes, and morphemes). Making an analogy with Saussure, Levi-Strauss tried to show how the countless discrete elements that make up a culture could constitute

a 'sign system'. Food habits, taboos, hunting rites, kinship relations- everything that has a cultural origin can be counted as a 'sign'. Such cultural elements are not meaningful in themselves, but draw their meanings from a system of signs in which they functions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is Strauss' view on what he called 'the classification on the basis of opposition'?

Q 6: How is Levi-Strauss associated with Structuralism?

3.4.2 Roland Barthes (1915-1980)

Critics generally differ in their opinion regarding where to situate the French literary critic Roland Barthes in the context of Literary Theory. Barthes introduced Saussurean ideas of Linguistics to the study of literature, and towards his later years, he became particularly concerned with the personal, subjective response of a reader to a text. Inspired by the methods of Structural Linguistics, during 1960s, Barthes wanted to explore the possibility of developing a science of culture. It was also the time when he came closer to the contemporary thinkers like Claude Levi-Strauss and Michel Foucault. His books *Elements of Semiology* and *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* clearly verify his stand on Structuralism. The systems of classification and 'binary opposition' encouraged him a lot. The principle that human performances presuppose a pre-conceived system of differential relations is applied by Barthes to almost all social practices. He refers to and interprets them as sign systems, which operate on a model of language. For him, speech always presupposes a system. Generally considered one of the leading figures in French Structuralism, Roland Barthes is, as Jonathan Culler puts it, "famous for contradictory reasons." On the one hand, Barthes sought a universal grammar of narrative in his influential essay "Introduction to the

Structural Study of Narrative" (1966), or explored Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of Semiology in works like *Elements of Semiology* (1965) and *The Fashion System* (1967); on the other hand, there is the Barthes who wrote playfully and allusively about pleasure in The *Pleasure of the Text* (1973) and in *A Lover's Discourse* (1977).



LET US KNOW

All of Barthes's writings reflect his idiosyncratic creativity. His first book *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) analyses the history of literary styles in terms derived from Karl Marx and Jean Paul Sartre. In *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes conducts a semiological study of mass culture and everyday life. His object is to show how mass culture is saturated with ideological propositions (or "myths") presented as if they were natural and self-evident. This was to anticipate what is today called **Cultural Studies**.

The publication of *S/Z* marks a turning point in Barthes's relation to Structuralism. It is a multilevel analysis that refuses to structure the text otherwise than by cutting it into hundreds of little pieces of varying lengths (called *lexias)* and also by identifying five broad functions (called *codes)* at work in the text. However, both Structuralist and Poststructuralist thinkers would contrast their analyses to the classical study of literary and other cultural objects ("work"). The *text* is a process; while the *work* is a product. *Works* can be found on library shelves; while *texts* are signifying fields into which one enters. The point is not that literature can be divided into 'works' and 'texts', but that the reader can activate either the closure of the 'signified' (the coherence of a meaning) or the 'play' of the 'signifier' (the dissemination and disruption of meanings).

Barthes is famous for the essay **"The Death of the Author"** which begins with an example taken from Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*— the tale of a sculptor who falls in love with an Italian

diva subsequently revealed to be not a woman. Barthes argues that the effective, productive, and engaged reading of a text depends on the **suspension of preconceived ideas** about the character of the particular author-or even about human psychology in general. From the moment that writing detaches itself from an immediate context, "It is language which speaks, not the author." The author, the text, and the reader are each composed of a universe of quotations without origin or end. In its celebration of the birth of the reader, **"The Death of the Author"** explores the consequences of freeing the reading process from the constraints of fidelity to an origin, a unified meaning, an identity, or any other pre-given exterior or interior reality. Such ideas help in understanding some of the important aspects of Structuralism.

[Read the essay "The Death of the Author" from Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood]

3.4.4 Jacques Lacan (1901-1981)

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

3.4.5 Gerard Genette (1930-)

Gerard Genette, another French theoretician and Structuralist critic, is known for his Literary Structuralism later established as Narratology. The focus of Genette was not on the underlying structures of the content of stories, but on the structure of narration

itself-the way stories are told. In fact, the underlying structures that make stories possible is what distinguishes Genette's Structuralist approach. His book *Narrative Discourse* (1972) is one of the most significant contributions to Narratology whose ultimate goal is to discover general rules of narration that will cover almost all the possible ways in which stories are told to produce the intended meaning. Working on his Structuralist approach to narratives, Genette introduced a number of new terminologies redefining already-existing categories and insights. His main contribution can be discussed in terms of his interests and concerns.

The first concern of Genette was with the way the chronological **'order'** of events and actions of a novel is narrated in the actual story. We can express this relationship between the chronological order (formalist's ides of the 'Fabula') and the narrative order (the 'Syuzhet') in terms of their connection at a given point of time. The narration may lag behind the chronological order of events, it may be running with the events, or it may run ahead of them. Genette provided a detailed analysis of all the possible relations between the order of events and the order of narration with the help of certain technical terms namely—analepsis, prolepsis, achrony, proleptic analepsis, analeptuic prolepsus.

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

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

Such discussions on narrative were very significant contributions to Structuralist Narratology.

3.4.6 Jonathan Culler (1944-)

Making an attempt to assimilate French Structuralism to an Anglo American critical perspective, the American literary critic Culler sought to establish the notion that linguistics presents the best model of knowledge for the humanities and social sciences. His highly acclaimed book, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (1975), first introduces 'the linguistic model' on the basis of the works of Claude Levi -Strauss, Roman Jacobson, A. J. Greimas, Vladimir Propp, and particularly Roland Barthes and draws attention to the theoretical limitations of each of these thinkers. Secondly, he attempts to synthesise 'the linguistic model' derived from European semiotics and Structuralism of the 1960s, especially that of Saussure and finally he articulates a Structuralist poetics, an effective model for reading literature whose very basic job is 'to make explicit the underlying systems which makes literary effects possible.'

3.4.7 Northrop Fry (1912-1991)

Structuralism in Western culture can be anticipated in the works of the Canadian thinker Northrop Fry who helped in the emergence of a type of criticism called "Myth Criticism" functional in-between 1940-1960. Drawing on anthropology and psychology, he began to consider universal myths, rituals, and folktales; and was also trying to restore the spiritual values to a world he took as alienated, fragmented and commonly ruled by scientism, empiricism, positivism, and technology. In his view, myths were created as integral to human thought. Subsequently, he assumed that literature too emerged out of a collective effort on the part of various cultures and groups to establish a meaningful context of human existence. Northrop Fry's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) emphasized that

criticism should be scientific, objective and systematic discipline, subsequently, his models exhibited recurrent patterns, which were later shared by Structuralist views of language and literature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Name some of the key Structuralist thinkers and mention their works?

Q 8: What ideas do you have of Gerard Genette's Narratology?

Q 9: State the major contributions of Jonathan Culler to Structuralism?

3.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

The following are some of the most important concepts that gained popularity under Structuralism.

3.5.1 Structure

Sometimes understood along with the idea of a 'form', 'structure' usually refers to the overall shape and pattern of a text. However, all critical theories, have tried to define the 'structure': or the developing unity of a work. According to the characteristics of that unity, the term may mean pattern, plot, form, argument, language, rhetoric, paradox, metaphor, myth and so on. Starting from such dispositions, the term 'structure' becomes an enabling reference to the internal means, and emphasised features likely to be mostly found in literature and language. The idea of structure should be made clear to you when you read the following by Peter Barry:

"The structures in question here are those imposed by our way of perceiving the world and organising experience, rather than objective entities already existing in the external world. It follows from this that meaning or significance isn't a kind of core or essence *inside* things: rather, meaning is always *outside.* Meaning is always

an attribute of things, in the literal sense that meanings are *attributed* to the things by the human mind, not contained within them. However, let's try to be specific about what it might mean to think primarily in terms of structures when considering literature. Imagine that we are confronted with a poem, Donne's 'Good Morrow', let's say. Our immediate reaction as structuralists would probably be to insist that it can only be understood if we first have a clear notion of the genre which it parodies and subverts. Any single poem is an example of a particular genre, and the genre and the example relate to each other rather as a phrase spoken in English relates to the English language as a structure with all its rules, its conventions, and so on. In the case of Donne's poem the relevant genre is the *alba* or 'dawn song', a poetic form dating from the twelfth century in which lovers lament the approach of daybreak because it means that they must part."

3.5.2 Text

A text is a structure composed of elements of signification by which the elements make themselves manifest. Consequently, a text comprises elements of signification, the unit of these elements and the manifestation of this unity. Any attempt to understand the text leads to the question as to how, following what mode of being, the elements of a structured whole are to be defined. Thus, Structuralist analysis dominates the debate around the status of a text. Saussure proposes that language is a system of signs determined by their differences. The interpretation of the text as the system of 'signs' limits the mode of manifestation of the text itself to purely functional structures. In literary theory, and criticism the term 'text' has so far replaced the idea of a 'literary work'. This is significant because a 'work' generally imply the idea of an author, authorial control, and a false notion of aesthetic completeness. With the emergence of theories there could be seen a shift from the author to the reader. Moreover, the term 'work' used to privilege literature at the cost of other forms of rewritings. Hence, the emergence of the

idea of the 'text' helped in imposing textuality on almost everything. Roland Barthes's theory sets itself against the assumptions, which impose authority over the meaning of the text to the author rather than the reader. It is in the context of such an understanding that Barthes's essay "**Death of the Author"** holds its point. In comparison to Structuralism, Poststructuralism views the world itself as a 'text'. The entire cultural network of our life is a text in which we live, think, and chose. This view has been very boldly presented by Derrida in his Of Grammatology where he mentions, "There is nothing outside the text". This means that we know the world through language and that we can locate a kind of textuality of almost everything.

3.5.3 Binary Opposition

The phrase refers to two mutually exclusive terms such as man/woman, black/white, nature/ culture and so on. It originated in Saussure's ideas on Linguistics. According to Saussure, the Binary Opposition is the means by which the units of language have value or meaning; each unit is defined in reciprocal determination with another term. It is not a contradictory relation but, a structural, complementary one. Saussure demonstrated that a sign's meaning is derived from its context (syntagmatic dimension) and the group (paradigm) to which it belongs. Structuralist critics argue that such oppositions are basic to all cultural phenomena. More specifically, structuralists also argue that meaning itself is relational in the way that we know the meaning of 'right' by virtue of its contrast with the word 'wrong'. In effect, this means that language is built on **a self-contained system of interrelationships**. Structuralist linguistics, defines language as the system of relations, presupposes binary opposites of the phonological elements of language as the basis and model of analysis. As Jonathan Culler points out in his *Structuralist Poetics*, the significance of binarism lies in the fact that it permits one to classify anything. Hence, Binary Opposition is

an important concept of Structuralism, which sees such distinctions as fundamental to all language and thought. Structuralism considers binary opposition as a fundamental organizer of human philosophy, culture, and language.

3.5.4 Sign, Signifier and Signified:

In his *Course in General Linguistics* Saussure presented the idea of the 'sign' and the distinction between the 'signifier' and the 'signified'. For him, the linguistic 'sign' unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image. The 'signifier' whether audible as speech or visible as writing, is only an object of perception. What relates and holds both the 'signifier' and the 'signified' is called the process of signification. Moving out of the traditional philosophical thinking Saussure did not grant any priority to the 'signified' as he could very radically claim that the relationship between the 'signifier' and the 'signified' is arbitrary. Thus, you should try to understand that language for Saussure is a **structured system of conventional 'signs'**, studied in their internal complexity as if frozen in time (synchronically) rather than as changing over time (diachronically).

Saussure further explained that the study of language eventually form part of a larger science of signs in culture, which he called **Semiology,** a field that later scholars like Roland Barthes tried to develop. The atom of language is the sign, which is functionally split into two parts: a 'signifier' (sound-image) and a 'signified' (concept), brought inseparably together like the two sides of the same coin. The relation between the 'signifier' and the 'signified' is "arbitrary" not "motivated" (by natural resemblance), even in cases of onomatopoiea (words that sound like what they mean). However, the 'signifier' and the 'signified' seem to function together as a unit to produce signification, each has *value* only by virtue of the ways in which it differs from other terms. Here, the chain of 'signifiers' and the chain of 'signifieds' diverge. A 'signifier' differs from other 'signifiers' while its 'signified' distinguishes itself from other 'signifieds'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Why, do you think, Structuralist Theorists like to use the term 'text' over 'word'?

3.6 RECEPTION OF STRUCTURALISM

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

You have read that Ferdinand de Saussure's work provided the groundwork for both Structuralism and Poststructuralism. It was part of the larger 'linguistic turn' in 20th-century philosophy, history, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and literary studies. Claude Levi-Strauss, for example, studied myths and kinship systems within different cultures as a system of signs to be interpreted. Roland Barthes explored the semiology of fashion, advertising, travel, and many other cultural phenomena. Jacques Derrida, while critiquing Saussure's privileging of spoken language nevertheless took up the aspects of Saussure's system of differences into what he called *differance.* On the basis of what Saussure says about language as a system, Louis Althusser seemed to have understood that the economic and social structures too possess structural (rather than transitive) causality.

And, Jacques Lacan used Saussure to 're-read' Freud in linguistic terms. However, the very things that made Saussure influential also led to the most serious objections. By focusing on the relation between the 'signifier' and the 'signified', he gained insight into the linguistic structure. However, Structuralism has also been criticised by other critics like Terry Eagleton, who find it impossible to speak of language without speaking of reference, things, history. However, despite these criticisms, the *Course in General Linguistics* opened up the question of the role of 'signs' in culture and the role of language in the mind. As Jonathan Culler put it in his *Ferdinand de Saussure* (1986), "What the study of Language reveals about mind is riot a set of primitive conceptions or natural ideas but the general structuring and differentiating operations by which things are made to signify."

The subsequent periods saw the publication of some very important books on Structuralism. Robert Scholes's *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974) and Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (1975) still remain good introductions to Structuralism. Two classic introductions to Structuralism have been John Sturrock's *Structuralism* (2003) and Terence Hawkes's *Structuralism and Semiotics* (2003). Jonathan Culler's massive and wide-ranging book *Structuralism* (2006) collects practically all important structuralist contributions to the humanities and the human sciences. Specifically focused on Narratology are two other classics—Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds: Narrating Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978) and Shlomith Rimmon Kenan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983).



3.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Structuralism explores the various possible ways of making meaning rather than meaning itself. It tries to frame the structure and the interrelation of the various elements within that structure. Although Structuralism is closely related to Russian Formalism

and the Prague Linguistic Circle, French Structuralism is distinguished by its variety and interdisciplinary character. Extending itself against the background of Humanism and Phenomenology, it relates itself to the constitution of language and all symbolic or discursive systems. However, while dealing with Structuralism, we must be able to clearly distinguish between Structuralist theory and Structuralist criticism. Theoretically speaking, Structuralism intends to establish a grammar of texts, a set of general rules about how they work. Following Saussurean ideas based on the premise that language is a self-sufficient system operating by its own internal rules and on the relation between the 'signifier' and the 'signified' Structuralists try to formulate the idea that **a text is a self-sufficient system**. Structuralism became famous also through the works of critics like Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Gerard Genette, Jonathan Culler and so on. Ideas of structure, text, binary opposition, sign, signifier and signified are the most important concepts of Structuralism. Although it seems valid, it is also a dull technical approach to literature because a rejection of the conventional interest in life beyond the text will only end up with establishing every book as a 'construct' of certain rules.



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3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Structure is the principle of construction and the object of analysis understood in terms of any 'system'… …structures are the actual carriers of meaning and the various relations between the elements within the structures… … Structuralism bases its premises on the 'constructed' nature of all human activity and its products.

Ans to Q 2: Structuralism formally began with the *Course in General Linguistics,* a series of lectures delivered by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure… …Saussure focussed on the underlying

rules and conventions that enable language to operate… …Saussure wanted to show that 'language has its own potentials' and can exist 'outside the individual'.

Ans to Q 3: The New Critics focused on the meaning of a literary text by paying a particular attention to the formal aspects of literature… …they also aimed at 'close reading'… …the theorists of Russian Formalism developed a theory of 'literariness' that differentiated literary texts from other forms of writings like an advertisement, or a newspaper article… …such ideas were to influence Structuralism in later times.

Ans to Q 4: Ferdinand de Saussure is well known for his book *The Course in General Linguistics…. …*he propounded the **"arbitrary"** (purely conventional) nature of the sign… … illustrates this point through his terms *langage, langue,* and *parole… …*Language, for Saussure, is a structured system of conventional signs, studied in their internal complexity as if frozen in time (synchronically) rather than as changing over time (diachronically)… … Saussure further explained the study of language in terms of 'sign', 'signifier' and 'signified', which are explained in the next section.

Ans to Q 5: Levi-Strauss studied how our ancestors, in their evolutionary process, made sense of the world they found themselves in… …the very basic mental operation began to develop on the basis of opposites—some things are edible, some are not, some animals are dangerous, some are not… … that is significant here is the fact that classification in terms of such oppositions in which the opposites are related to each other as the presence or absence of the one will influence the other… …thus, they started to categorize their world in a basic pattern of presences and absences like – light/darkness, man-made/ natural, raw/ cooked, clothes/ necked and so on.

Ans to Q 6: Claude Levi-Strauss's ideas influenced Structuralism as an intellectual movement… …he applied the methods of structural linguistics to Anthropological analysis… …Levi-Strauss's Anthropological Structuralism does not have any direct impact on literarily studies… …Yet, its indirect influence is quite visible in the later developments of both Structuralism and Poststructuralism.

Ans to Q 7: Ferdinand de Saussure (*The Course in General Linguistics*)… … Claude Levi-Strauss (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*)… …Roland Barthes (*Elements of Semiology* and *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative*)… …Gerard Genette (*Narrative Discourse*)……Jonathan Culler (*Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*)… …Northrop Fry's (*Anatomy of Criticism*) and so on.

Ans to Q 8: Gerard Genette is known for his Literary Structuralism better known as Narratology… …Genette's focus was on the underlying structures of the content of stories, the way stories are told… …Genette's Structuralist approach is visible in his book *Narrative Discourse* (1972).

Ans to Q 9: Culler tried to assimilate French Structuralism to an Anglo American critical perspective… …his *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (1975), first introduces 'the linguistic model' on the basis of the works of Strauss, Jacobson, Greimas, Propp, and particularly Roland Barthes and draws attention to the theoretical limitations of each of these thinkers… …Secondly, he attempts to synthesise 'the linguistic model' derived from European semiotics with Structuralism of the 1960s,

Ans to Q 10: Because, a 'work' generally implies the idea of an author, authorial control, and a false notion of aesthetic completeness… …the term 'work' used to privilege literature at the cost of other forms of writings… …hence, the emergence of the idea of a 'text' helped in imposing textuality on almost everything… … Barthes in his essay "Death of the Author" imposes authority over the meaning of the text to the author rather than the reader



3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What does a structuralist critic do while analysing a literary text. Illustrate with reference to the theorists concerned.

Q 2: What, according to you, are Ferdinand de Saussure's contributions to the development of Structuralism? Discuss with reference to the key concepts in Saussure's book *Course in General Linguistics*.

Q 3: Do, you think that Saussure is the real forerunner of Structuralism? Discuss his role in the 'Linguistic Turn' in the Humanities.

Q 4: Discuss the major assumptions of Structuralism with reference to Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette.

Q 5: Find out the significance of Claude Levi-Strauss's Structuralist Anthropology?

Q 6: Structuralism is a dull technical approach to literature because a rejection of the conventional interest in life beyond the text will only end up with establishing every book as a 'construct' of certain rules. Discuss.

Q 7: What are the key concepts in Structuralism? Discuss in detail.

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UNIT 4: POST STRUCTURALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Introducing Poststructuralism

4.4 Major Thinkers of Poststructuralism

- 4.4.1 Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)
- 4.4.2 Michel Foucault (1926-1984)
- 4.4.3 Jacques Lacan (1901-1981)
- 4.4.4 Roland Barthes (1915-1980)
- 4.4.5 Paul de Man (1919-1983)
- 4.4.6 J. Hillis Miller (1928-)

4.5 Post Structuralism and Deconstruction

4.6 Reception of Poststructuralism

4.7 Let us Sum up

4.8 Further Reading

4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.10 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss Post structuralism as approaches to the study of literature
- trace the unique historical and intellectual background out of which it had emerged
- find out the basic properties of Poststructuralism
- make a list of the major Post structuralist critics
- make an assessment of Post structuralism as a theoretical trend

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth unit of this course. This unit deals with Poststructuralism. In the previous unit on Structuralism, we have seen that Poststructuralism is both a continuation and critique of Structuralism.

Actually, the term Post structuralism became a popular critical and theoretical usage during 1970s. Like Structuralism, it is not a unified school of thought or movement. Thinkers most commonly attached to this theoretical trend are Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes. The dismissal of any 'real' (which means an original, authentic, stable referent, experience and meaning) is both a topic and an effect of Poststructuralism. However, the problematic relationship between 'signifier' and 'signified' or 'event' and 'concept', is perhaps the most important issue in Poststructuralism. What makes Poststructuralist theory a relevant way of looking at the contemporary world of change is the 'erasure' or weakening of divisions between 'signifier' and 'signified', reading and writing, literature and criticism. By the time we finish reading this unit, we shall not only be able to discuss Post structuralism and its major exponents but shall also make ourselves comfortable to understand the difficult concepts usually studied along with Post structuralism.

4.3 INTRODUCING POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Post structuralism is a vast area of discussion. In this section, I will try to deal with some very specific aspects of Poststructuralism. Poststructuralism has much to do with structuralism itself. Because, Poststructuralism began partly as the continuation of and partly as the reaction against Structuralism. Hence, there is a valid ground to state that the premises and findings of Structuralism established the basis for Poststructuralism. It has also been argued that Poststructuralism began with a suspicion of Structuralism's tendency to impose a comprehensive theory on literature. Thus, it is concerned less with having a firm hold over the text than with celebrating the text's elusive nature and the fallibility of all readings. As a theoretical tool, it has derived much from Jacques Derrida's idea that **language is an infinite chain of words having no extra-lingual origin or end**. According to Derrida, a text should be seen as an endless stream of 'signifiers' without any final meaning. Such a view rejects the functionality of elements like common sense and reason the readers have in their minds, as they want to pull the text into his or her own frame of

reference. At the same time, any attempt at imposing an order on language on the part of the writer, also proves to be inadequate. Such thinking resulted in his most acclaimed theoretical concept known as **Deconstruction**, which is often used interchangeably with Poststructuralism. In another sense, Poststructuralism takes an interdisciplinary stance by incorporating all other approaches that developed after Structuralism.

It is important to explore how Poststructuralists accounts of literature often stem from **deconstructive theory** in terms of the three interconnected concepts: 'textuality' (or floating signifiers), 'rhetoricity', and 'intertextuality'. Because the signifier (word) is disconnected from the 'signified' (concept) and the 'referent' (thing), language floats or slides in relation to reality. It is a condition made more rigorous with the additional sliding introduced into language by figurative language, such as 'metaphors' and 'metonymies'. Such 'rhetoricity' (as it is called) adds layers of substitutions and supplements (more differences) into floating signifiers. 'Textuality' and 'rhetoricity' are conditioned by yet a third sliding or differential element known as 'intertextuality' which refers to a text's dependence on prior words, concepts, connotations, codes, conventions, unconscious practices, and texts. Thus, every text is an 'intertext' that consciously and unconsciously borrows from the immense archive of previous culture.



LET US KNOW

The technical term **dissemination** is commonly employed to name the deconstructive concept of textual meaning. The linguistic, rhetorical, and intertextual properties of language undermine or **deconstruct** stable meaning. Poststructuralist theories of language, whether they focus on floating signifiers, rhetoricity, intertextuality, dissemination and so on, typically bring traditional mimetic, expressive, didactic, and formalist theories into crisis but do not flatly invalidate their claims.

Post structuralist thinkers opined that theory has more than literature to account for. Since everything, from the unconscious to social and cultural

practices, is seen as functioning like a language, the goal of Poststructuralist theorists is to find out what controls interpretation and meaning in all possible system of signification. In the recent decades, Poststructuralism has set the terms and the agenda for many of the major developments and debates in the field of theory and criticism. You will note that it has played a significant role in shaping the direction of other schools and movements, particularly Feminist criticism, Postcolonial theory, Cultural Studies, Film Studies, and Queer Theory. Thus, originally a radical movement of French literary intellectuals and philosophers who came into prominence during the 1960s and 1970s, and who all were critical of Structuralism, it quickly spread to intellectuals around the globe. By the close of the twentieth century, Poststructuralism had become the leading edge of Postmodernism. The main features of Poststructuralism include: the problematising of linguistic preferentiality, the emphasis on heteroglossia, the decentering of the subject, the rejection of "reason" as universal or foundational, the criticism of humanism, and a stress on difference.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What connection does Poststructuralism share with Structuralism?

Q 2: Which are the schools and movements influenced by Poststructuralism?

4.4 MAJOR THINKERS OF POSTSTRUCTURALISM

The following are the most prominent thinkers labelled as Poststructuralist.

4.4.1 Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)

Derrida was a French thinker who taught philosophy at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris. He made a tremendous impact on contemporary literary studies, especially in the universities of America where his notion of '**Deconstruction**' became a major intellectual force in 1970s and 80s. Derrida's intellectual deliberations

were directed against metaphysics that extends from Nietzsche to Heideggar. His critique of the 'presence of consciousness' owes much to Sigmund Freud's discovery of the unconscious. His challenge against the idealist concept of language is an extension of principles laid down by Ferdinand de Saussure and his Structuralist undertakings.

In 1967, Derrida published his first three books in French: *La Voixet le'phtnomene (Speech and Phenomena), De la Grammatologie (Of Grammatology)* and *L'E: criture et la* diffarance *(Writing and Difference).* Derrida published three more books in 1972: *La Dissemination (Dissemination), Marges en la phllosophle (Margins of Philosophy)* and *Positions.* You should note that these early books are the yardstick for deconstructive literary criticism. In 1975, Derrida was invited to teach at Yale University, where he was soon considered a member of the so-called Yale School (along with Paul De Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom). From then on, his career was split between two countries, as his role became embattled and marginalised in France and increasingly active and important in the United States. Derrida died of cancer in Paris at the age of 74.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are the major intellectual deliberations of Jacques Derrida?

Q 4: Why is the conference held in Johns Hopkins University is significant?

4.4.2 Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

Foucault has been described variously as a philosopher, social scientist, and historian of ideas. His works call attention to the role of language in the exercise and preservation of power. Unlike the Structuralists like Levi-Strauss and Barthes, who used language and linguistics as their methodological tool, Foucault used the history

of social and political institutions and discourses. His claim over the instability of any universal truth had a powerful impact on writing of literary history in Britain and America. Foucault believes that the world is more than a galaxy of texts, and that some theories of textuality usually ignore the fact that any discourse is discursively formed out of a power politics. Such discourses reduce the political and cosmic forces and ideological and social control to aspects of signifying processes. His major publications include *Madness and Civilization* (1965), *The Order of Things* (1970), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and a multi-volumed *History of Sexuality* left unfinished by his sudden death.

In a 1976 lecture series, Foucault briefly summarized the general impetus of the Poststructuralist movement like this: "...For the last ten or fifteen years, the immense and proliferating criticisability of things, institutions, practices, and discourses; a sort of general feeling that the ground was crumbling beneath our feet, especially in places where it seemed most familiar, most solid, and closest to us, to our bodies, to our everyday gestures. But alongside this crumbling and the astonishing efficacy of discontinuous, particular, and local critiques, the facts were also revealing something... beneath this whole thematic, through it and even within it, we have seen what might be called the insurrection of subjugated knowledges." [Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 7th January 1976]



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Mention some of the important works of Michel Foucault.

Q 6: What is the role of an author, according to Foucault?

4.4.3 Jacques Lacan (1901-1981):

Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, entered the Freudian psychoanalytical movement in 1936. However, his radical critique

of the orthodox psychoanalytical theory and practice led to his expulsion from the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1959. The publication of his research papers and articles later published as *Ecrits* (1964) in Paris made him one of the leading figures who influenced the International Dissemination of Structuralist and Poststructuralist ideas of language, literature, and the nature of the human subject. His most celebrated theory: "The Unconscious is Structured Like a Language", implied his borrowing of methods and concepts of modern linguistics and tried to question Saussure's assumption that there is nothing problematic about the bond between the 'signified' and the 'signifier' by pointing out that the two 'signifiers' ladies and gentlemen may refer to the same signified–a toilet. He concluded that language, the signifying chain, has a life of its own, which cannot be anchored to a word or thing. Perhaps, this is how his **poststructuralist inclinations** come to the forefront.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: In what way, can we call Lacan a Poststructuralist critic?

4.4.4 Roland Barthes (1915-1980)

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

4.4.5 Paul de Man (1919-1983)

Paul de Man was born and schooled in Antwerp, Belgium. In 1937, he entered the University of Brussels, first studying engineering and eventually taking degrees in Chemistry (1940) and then Philosophy (1942). Though he began his academic career relatively late in life, he quickly rose to prominence, teaching at Cornell University from 1960 to 1967, intermittently at the University of Zurich from 1963 to 1970, and at Johns Hopkins University from 1968 to 1970. In 1970, he moved to Yale University, where he was appointed Sterling Professor of Comparative Literature in 1979.

Paul de Man is often credited with establishing 'Deconstruction' as a valid theoretical tool. Inspired by Derrida, during 1970s, he made Yale the centre of Deconstructive criticism. He was mostly interested in the interdisciplinary mix of literature, philosophy and linguistics the components of theory. He is known for his influential books *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971) and *Allegories of Reading* (1979). These two books are regarded as rigorous works of 'Deconstruction'. De Man is concerned with the theory of tropes, which accompanies rhetorical treatise. Figures of speech (tropes) allow writers to say one thing but mean something else: to substitute one sign for another (metaphor) and to displace meaning from one sign in a chain of signification to another (metonymy). Tropes tend to pervade the world of language by destabilising Logic, thereby denying the possibility of straightforward literal or referential use of language. Take for example, the question: Tea or Coffee? One may reply "Whats the difference?" While doing so, one may produce two meanings. One rhetorical "It makes no difference which I chose", and the other, literal-"what is the difference between tea and coffee." De Man grounds his theory on a meticulous 'close reading' of specific texts, and considers that it is the effect of language and rhetoric that prevents direct representation of the real. For de Man, every reading is a **mis-**

reading, because tropes intervene between critical and literary texts. His most radical belief is that literary texts are 'self-deconstructing' means that a literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of his own rhetorical mode. The 'interpreter' or 'deconstructor' has nothing to do except to collude with the text's own processes. With these ideas, de Man became the most influential literary theorist of the Yale School, and perhaps of his generation. In 1983, at the height of his influence, de Man died of cancer.



LET US KNOW

De Man's "Semiology and Rhetoric" aims at the semiological approaches characteristic of French Structuralism, which attempt to develop a grammar of literary structure on the scientific model of linguistics. Using William Butler Yeats's poem "Among Schoolchildren" (1928) as a test case, de Man shows how meaning cannot be determined by grammar but is exceeded by the figural properties of language. Focusing on the poem's famous last line, "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" he adduces two different readings, taking it first as a rhetorical question reinforcing the images of unity in the poem (the standard interpretation) and then as a serious question that culminates in an image of dramatic uncertainty rather than unity. These yield "two entirely coherent but entirely incompatible readings," and thus "the entire scheme set up by the first reading can be undermined, or deconstructed, in terms of the second." Thus, de Man brings home his point about the limitations of Structuralism as well as of the Hermeneutic approaches; de Man shows how the poem's rhetoric renders interpretation undecidable. He calls this the "rhetorization of grammar."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: How does Paul de Man view "Rhetorical Meaning"?

Q 9: Why does de Man use Yeats' poem "Among School Children"

4.4.6 J. Hillis Miller (1928-)

J. Hillis Miller is an American Literary Critic who has been heavily influenced by Deconstruction. As a critic he was specialized in Victorian and modern literature, as well as in American and European literature of the past two centuries. He was closely aligned, first, to phenomenological criticism or "criticism of consciousness," and then, after 1968, to deconstruction. Miller received his BA in English from Oberlin College in 1948 and his PhD from Harvard in 1952, for a dissertation entitled "The symbolic imagery of Charles Dickens." It made use of Kenneth Burke's idea that a literary work is a form of "symbolic action" in which its author attempts to work out indirectly some personal problem or impasse. After teaching at Williams College for a year, he taught for 19 years at Johns Hopkins University, then 14 years at Yale, after which, in 1986, he moved to the University of California at Irvine, as a Professor of Comparative Literature and English Emeritus. He has been the President of the Modern Language Association of America in 1986.

Known for his works like *The Disappearance Of God* (1963), *Poets of Reality* (1965), Miller became a follower of Derrida by attending Derrida's seminars at Hopkins and then at Yale and Irvine, and applied his theory and method to interpret literary criticism. In his essay "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure" Miller famously explained that "**Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself."** This is an important statement as it helps to understand that texts are subjected to a kind of uncovering of structures that operate in a text and these structures can be

dismantled by making use of the elements of the text itself. The concerns of Miller can also be traced in his next three books, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (1970); *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (1982); *The Linguistic Moment* (1985). Later on Miller moved to Yale in 1972, and became a close colleague of reputed critics like Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man. Along with Jacques Derrida, who moved to Yale from Johns Hopkins for annual seminars, these five critics and theorists collectively became known as the **Yale School**. In 1979, they published a joint venture called *Deconstruction and Criticism*.



LET US KNOW

In spite of Miller's evident focus on readings of literary works, his more purely theoretical essays have been widely read and anthologized. One of his most famous articles, written during his time at Yale, is "The Critic as Host" (1977). Given in response to an attack on deconstruction by the critic M. H. Abrams, Miller asks what "happens when a critical essay extracts a 'passage' and cites it?...Is a citation an alien parasite within the body of its host, the main text, or it is the other way around, the interpretative text the parasite which surrounds and strangles the citation, which is its host" (439). Miller analyses the logic of "parasite" and "host," pointing out that "guest" has the same origin as "host," and that the order of "parasite" and "host" is complex and often reversible. [Read 'The Critic as Host', in Lodge and Wood]

Miller in his book *For Derrida* (2009) gathers all the essays on specific aspects of Derrida's work that he had written for conferences and journals since Derrida's death in 2004. This book exemplifies his conviction that a philosopher-theorist-critic like Derrida cannot be encapsulated in just a few putatively totalising formulas taken out of context.

4.5 POST STRUCTURALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction is a term that was originated by the post structuralist thinker and philosopher Jacques Derrida. It denotes a particular approach or practice to understanding the relationship between text and meaning. Derrida's approach consisted of conducting readings of texts countering the intended meaning or structural unity of that text. In her book *The Critical Difference* (1981), Barbara Johnson clarifies the term like the following:

Deconstruction is not synonymous with 'destruction', however. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis' itself, which etymologically means 'to undo'-a virtual synonym for 'to de-construct.' The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by *the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself* [my italics]. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. A deconstructive reading is a reading, which analyses the specificity of a text's critical difference from itself.

One could say that while Post-structuralism develops as a response to, and displacement of, Structuralism, Deconstruction focuses on rhetoric and reflexivity (i.e. the self-referential aspects of language) in a way that the American New Critics had encouraged earlier in the century. As already mentioned, Deconstruction owes much to the theories of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida whose essay "Structure, Sign and Pay in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966) began a new critical movement. Deconstruction, so far, has been the most influential feature of Post-structuralism because it defines a new kind of reading practice, which is a key application of Post-structuralism.

According to Derrida, a text (any text-be it a polemic, a philosophical treatise, a poem, or, for that matter, an exercise in deconstructive criticism) can be read as saying something quite different from what it appears to be saying, and that it may be read as carrying a plurality of significance or as saying many different things which are fundamentally at variance with, contradictory to and subversive of what may be (or may have been) seen

by criticism as a single, stable 'meaning.' Thus, a deconstructive criticism of a text reveals that there is nothing except the text. Derrida evinced that the language of any discourse is at variance with itself and, by so being, is capable of being read as yet another language. Thus, hypothetically, one may envisage an endless regression of dialectical interpretations and readings without any stable essential meaning. In short, a text may possess so many different meanings that it cannot have A MEANING. There is no guaranteed essential meaning. An immediate deconstructive practice would be to question the foregoing sentence by asking what is meant by 'guaranteed', 'essential' and 'meaning' in that context.

As a form of textual analysis, associated mainly with Jacques Derrida, Deconstruction later became part of critical discussions began by the American critic Paul de Man and his fellow deconstructionists from Yale University Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. One of the principal premises of Post Structuralism, Deconstruction rendered an important influence on literary studies. Thanks also in part to Derrida's translator Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; it has had a major impact upon Postcolonial theory and Queer Theory, as we shall read in Block 3 of this course.

4.6 RECEPTION OF POSTSTRUCTURALISM

The greatest success of Poststructuralism in the domains of Aesthetics as well as textual interpretations is the assertion that no text can ever be considered complete in itself or as communicating a fixed meaning over time. It also dismissed the claim of the author's producing or controlling meaning or interpretation and that of the critic's offering a definitive meaning of the author's supposed intentions. In one sense, 'Deconstruction' had a tremendous influence on the entire field of literary criticism of the last three decades, by blurring the division between fiction and theory, literature and philosophy, reading and writing and the critic and the reader. Together with the Psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, Derrida's 'Deconstruction' launched a new category of writing Reading of Lacan reading Freud, of Derrida re-reading Plato and Rousseau, of Barthes reading Balzac. The developments in the field of literary theory and criticism in the last decades of the 20th

century is partly a rejection of and partly a reaction to 'Deconstruction'. In fact, it enabled the people to see that the order of the 'world out there' is not something given, but something that is chosen to be 'constructed' through language. 'Deconstruction' provided a new angle from which that structure of Western society is sought to be analysed.

Although Deconstruction as a method has revolutionised the ways of interpretations, it is not free from its limitations. Traditional thinkers would say that Deconstruction is valid only in the theoretical level because a reader may share a context of understanding with the writer and try to assign meaning to what the text says accordingly. The traditional objection to 'Deconstruction' is that it is a form of criticism, which, rather than valuing what the text says, emphasises a text's difficulties in saying that. However, Deconstruction has succeeded in standing against all sorts of allegations. Because, it has over time, developed into a method adopted by many critics with a wide range of approaches to literature—Ethnic, Feminist, New-historicist, Marxist, and Postcolonial. Edward Said, who is said to have inaugurated Post Colonial Criticism, is just one of the many who has imported the notions of 'Deconstruction' from the literary to the non-literary arena. In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said deconstructed the East/ West, Orient/ Occident binaries, and the stereotypes it entailed.



4.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have understood that Poststructuralism is the working out of the various implications of Structuralism. However, it is also quite evident that Poststructuralism defies many of the assumptions of Structuralism. The important thing to notice is that Structuralism set out to master the text and open its secrets. Poststructuralism instead believed that this desire is futile because there are various unconscious, or linguistic or historical forces, which cannot be mastered. In this unit, the different concepts and ideas of Poststructuralism have been explored in connection with the contributions made by thinkers like Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, de

Man, and Miller. A deconstructive reading, as stated by Derrida, seeks to expose the various contradictory forces within the text itself, dissipates the fixity of the structure and meanings into an incompatible and undecidable possibilities. A deconstructive reading is a sort of 'double-reading' which means that it acknowledges the ways a writer makes an attempt to order things, but at the same time also points to the contradictions and problems in the text. Derrida's Deconstruction as a method, closely considers an individual text, searching for its inherent contradictions. However, he did not propose Deconstruction as a mode of literary criticism, but as a new way of reading all types of texts. You have learnt that Lacan made an entry into Post structuralist ideas through his engagement with psychoanalysis, and Foucault through the discussion of power and discourse.



4.8 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

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



4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Poststructuralism began partly as the continuation of and partly as the reaction against Structuralism… ...Poststructuralism began with a suspicion of Structuralism's tendency to impose a comprehensive theory on literature… …Thus, it is concerned less with having a firm hold over the text than with celebrating the text's elusive nature and the fallibility of all readings.

Ans to Q 2: Poststructuralism influenced Feminist criticism, Postcolonial theory, Cultural Studies, Film Studies, and Queer Theory… …Poststructuralism had become the leading edge of Postmodernism.

Ans to Q 3: His notion of 'Deconstruction' that became a major intellectual force in 1970s and 80s…. …his critique of the 'presence of consciousness'… …**logocentric** argument that spoken language is superior to written language… … "sign", "signifier" and "signified"… … "supplement".

Ans to Q 4: In 1966, Derrida gave a landmark lecture at the conference "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" at Johns Hopkins University… …that conference helped shape how Structuralism and Poststructuralism began to influence literary studies in the United States… …Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," was fundamental in articulating what was later seen as the "break" between the two schools.

Ans to Q 5: *Madness and Civilisation… …The Birth of the Clinic… …The Order of Things… … The Archaeology of Knowledge… …Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.*

Ans to Q 6: In his essay "What Is an Author?" Foucault asked what "functions" the category called "author" fulfils within the "discourse" the historian or critic deploys in the analysis of written texts… …He pointed out that the concept of *author* is an organising device, permitting us to group certain texts together… …the author thus functions both to organise the vast reservoir of materials that the past bequeaths us and to anchor a certain way of interpreting those materials.

Ans to Q 7: Lacan, entered the Freudian psychoanalytical movement in 1936… …through the papers and articles in his *Ecrits* (1964), he influenced the International Dissemination of Structuralist and Poststructuralist ideas of language, literature, and the nature of the human subject… … his most celebrated theory: "The Unconscious is Structured Like a Language" questioned Saussure's assumption that there is nothing problematic about the bond between the 'signified' and the 'signifier'… …this is how his poststructuralist inclinations became prominent.

Ans to Q 8: De Man is concerned with the theory of tropes which accompanies rhetorical treatise… … Figures of speech (tropes) allow writers to say one thing but mean something else… …to the question Tea or Coffee? one may reply "Whats the difference?"…. …there may be two meaning of the answer: one rhetorical "It makes no difference which I chose", and the other, literal—"what is the difference between tea and coffee." ... ... This is how "Rhetorical Meaning" is differentiated from "Literal Meaning".

Ans to Q 9: De Man used William Butler Yeats's poem "Among Schoolchildren" to shows how meaning cannot be determined by grammar… … the poem's famous last line, "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" provides two different readings… …, which yield "two entirely coherent but entirely incompatible readings" and

thus "the entire scheme set up by the first reading can be undermined, or deconstructed, in terms of the second.

Ans to Q 10: Structure, Sign and Play… …'Logocentrism'… …Supplement… …Difference… …Aporia and so on.

Ans to Q 11: For Lacan "The unconscious is structured like a language." This does not mean that the 'unconscious' *is* language, but that the 'unconscious' is *like* a language. In other words, the 'unconscious' is *structured,* not amorphous, and it *speaks* rhetorically through the dreams, mistakes, and symptoms of the subject.



4.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What do you understand by the term Poststructuralism? How did it react to Structuralist tendency to impose a comprehensive theory in literature?

Q 2: What idea do you get of Derrida's 'Deconstruction' from your reading of this unit?

Q 3: Do you consider 'Deconstruction' to be a valid method of critiquing established notions in Literary Studies.?

Q 4: Discuss the main ideas of the key thinkers of Poststructuralism?

Q 5: How did Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller establish Deconstruction as an important tool for analysis?

Q 6: Discuss Lacan and Foucault as Post structuralist theorists and elaborate on their contributions.

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UNIT 5: NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL MATERIALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Introducing New Historicism

5.3.1 Major Theorist: Stephen Greenblatt

5.4 Introducing Cultural Materialism

5.4.1 Common Agenda between New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

5.4.2 Major Theorists

5.4.3 Important Concepts in Cultural Materialism

5.5 Reception of These Theories

5.6 Let us Sum up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.9 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss New Historicism and Cultural Materialism as two very important trends in Literary Theory
- trace the growth and development of both the trends
- make a list of the major theorists of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism
- examine the concepts propounded by the theorists in question
- assess the reception of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism in subsequent critical periods

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth unit of the course. In this unit, we shall get to lean about New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. New Historicism, which

emerged in 1980s in the field of Renaissance Studies, designates a kind of writing marked by components such as rejection of the compartmentalisation of disciplines, attention to economic and historical contexts of culture, self-reflexivity in the act of writing about culture, and intertextuality of texts and discourses. New Historicism seeks to reconstruct a literary text as a historical object by considering the ways and methods not included in traditional literary studies. Cultural Materialism, on the other hand, was initiated in Britain. It is a theoretical approach to literature proposed by Raymond Williams during 1970s. This theory was later redefined by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield in the mid 1980s as they applied it to the study of Renaissance drama. Rooted in Marxism, it stresses the interaction between cultural creations such as literature and their historical context that also includes social, political and economic elements. By the time we finish reading this unit, we shall learn how to use the resources of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism in your analysis of literary texts. We also learn that both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism are part of a broader sea change in the studies of history and literature.

5.3 INTRODUCING NEW HISTORICISM

Although the term 'historicism' had been in use before, New Historicism received its current meaning in 1982, when the prominent new historicist critic Stephen Greenblatt used it to describe recent work of himself and others on the Renaissance period. Many commentators would like to situate its origin in 1980s, in Greenblatt's book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. In the introduction to the special issue of *Genre* (1982), Greenblatt remarked: "The New Historicism erodes the firm ground of both criticism and literature. It tends to ask questions about its own methodological assumptions and those of others". The first institutional centre of New Historicism is the journal called *Representations* (1983-) edited by Greenblatt himself and others. The New Historicist thinkers believe that they do not form a single school of thought, because theirs is a consolidation of 'themes, preoccupations and attitudes'. They both criticise and incorporate aspects of traditional and contemporary theory. It retains

some of the techniques of New Critical 'close reading' with its assumption of a literary text as a container of meaning. Similarly, it critiques the 'ahistorical' tendencies of Structuralism and Deconstruction.

For the students of literature New Historicism is important for two obvious reasons.

First, it rejects the Base-Super Structure model of Marxism although it retains the Marxist notion that human beings and their artefacts are "constructed by social and historical forces."

Secondly, it repudiates the 'history of ideas' approaches of the Renaissance Studies scholars like Douglash Bush, C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard who are criticised for their homogenous representations of historical periods.

Thus, concentrating on the relation between literature and history the New Historicist critics have devised alternative reading practices. They opine that forms of discourse, artistic or documentary, popular or elitist, often interact with and are determined by other discourses and institutional practices in a specific historical moment. Thus, they presuppose both 'the historicity of texts' and 'the textuality of history' in the words of the American literary theorist Louis Montrose. Different ideas can be derived from concepts like 'historicity' and 'textuality'. For instance, Montrose stresses 'historicity' in connection with the Elizabethan notion of pastoral that describes land holding practices and the hierarchical relations of the Elizabethan court. While, Greenblatt emphasises 'textuality' he argues in the book *Renaissance Self Fashioning* that the self is a literary construct of the text, and historical personages are inscribed in documents as textual systems. An increased awareness of the ways in which the self can be fashioned leads to an increased awareness of how the self is subject to power relations and how it always functions within larger structures that may even completely control whatever self-fashioning seemed initially possible. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* ultimately subscribes to the notion that the self is always a construction, that our identity is never given, but always the 'product' or 'construct' of an interaction between the way we want to represent ourselves, through the stories we tell (or the incidents we suppress) and our actual presentations, and the power relations we are part of.

However, you should note that New Historicism neither privilege 'historicity' nor 'textuality'. Instead, the main focus here is on the mediation and interaction between the two. New Historicism tends to read a literary text as constituted within historically specific institutions. Thus, Greenblatt states that in Elizabethan Theatre "each play is bound up with the theatre's long term institutional strategy…An individual play mediates between the mode of theatre, understood in its historical specificity, and the elements of society out of which that theatre has been differentiated. [As stated in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. P-14] Louis Montrose also states that New Historicist scholars relate the historicity and textuality of their own subject position by making various self-reflexive gestures. In doing so, the writer is placed in a problematic relation to the historical object being written about. Besides, the histories the writer reconstructs are the textual constructs of critics who are, themselves historical subjects.



LET US KNOW

We should pay attention to the fact that many literary scholars have incorporated the concerns of Cultural Studies into the historical analysis of literature. For example, they have examined class conflicts, hegemonic forces, and racial and gender codes in William Shakespeare's plays, Charles Dickens's novels, and Walt Whitman's poetry. Particularly important in this regard is the critical movement known as the New Historicism which studies literary texts not as autonomous objects but as material products emerging out of specific social, cultural, and political contexts. This view of literature breaks down the traditional distinction between literary and non-literary texts and forms. Typically, New Historicists demonstrate the ways in which the power relations of a particular era shape how literature is produced, distributed, and consumed, making use of a wide range of contemporary materials-everything from diaries and travel writings to legal documents to medical and penal records.

New Historicism is based on Foucault's ideas on 'power', Raymond Williams' 'culture' and Louis Althusser's 'ideology'. By using those ideas, New Historicism specifies the historical contexts in which a particular literary text is to be read.

Thus, the New Historicist not only pays attention to the discursive disputes in a particular text but also examines how a particular text is addressed to other texts, other discursive orders, in the wider culture. Unlike the old historicist, the New Historicist does not expect that cultural moment is unified, with the literary text simply reflecting or embodying that unity. The text is rather a dynamic interweaving of multiple strands from a culture that is itself an unstable field of contending forces. Any given text for the New Historicist is an attempted intervention in the ongoing struggle to influence or even dominate the cultural field. To explain how Shakespeare's *Richard II* is implicated in the power struggles of its time is both to write a history of the consolidation of power, and to awaken today's reader to the conflicts that we experience at the present.

New Historicism remains political while denying that any social world is stable and that artworks are separated from the power-struggles constituting social reality. The literary work is a player in the competition, among various groups to gain their ends, that takes place on many levels. New Historicism accepts Foucault's ideas that power operates through different channels, which include not just direct governmental action but also, the daily routines and language. The New Historicists often construct narratives in which dispersed and disputed power becomes more insidious, and dominance grows more dominant. They want to emphasize the contingencies and fluidity of history in a given moment. However, they also, emphasise how history reveals the growth of forms of power that continuously affect the lives of the common subjects.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you understand by the term New Historicism? How is Greenblatt associated with NH?

Q 2: What is the scope of New Historicism?

Q 3: How is the idea of 'history' viewed in NH?

5.3.1 Major Theorist: Stephen Greenblatt (1943-)

Stephen Greenblatt was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1943 and did his undergraduate and graduate studies at Yale University, gaining his PhD in 1969. For more than twenty years, he taught at the University of California at Berkeley, where he was one of the founders of the journal *Representations,* in which there appeared for the first time the path breaking New Historicist works. He moved to Harvard University in the mid 1990s. A leading proponent of New Historicism, he became a key figure in the shift from literary to cultural poetics and from textual to contextual interpretation in American critical scene during 1980s and 1990s. He was mostly inspired by Michel Foucault's historical investigations of medical and penal institutions and his theoretical views of power. For Greenblatt, literary works are "fields of force, places of dissension and shifting interests, occasions for the jostling of orthodox and subversive impulses." In an important essay entitled "Invisible Bullets" (1981), echoing Foucault's pessimistic strain, Greenblatt argues that Renaissance subversion inevitably played into the hands of power. In fact, power *needs* subversion and actively produces it: 'subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers its ends'. His *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991) is yet another important addition to his New Historicist criticism. It examines the role that 'wonder' plays in the response of European explorers and travellers to the New World. He characteristically sees that 'wonder' as 'an agent of appropriation' in the sense that the expressions of 'wonder' function as an instrument of power. Under Greenblatt's investigation, 'European' representational practices turn out to have played a vital role in the process of colonisation that followed exploration and travel by the Europeans.

5.4 INTRODUCING CULTURAL MATERIALISM

The term Cultural Materialism refers to 20th-century attempts at applying the Marxist notion of materialism to the study of culture. It was first used by Raymond Williams more than a century after Marx's own deliberations on "historical" and later "dialectical" materialism. Williams explored the term 'materialism' in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Thus, Cultural Materialism, as set forth by Williams, attempts to show that classic Marxism's negative answer to questions about the nature of cultural production was misguided. Thus, Williams tried to explore classical Marxism, which according to him, is not materialist enough. For Williams, material activity is not limited to what Marx might have termed "the production and reproduction of real life." He is concerned explicitly to extend the term to any practical activity in which an individual establishes, maintains, or changes specifically human relationships (physically, to nature, and socially, to one another). He often refers to such activities as "constitutive", an opposite term to "instrumental", and is concerned to demonstrate that many activities, which Marx might have considered "instrumental", are in fact "constitutive." In the first four chapters of the book, he dismantles a number of "Basic Concepts," namely "culture," "language," "literature," and "ideology." In each case, he takes a concept which classical Marxism assigns to the 'superstructure', reveals current problems in the definition of the concept, and demonstrates that the concept can be found to have referred to a "practical" (or "basic") activity, but that this meaning has been historically erased, by Marxism and other schools of thought. He then proposes a contemporary redefinition of the term, which returns it to the "material" realm.

Cultural Materialist criticism gradually established itself permanently in the field of literary studies in the mid-1980s, with the publication of Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (1984), of Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (1985), and of two collections of essays: *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985) edited by John Drakakis, and *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985) edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield.

Dollimore and Sinfield, in their edited book *Political Shakespeare* declares their stance over Cultural Materialism. Their approach was based on a "a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis . . . [w]e call this 'cultural materialism'" (vii). The "political commitment" referred to is specified as "socialist and feminist" not "Marxist" and the elements in which it is placed are really not derived from Williams at all. With their relentless questioning and undermining of traditional approaches to Shakespeare, Dollimore and Sinfield significantly altered the teaching of Shakespeare in the academy.

Both Dollimore and Sinfield are famous for their book *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985) in which they introduced Raymond Williams' theory to the study of Shakespearean drama and defined their parameters in their own terms. Noting the significance of the terms 'cultural' and 'material' they tried to explain that the theory combines two meanings: the analytical term 'culture' referring to social systems studied in Anthropology and Social Sciences; and the evaluative term culture referring to art and literature as form of 'high culture'. They tend to suggest that literary texts 'represent' rather than 'transcend' or 'reflect' material reality and asserts the potentials of literature both to interact and intervene in accepted practices and beliefs. As they state in the Introduction to their book *Political Shakespeare,* that the essays included in the book indicate that Cultural Materialism involves 'historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis' (viii). They took theory to be overlapping with and including studies of History, Sociology, Feminism, Marxism and Post structuralism.



LET US KNOW

Louis Althusser, the French Marxist philosopher starts his essay on the "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation" with an acknowledgment that "any social order has to include the conditions for its own continuance, and capitalism and patriarchy do this partly through the education system."

For Sinfield, Shakespeare is generally appropriated by the educational state as a means of constructing its subjects (school pupils) within the dominant bourgeois ideology. One can observe this not only in the ideological framework implicit in the questions, which they are permitted to answer, but also in the questions, they are not asked. There is little encouragement, for example, to view Shakespeare in relation to the economics, politics, or social history of his day.

5.4.1 Common Agenda between New Historicism and Cultural Materialism [Adapted from Hens Bertens]

1. Both the trends brought to the then still traditional study of Renaissance literature, in particular the work of Shakespeare, a mixture of Marxist and Post structuralist orientations, in particular Post structuralist notions of the 'self', of discourse, and of power. New Historicism leaned more towards a (Foucauldian) Post structuralism in its focus on power, on the discourses that serve as vehicles for power, on the construction of identity, and other Post structuralist issues, while Cultural Materialism leaned more towards the Marxism of Raymond Williams and its focus on ideology, on the role of institutions, and on the possibilities for subversion or dissidence.
2. Both reject the individual genius of the author and the autonomy of the literary work and see literary texts as absolutely inseparable from their historical context. The role of the author is not completely negated, but it is a role that the author is at best in command of. The author's role is to a large extent determined by historical circumstances. As the prominent New Historicist critic Stephen Greenblatt put it: "the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society."
3. They do not see literature as a special category of transcendent, essentially ahistorical texts. Both treat literary texts in the same

way that they treat other texts. For their specific purposes, they bring to light the relations of power and processes of ideological and cultural construction.

4. Finally, in their conviction that culture, including all beliefs and values, is a construction, the New Historicists and Cultural Materialists are willing to grant that their own assumptions must also be constructed and may therefore be deconstructed. However, that does not prevent them from taking up political positions that are motivated by a political vision.

If New Historicism and Cultural Materialism have so much in common what could possibly distinguish them? One distinctive feature is the role that subversion, or dissent, is allowed to play in them. As Catherine Belsey argued, the New Historicism's view of culture 'allows no space for dissent. Instead, minor revolts simply offer occasions for extending social control; crime legitimates an extension of the police'. Where new historicists would be satisfied to bring to light hidden power relations in a cluster of Renaissance texts, cultural materialists seek to find instances of dissidence, subversion, and transgression that are relevant in contemporary political struggles. Because of this double focus, Cultural Materialism is deeply interested in the ways in which literature from the past, say the works of Shakespeare, has been made to function in later periods and in our contemporary culture.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Who used the term Cultural Materialism? Why is materialism important in CM?

Q 5: What are the common aspects between NH and CM?

Q 6: What is the basic difference between NH and CM?

5.4.2 Major Theorists

The following is a list of the major theorists of Cultural Materialism

Raymond Williams (1921-1988)

Raymond Williams was a literary critic, cultural theorist and political activist. His critique of English culture became more and more prominent through his long engagement with its literature and institutions, and a growing affinity with the continental currents of thoughts. In all his works, as he wrote in his *Politics and Letters,* he was writing mainly against two traditions: "one which has totally spiritualised cultural production, the other which has relegated it to secondary status". He also opined that the prevailing "categories of literature and criticism were so deeply compromised that they had to be challenged in toto". According to him, the whole range of 'imaginative literature' was confined to specialised groups of readers and was often excluded from other writings and activities. Thus, it became so complicated in the capitalist system of meanings, values, and divisions of labour that it had become an obstacle in the fuller attainment of values.

He is well known for his pioneering contributions to Cultural Studies. He refined terms such as 'structure of feelings', 'knowable community', 'hegemony', and 'cultural materialism'. Through his publications like *Culture and Society* (1958), *The Long Revolution and Communications* (1961), Williams established the frameworks for placing literary debates in larger contexts of discussions. His analysis of the idea of culture—for example, the forms of drama and fiction, the standardisation of language, the press, education and literacy – provided evidence that the changes and conflicts of a way of life are deeply implicated in its systems of learning. In the later 1960s and early 1970s, he produced revaluations of fiction, drama and television under the titles—*Modern Tragedy, Drama From Ibsen to Brecht, The country and the City,* and *Television.* He

'historicised' the texts, read them in their historical contexts, and discussed cultural institutions within a critical sociology of society. In the later part of 1970s, he turned towards rewriting Marxist literary and cultural theories. In works like *Marxism and Literature, Politics and Letters, Problems in Materialism and Culture, Culture,* he elaborated his mature theories of Cultural Materialism, by showing culture as a productive process. You should note that he coined the phrase 'cultural materialism' in the book *Marxism and Literature.*

Jonathan Dollimore (1948-)

Jonathan Dollimore is an English sociologist and theorist in the field of Renaissance Literature (mainly drama). Earlier, he was a Professor in the School of English and American Studies and is currently an associate member of the Centre for the Study of Sexual Dissidence, University of Sussex. He is also a Professor of English and Related Literature at the University of York. Dollimore is credited with making major interventions in debates on sexuality and desire, Renaissance literary culture, art and censorship, and cultural theory. After leaving school at an early age with no formal education to speak of, he worked in a car factory and as a journalist before going to university as a mature student. His first degree was in English with Philosophy. Both subjects have remained central to his range of interests which include Renaissance literature, especially drama; gender studies, especially homosexuality and bisexuality; the history of ideas, especially the philosophical preoccupation with decadence and death in western culture; the history of criticism— especially New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. His books include (with Alan Sinfield), *Radical Tragedy: Religion Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (1984), *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985), *Sexual Dissidence* (1991), *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (1998), *Sex, Literature and Censorship* (2001).

Dollimore in his *Radical Tragedy* states that the traditional interpretations of the Jacobean tragedies like Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*

and Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* have ignored how the plays undermine humanist assumptions because they focus on what fits the humanist framework. He (with Alan Sinfield) polemically announced in their introduction to *Political Shakespeare* that Cultural Materialism does not, like much established criticism, attempt to mystify its perspective as the natural, obvious or right interpretation of an allegedly given textual fact. On the contrary, it registers its commitment to the transformation of a social order, which exploits people on grounds of race, gender and class.

Alan Sinfield (1941-)

Alan Sinfield is an English theorist in the fields of Shakespeare and sexuality, modern theatre, gender studies, queers theory (queer studies), post-1945 politics and cultural theory. A number of important books are placed in his credit. They include *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992), *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1994), *Gay and After: Gender, Culture and Consumption* (1998), *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (1999), *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (2004), *On Sexuality and Power* (2004), *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (2006) and so on.

Sinfield in his *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* shows how the patriarchal culture in a play like *Othelo* presents Desdemona as someone who is bound to obey her father and the role of obedient daughter should in the normal course of things lead her to follow his wishes in her marital choice. However, in the early modern period we also find an increased emphasis on the idea that marriage should be personally fulfilling. This 'contradiction in the ideology of marriage' – one of Sinfield's 'faultlines' – allows Desdemona to disregard her father's wishes and to marry a man who from the perspective of the social group to which she belongs is totally unsuitable. As a result, the social order

comes under immediate pressure. It is the faultline in question that creates what Sinfield calls 'dissident potential'. Dissidence is not so much a matter of individual agency but is first of all produced by the inner contradictions that characterise any social order. Since such 'faultlines' are to be found in all cultures, it is only natural that they should turn up in literary texts because literature offers a place where, contradictions and tensions can be addressed and worked through. With such views, Sinfield focussed on the cracks in the ideological facade that texts offer. Hence, Cultural Materialism reads even the most reactionary texts against the grain, offering readings of dissidence that allow us to hear the socially marginalised and expose the ideological machinery that is responsible for their marginalisation and exclusion.



LET US KNOW

Ideology:

For cultural materialists ideology becomes quite visible in institutions such as the university, the museum, the army, the school, the labour union, the church, and a whole range of organisations. And it becomes material the ways in which images and representations from the past are deployed in the service of contemporary ideology, for instance, the merchandising of the product called 'Shakespeare' (and other big sellers in the heritage industry) and in the use of, for instance, 'Shakespeare' in commercials. In *Faultlines* Sinfield shows how a reference to Shakespeare's **Globe Theatre**, evokes the continuity of British tradition, and is used by a manufacturer of defence equipment to promote itself and its wares. From the perspective of Cultural Materialism, contemporary culture, both in its institutionalised and in its popular and mass forms, is a battlefield where an omnipresent conservative ideology must constantly be challenged.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How is Raymond Williams connected with CM?

Q 8: Mention the significance of the book *Political Shakespeare*?

5.4.3 Important Concepts in Cultural Materialism

The following are the important concepts in Cultural Materialism.

Ideology

Ideology is an important concept in Cultural Materialism. According to classical Marxism, it is a system of false beliefs founded on contradictions and inconsistencies that misrepresent social relationships. Louis Althusser, the noted Marxist theorist talked about "Ideological State Apparatuses" that include all institutions like educational systems, law, religion, art etc, and which represent and reproduce the myths or beliefs needed to maintain the existing mode of economic production of a society. Raymond Williams, on the other hand, places ideology in the context of changes comprising 'residual', 'dominant', and 'emergent' elements in culture. He was of the opinion that the dominant elements form the controlling ideology at any historical moment. While the residual elements of previously dominant ideologies still maintain some influence and new elements emerge in the form of new ideas and values to initiate change by challenging central beliefs and faiths. The point Williams raised is that the dominant values only 'misrepresent' by failing to acknowledge the complexity of social interaction, but simultaneously, marginal beliefs complete the ideological picture by accounting for historical change and cultural contradictions.



LET US KNOW

For Williams, as we have seen, the dominant culture is never more than one player in the

cultural field, even if it is by far the most powerful. There are always residual and emergent strains within a culture that offer alternatives to the hegemony. In other words, the dominant culture is always under pressure from alternative views and beliefs. Therefore, while cultural materialist analyses of literary texts bring to light how texts are instruments of a dominant socio-cultural order, they also demonstrate how the apparent coherence of that order is threatened from the inside, by inner contradictions and by tensions that it seeks to hide.

Politics

Cultural Materialists believe that literary representation of ideology is used to reinforce power and authority in the face of opposition. Hence, words like 'Consolidation', 'Subversion' and 'Containment' are key words in Cultural Materialism. In *Political Shakespeare,* Jonathan Dollimore opines that "the first refers, typically, to the ideological means whereby a dominant order seeks to perpetuate itself; the second to the subversion to that order, the third to the containment of ostensibly subversive pressures." (p 10) Subsequently, materialist critics have viewed political power as a shaky relationship between dominance and subversion. Any dominant order restricts and falsifies human experience and literary texts play a politically subversive role by exposing the contradictions and inconsistencies, which undermine domination.

Renaissance Drama

The study of Renaissance drama was heavily influenced by Cultural Materialism following which the interaction between politics and performance has been of serious interest in recent literary criticism. Perhaps the approach was first started by Jonathan Dollimore in his books *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (1984), and *Political Shakespeare* (1985). Dollimore portrayed the Jacobian playwrights as political activists who repeated by question

and subvert the ideological foundation of monarchical authority. In his interpretations of the Renaissance texts, Dollimore challenged essentialism— the view that human nature has inherent or universal qualities uniting readers and writers from one historical period to the next.

5.5 RECEPTION OF THESE THEORIES

Following New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, literary criticism increasingly began to see literature as an integral part of a much wider cultural context. Initially in the field of Renaissance Studies, but later on in literary studies in general, critics start from the assumption that literary texts are inevitably situated within the discourses that, according to Foucault, carry and maintain social power. The American New Historicists and the British Cultural Materialists read literary texts for their role in the circulation of power. In order to bring to light the political dimension of literary texts, new historicists and cultural materialists often read them in connection with non-literary texts and the dominant discourses of a given period. Cultural Studies shares its roots with Cultural Materialism, in seeing the whole field of contemporary culture as its object of study. Like New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, it is interested in the workings of power, and in the way, cultural institutions and organisations and the products of culture create subject positions for the members of a society.

There is no doubt about the fact that during 1990s, New Historicism provided many new directions to literary discussions that influenced the new field of Postcolonial studies. However, New Historicism is also open to serious critique. The tendency to tell similar historical tales of the expanding reach of power has opened New Historicism to criticism. Historians have objected that these literary critics read a few non-literary texts, juxtapose them with plays or novels, and think they are doing history. Besides, Feminist and other critics too have objected to the steamroller effect of New Historicism's view of power, and to how in new historicist criticism structures of power flattened and homogenised all subjects that lived within them so that differences in class, sex, and race completely disappeared from view.

Responding to such criticisms, subsequent new historicist studies had begun to consider such differences in its analyses of the way subjects are constructed. In the new historicist discussion of the 1990s and beyond, subjects are not simply seen as the products of the dominant ideology, but 'constructed' by one or more subcultures. Such a view immediately brings issues of sex and race into the foreground.

To talk about the reception of Cultural Materialism, it has been observed that the political bias of Cultural Materialism is its most controversial aspect. The objection is that the practitioners often choose those texts that validate their own position. Besides, their studies often lead to a narrow predictable reading of texts or to a discussion of contemporary politics which overshadows focus on texts and history altogether. Scholars who are called Materialist have been criticised for being both too materialist and not enough materialist.

Greenblatt's works, along with that of Louis Adrian Montrose, Stephen Mullaney, Jonathan Dollimore, Catherine Belsey, and numerous other literary critics, had ensured that English Renaissance studies and New Historicism have become inextricably linked. However, New Historicists work has also been highly influential in studies of other historical periods. especially ninesation-century American and British literature. Jerome McGann for example, though not influenced so directly by Foucault as are the members of the *Representations* group, has brought a New Historicist concern with social context to the criticism of British Romantic poetry. By the late 1990s, literary critics stopped identifying themselves as New Historicists, but the emphasis on context over text still prevailed in most of their theoretical analysis.



5.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have learnt that the 'constructedness' of culture and its annexation by literary studies are central to New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, the first being American in origin, and the second being

mainly British. Both the approaches share a focus on power and ideology and the view that writers challenge political power by exploring its representations and exposing its inconsistencies in representations. Both share the assumption that literature is completely integrated with political, social and economic forces. However, there are certain differences between the two. The British Marxist origin of the first link it to a tradition of oppositional politics, while the second is influenced more directly by Clifford Geertz's Anthropology, Michel Foucault's discussions of power relations, and Jacque Derrida's Deconstruction. The Marxist political background helps in explaining the cultural materialist belief in freedom for social change through literary texts and analysis. But, the two also differ in textual interpretation. Cultural Materialists focus on the subversion of dominant ideologies and institutions represented in literature, while the New Historicists emphasise containment in asserting that the dominant is necessarily defined by the subversion it controls. Besides, New Historicism too tends to remain within the problematics of representation. Nevertheless, Cultural Materialism moves from systems of representation to specific historical referents and their political effects.



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Web Resources:

http://english.jhu.edu/bios/jonathan-dollimore/index.html



5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: New Historicism began around 1980s… …according to Stephen Greenblatt "The New Historicism erodes the firm ground of both criticism and literature"… …the New Historicist critics decide on alternative reading practices… … as Louis Montrose states, they presuppose both 'the historicity of texts' and 'the textuality of history'.

Ans to Q 2: New Historicist not only pays attention to the discursive disputes in a particular text but also examines how a particular text is addressed to other texts… …it views the text as a dynamic interweaving of multiple strands from a culture that is itself an unstable field of contending forces… …New Historicism remains political while denying that any social world is stable and that artworks are separated from the power-struggles constituting social reality… …they want to emphasise the contingencies and fluidity of history in a given moment.

Ans to Q 3: History, such as the socio-economic circumstances of a specific literary text's creation, is not read to illuminate literature, nor is literature read to shed a direct light on history… …rather, the historical period in question is seen as a remote culture whose various discursive manifestations need detailed attention and need to be brought into contact with each other so that the power relations and the forces operating in that culture may be brought to light.

Ans to Q 4: Cultural Materialism refers to 20th-century attempts at applying the Marxist notion of materialism to the study of culture… … It was first used by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature…* …Dollimore and Sinfield in their book *Political Shakespeare,* stated that Cultural Materialism involves 'historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis'.

Ans to Q 5: Both the trends were engaged with the traditional study of Renaissance literature, in particular the works of Shakespeare… …both rejected the individual genius of the author and the autonomy of the literary work and see literary texts as absolutely inseparable from their historical context… …they do not see literature as a special category of transcendent, essentially ahistorical texts… …in their conviction, culture is a construction.

Ans to Q 6: Where New Historicists would be satisfied to bring to light hidden power relations in a cluster of Renaissance texts, Cultural Materialists seek to find instances of dissidence, subversion, and transgression that are relevant in contemporary political struggles.

Ans to Q 7: Raymond Williams was a literary critic, cultural theorist and political activist. … …he is well known for his pioneering contributions to Cultural Studies… …through his publications like *Culture and Society* (1958), *The Long Revolution and Communications* (1961), Williams established the frameworks for placing literary debates in larger contexts of discussions… …in works like *Marxism and Literature, Politics and Letters, Problems in Materialism and Culture, Culture,* he elaborated his mature theories of Cultural Materialism.

Ans to Q 8: In the introduction to *Political Shakespeare* Alan Sinfield stated that Cultural Materialism does not, like much established criticism, attempt to mystify its perspective as the natural, obvious or right interpretation of an allegedly given textual fact… …On the contrary, it registers its commitment to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on grounds of race, gender and class.



5.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is New Historicism? Discuss the scope of New Historicism as a theoretical trend that is engaged with the reception of 'history'.

Q 2: Why is the idea of 'history' so important in New Historicism? How does it reveal the growth of forms of power that affects the lives of the common subjects?

Q 3: Who are the major exponents of New Historicist criticism? Discuss with reference to some of the key texts of New Historicism.

Q 4: What, according to you, is Cultural Materialism? Illustrate with the discussions of the major Cultural materialist critics.

Q 5: "Cultural Materialism involves historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis." Discuss.

Q 6: Discuss the similarities and differenced between New Historicism and Cultural Materialism as theoretical approaches in terms of their views regarding the past.

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UNIT 6: PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Introducing Psychoanalytic Criticism

6.4 Major Trends

- 6.4.1 Classical Freudian Criticism
- 6.4.2 Jungian Criticism
- 6.4.3 Lacanian Criticism

6.5 Reception of Psychoanalytic Theory

6.6 Let us Sum up

6.7 Further Reading

6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.9 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the nature and function of psychoanalytic criticism
- identify the various trends within the scope especially those initiated by Freud, Jung and Lacan
- discuss the wide-ranging reception psychoanalytic criticism enjoys
- discuss the implications psychoanalytic criticism effects in literary studies

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the Block. In this unit, we shall discuss Psychoanalytic Criticism in some detail. Psychoanalytic criticism adopts the methods of "reading" employed by Freud and later theorists to interpret texts. It argues that literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses. One may psychoanalyze a

particular character within a literary work, but it is usually assumed that all such characters are projections of the author's psyche. As we finish reading the unit, we shall be able to understand the various facets of psychoanalytic criticism.

6.3 INTRODUCING PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

Psychoanalytic criticism is one of the distinctive branches of study gaining widespread circulation as time passes on. However, the passage of time did not reduce its significance and applicability provided its adaptations being made, albeit by taking recourse to various fields of study. For instance, Jacques Lacan's linguistic reading of Sigmund Freud's formulations points out the continuation of the school of thought. At times, other disciplines including Feminism take Freudian observations into account, though not always in their positive framework; rather in the alleged bias, Freud had made in conditioning his thought processes. This is also a pointer towards the extent Freudian psychoanalysis enjoys in the academics and the wider circle of socio-cultural context as well.

It is understood that psychoanalytic criticism made its presence felt in the 1920s with no looking back since its inception. Of course, its major premises and procedures are traced back to Viennese neurologist Sigmund Freud. His treatment of neurosis and hysteria brought out certain key aspects relating to human psyche and its hitherto untouched reality. In his epoch-making study, Freud points out that mental illness, symptoms, and even normal life remain inexplicable, potent cause being frequent interference from the unconscious mind of human beings. Indeed, Freud's major theories such as Repression and the Unconscious, Infantile Sexuality, Oedipus Complex, among others, constitute major space in psychoanalytic criticism. With these novel ideas and projections, newer vistas of thinking processes came into effect and the certainty of everything assumed has been subject to scanner.

If Freud gives much importance to sexuality and repressed motives as deciding factors conditioning general course of action in human beings, later thinkers notably Carl Gustav Jung see archetypes of the collective or

personal unconscious as founding aspects of artistic creations and other issues. For the Jungians, the nature of art is a matter inseparably connected to aesthetics, and mere psychiatry fails to unfold the real value of literature. Though greatly influenced by Freud's formulations, Jung emerged as a distinctive thinker sidelining the centrality of sex and other related issues. Any discussion on Freud and Jung remains incomplete, especially in context of the late 20th century, unless French critic and philosopher Jacques Lacan is taken into account. Indeed Lacan's linguistic reading of Freud has done a job many fold. It not only extends Freud's relevance, but also introduces symbolic order into psychoanalysis. The lingual dimension to psychoanalysis introduces the three elementary registers such as the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real, which Lacan found of immense significance in unfolding various facets to his area of interest. These ideas were given much publicity by Lacan maintaining close ties with Saussure's linguistics, structural anthropology and post-structural theories. In fact, Lacan's adherence to Freudian psychoanalysis extends its bounds and encompasses fields as diverse as film studies, feminist theory and philosophy, and, above all, literary criticism.

There is no denying the fact that psychoanalytic criticism is the least appreciated of all major disciplines emerged among the academics and thinkers. Though mostly controversial, psychoanalytic criticism seems very effective a tool especially in interpretative analysis. Coming into terms with this, the school bears much implication in literary studies. Indeed, it would be a misnomer to refer to a few select texts on which psychoanalytic criticism could be levied. Generally, this distinctive school may be conveniently applied to any text. It depends upon the interest and perspective an analyst maintains in approaching a given text. Interestingly, psychoanalytic criticism engages a great variety of areas pertaining to a text that include the author, the characters, the audience, and also the hidden dynamics the text inherits. However, all these major areas may not be given equal treatment by an analyst. Sometimes a particular area is given due focus while at times more than one aspect draw the attention of the concerned. Whatever the case be, psychoanalytic criticism exerts far-reaching impact on literary studies and comes up with many a good, but interesting observation

regarding the chosen text. Literary studies apart, psychoanalytic criticism turns out functional in understanding the wider circle of philosophy, religion and culture.

It goes without saying that psychological dimension to literature is not new a phenomenon. Since the time of Aristotle, it has been a recurring motif, and most of the thinkers have taken recourse to this with their respective design and purpose. Although Sigmund Freud is regarded the pioneer in the field, with whom the theory of the 'unconscious' was of wide-ranging bearing, his was not a maiden venture too. For instance, thinkers like Schlegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche also gave emphasis upon the notion of the "unconscious". What Freud did was the inculcation of a systematic study and an introduction of a new language into the said area. Another important aspect to Freud's formulation is the challenge it poses to the certainty of everything that is usually taken for granted. This situates Freud, though controversially, in the postmodernist context as well, particularly in respect of the improbability of definite meaning. In fact, Freud's observations defy the Enlightenment postulation about the rational bearing of human beings in getting access to various matters and their associated knowledge.

It is very true that psychoanalytic criticism came into prominence in the 1920s, and there is no looking back since its inception. Cantering Sigmund Freud's basic premises and projections, psychoanalytic criticism is not identical to psychological criticism that emerged in the early decades of the 19th century. Dealing with the state of mind and the framework of personality of a given author, psychological criticism turned out an antidote to the pragmatic and mimetic views earlier schools of study strictly prescribed. However, psychoanalytic criticism comprises a broader space engaging the motives of an author, of readers, of fictional characters, relation of the text to its author's biography, role of gender, analysis of symbols, and function of language. While doing all this, the distinctive school takes recourse to observations made by various thinkers in the concerned field. Along with Freud, influential thinkers like Alfred Adler, Carl Gustav Jung, among others, gave a new orientation, and succeeding practitioners owed a great deal to their ideas and views.

Psychoanalytic criticism views literature and other art forms as the imagined or fantasised satisfaction of wishes that are usually denied in reality by a series of factors. An individual might have myriad attitudes and intention in normal course of life, which finds it difficult to get fulfilled because of various social norms and standards affecting the concerned and other people. These remain unfulfilled, but do not die out altogether. Instead, they take the repressed mode in what is called the "unconscious" state of mind. One's pursuit of literary undertaking and other art forms provide a space and the repressed but powerful feelings access a kind of satisfaction. Following the mandate of Freud, psychoanalytic thinkers believe that artists, poets, novelists, dramatists, and other creative personalities use creativity as a tool of therapy for their neurotic tension. Of course, the satisfaction one's creativity provides is not of the usual nature; rather it proceeds through a number of mechanisms such as Condensation, Displacement, and Symbolism. Moreover, residual traces of earlier stages also make their presence felt in the unconscious. Any instance of the present stage may ignite the repressed, and the same constitute a fantasy of satisfaction. The main task of the psychoanalytic critic is to unfold the effect literary text produces on the readers keeping in view the latent determinants conditioning suppressed meanings. Indeed the role played out by a psychoanalytic critic is of much importance since the issues being harping upon relate to the mind of human beings, which does not seem so easy a space one could discern.

It is seen that psychoanalytic criticism came into prominence in the 1920s, and any trend making its presence felt in the period is more or less related to the World War I. With no exception to this, Freud noticed the devastation caused by the War and came out refreshed with realisation about the darker aspect of human psychology, and his thrust upon the death instinct present in every human being. At this juncture, Freud published many a good writing that included "On Narcissism", "Mourning and Melancholia", and also the series of lectures under the banner of psychoanalysis. In all this, he pointed out the instinctive appeal of human beings for which they stay undone, but subject to the role played out by the

given instinct. Psychoanalytic criticism owes a great deal to these formulations, especially those that unveil various facets of human mind. Though succeeding thinkers inculcated much elaboration and redefinition, basic concepts were not altered altogether. For instance, Freud's major postulations relating the three functional aspects of the mind namely the id, ego, and superego, along with other theories have exerted deep influence on the practitioners of the school. However, it is worth remembering that the emergence of structural and post structural theories gave a new boost to psychoanalytic criticism and also to Freudian studies. Be it in the Marxist, Feminist, Derridean, or Foucauldian parlance, basic concepts of Freud and a few of his close allies upon which psychoanalytic criticism stands are given a re-look; at times critique of the concepts is also a reality. Interestingly, historians often question the personal, scientific and philosophical credentials of psychoanalysis and its theoretical applicability to literary texts and other areas. These approaches, in fact, point out the influence of the distinctive school of study on the academics and associated concerned. Despite its inception decades back, psychoanalytic criticism as well as psychoanalysis has not gone into oblivion as time passes on.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 1: How would you relate Sigmund Freud to psychoanalytic criticism?

Q 2: What space does psychoanalytic criticism occupy in recent critical trends?

6.4 MAJOR TRENDS

Psychoanalytic criticism witnessed major trends in its critical domain. Indeed each of the trends is not completely different from the earlier one; rather they provide useful insight into proper understanding of the school. They share certain major ideas while at the same time point out their non-conformity and come up with distinctive viewpoints. All this has made study interesting and fruitful as well. Hence it is imperative that a few of the major trends including those enunciated by Sigmund Freud, Carl

Gustav Jung, and Jacques Lacan are given due focus and some sort of justification.

6.4.1 Classical Freudian Criticism

In psychoanalytic criticism, Sigmund Freud's concepts and views played out an effective role. It is in recognition of his pioneering contribution to the field of psychoanalysis that the school of psychoanalytic criticism introduces Freudian criticism as an inseparable part, which has made an invaluable contribution to many a good area. A neurologist by profession, Freud developed therapeutic technique to treat hysteria and neurosis. During research, he observed that mental illness, symptoms and even normal course of life are simply inexplicable because of frequent intervention from the 'unconscious mind'. However, the unconscious mind usually remains inaccessible, it is not absent from its impact upon the individuals. Even the patients suffering from neurotic disorder and hysteria are unquestionably subject to the powerful effect of the unconscious. Hence, Freud wanted the patients to say everything that comes to mind, and this helps to have access to the hidden motifs and inner happenings of the patients. This also warrants the study of dreams, jokes etc, since repressed feelings relating to sexuality and other potent instinctive appeals find their royal road to these developments. Consequently, a kind of symbolic satisfaction results in the concerned individual.

With his collaborators including Theodor Reik, Otto Rank, Ernest Jones, Wilhelm Stekel, among others, Freud made extensive study on the human mind and broadened the scope of psychoanalysis, which in succeeding times came of great help. Major theories like the Repression and the Unconscious, Infantile Sexuality, Oedipus Complex etc enunciated a new vista of learning about human psyche. In his epoch-making texts such as *Interpretation of Dreams, The Subtleties of a Faulty Action,* among many others, Freud discusses the key theories. For instance, his

in-depth analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* or Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in respect of Oedipal elements is still fresh with psychoanalytic critics. Freud's primary belief was that creative writings are the product of unconscious processes and a literary work is analogous to a daydream as in both there is the wish-fulfilment of the concerned individual. Moreover, Freud's major thrust upon the mental apparatus being conditioned by agencies namely the 'id', 'ego' and 'superego' also did exert immense influence upon the psychoanalytic critics.

6.4.2 Jungian Criticism

Carl Gustav Jung was another influential thinker whose ideas and concepts play a decent role in the domain of psychoanalytic criticism. It is true that Jung started his venture under the stewardship of Freud, but in later days his were the postulations especially those on depth-psychology accorded him a place unlike that of his master. Though a faithful ally to Freud particularly at the early stage, Jung had split from his master by 1913 waging protest against his insistence on the centrality of sex, suspicion of religious ideals, and authoritarian methods. Indeed Jungian criticism departs radically from psychoanalytic criticism on various fronts. Unlike psychoanalytic criticism, the Jungians gave emphasis on what is called the "collective unconscious" of human beings. As opposed to the individual unconscious, collective unconscious is seen as the repository of archetypes. The Jungians regard art not as neurosis; rather a matter of aesthetics and literary works are to be judged by methods appropriate to the given art form. Like the myths, great literature always inherits archetypes as inseparable entities, and this is what the Jungians adhere to in their critical pursuits. Another important figure in the Jungian thinking, Alfred Adler also saw human beings as social beings motivated by social needs and related aspirations. Northrop Frye, an influential thinker in the line opined that psychiatry hardly judges the aesthetic value of literature.

Going by all this, what comes to notice is that the Jungians extended the bounds of study engaging the larger concerns of collective life as well as social life.

6.4.3 Lacanian Criticism

Jacques Lacan's ideas and views revolutionised the clinical practice of psychoanalysis exerting major impact upon fields as diverse as literary criticism, film studies, feminist theory and philosophy. Indeed Lacan made linguistic reading of Freud saying that truth could be accessed only through language. The three "elementary registers" such as the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real are effective tools in developing perception of reality. Of these, the Symbolic is an important aspect since it is because of this order that the analysis no longer remains in the custody conditioned by the interaction between the two egos, i.e. that of the analyst and the analysed. It is in the Symbolic that Lacan's much touted term the "big Other" rests on while in the Imaginary that the "little other" has its stay. Influenced by Freud, Saussure, Roman Jakobson, and Hegel, Lacan also made extensive study on the idea of the unconscious, but not purely on the prescribed lines of Freud. Instead, he harnessed the larger concerns of society, particularly those of law, morality, religion and conscience. Using Saussure's linguistic acumen, structural anthropology and poststructural theories, Lacan dismantled the imaginary sense of completeness combined with de-cantering the subject, loss of unified psychic life and also the primacy of the signifier over the signified. Lacan's observations were so far-reaching that many of the succeeding thinkers such as the Marxist, Louis Althusser and the Feminist, Julia Kristeva came under his influence.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 3: Would you say Freudian and Jungian critical thoughts as identical? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 4: What relation did Jacques Lacan maintain to psychoanalytic theory? Illustrate your argument referring to his major theoretical postulations.

6.5 RECEPTION OF PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN LITERARY STUDIES

Psychoanalytic criticism has been an influential rendition in the field of literary criticism. Though the school came into effect in 1920s, it never goes into oblivion as time progresses and newer trends of study appear at the scene. Of course, succeeding thinkers' novel approach to the trend with an eye open to contemporary thinking makes it more appealing and functional as well. For instance, Jacques Lacan's approach to the theory in close resemblance to Saussure's linguistics, structural anthropology and poststructural theories points out the reception it gets among the critics. It is also the pointer towards the adaptability it inherits, indeed for better understanding of subject matter and other issues. Another important area of interest regarding widespread popularity of psychoanalytic criticism is its practitioners, who have added many a good, but significant aspects to the said theory. Instead of following Freud's observations in letter, they come out with distinctive ideas that have extended its bounds and scope.

As Freud observes, there is a close connection between literary work and human mind. Although he regards literary work as a means of wish-fulfilment, one cannot ignore the bond that exists in the creative mechanism. He believes that artists, poets, novelists, dramatists, and other creative genius use their creativity as a faithful means of therapy, and the release of their neurotic tension is intended. Of course, it is not simply the idea of releasing neurotic concerns; rather unfolding inner workings of the mind, which remain untouched keeping in view the prohibition of certain social norms and standards, is what is facilitated in psychoanalytic analysis. As such, some sort of radicalism always accompanies this distinctive approach, but such a conditioning comprises an interesting side because of the exposition of many a good truth related to various issues and subject matter. Freud's analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, and Shakespeare's

Hamlet to see their Oedipal elements is quite appealing since the obsessive relation between mother and son causes difficulties that are of different colouring and nature. Although social laws do not allow having interpretation of this forbidden truth, psychoanalysis deals with this and comes up with novel ideas and postulation. D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* also relates the troubled relationship between protagonist Paul Morel and his mother. It is because of his mother's obsessive and possessive instinct that he hardly develops relation with the women of his choice. This turns out very much complex since the concerned self is dissected between one's choice and the mother's obsession resulting in killing her by increasing the dose of morphine. The incident is fatal, but it releases Paul from the Oedipus complex. In Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, the life of Meursault is recounted with the lens of psychology. His psychological constraints and attendance at mother's funeral with no trace of shedding tears, which goes against traditional norms, constitute an interesting phase in the novel. Psychological variables in the characters of Arthur Miller's plays comprise an interesting study for scholars and practitioners in the field. As the principal character, Willie Loman is affected with regression of pleasure principle, the course of his life experiences drastic turns, and the tragic overtones rise up many fold. Even his son Happy's affairs with women combined with views and observations relating to female sex seem an offshoot of Oedipus complex. Walt Whitman's *The Sleepers* or some of the poems by W.H. Auden are seen to have been influenced by a large number of psychoanalytic theories.

In literary studies, psychoanalytic criticism seems to be a remarkable side that unveils interesting issues and themes relating to human mind. As it is known that human mind is a complex phenomenon that one can hardly come to its grasp, an approach like that of psychoanalytic criticism or literary pursuit goes a long way in giving some clue, though not entirely its original nature, about the mind. However, partial interpretation of the mind and its literary accomplishment are unquestionably an important segment in understanding concerned individuals. Of course, psychoanalytic criticism does not remain untouched at the hands of critics. It is seen that historians most often question Freud's personal and scientific integrity. Also, the so-

called philosophical credentials come under scanner. Such complaints fall short of posing damage to the stature of psychoanalytic criticism. That psychoanalytic criticism enunciates many a good positive but interesting aspects cannot be ruled out given the popularity it enjoys among academicians as well as its practitioners.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 5: How does psychoanalytic criticism affect literary studies? What are the positive sides embedded in psychoanalytic criticism?



6.6 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, it may be said that psychoanalytic criticism is one of the most widely used critical approaches to literary texts. Since its inception in the early 20th century, it has been a preferred zone for most of the scholars. The passage of time does not find it going obsolete; rather it continues to hold its sway, and this is what points out the adaptability the distinctive school sustains. If Freud's are the observations functioning as platform, succeeding thinkers' respective views and statements are no less significant in the direction. As such, the critical school gets enriched with the contribution being made by each of the successors. If Freud gives major thrust upon the working of the unconscious in his psychoanalytic analysis, Lacan in the later part of the 20th century introduces the symbolic order into psychoanalysis. Indeed his linguistic reading of Freud gives a new orientation to psychoanalytic theory. With such a rich amalgam of thinkers and their theoretical stance, many a good number of people have tried their hand in presenting various aspects to life and society. To substantiate this, one may refer to the texts in which the authors seem to have followed some of the influential facets to the complex human psyche.



6.7 FURTHER READING

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6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Sigmund Freud's concepts and theories played a pivotal role in psychoanalytic criticism… …it is true that the school came into prominence in the 1920s… …but it took recourse to Freudian formulation of the human mind… …many of his predecessors gave major thrust upon the "unconscious"… …Freud materialised a solid base and systematic study… …Freud impacted wide-ranging effect upon the critical scene… …logical interpretation of dream and repressed feelings… …even practitioners of other schools of criticism take recourse to Freudian concepts.

Ans to Q 2: Psychoanalytic criticism enjoys a decent space in recent critical discourses… … despite its inception in the early 20th century, it does not appear obsolete a development… …newer dimensions to the key concepts of psychoanalytic criticism come into effect… … emergence of critical schools such as structuralism and poststructuralism turned out a blessing in imbibing psychoanalytic terms… …thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault brought out many facts to psychoanalysis… …the feminists too maintain a close bond… …their stance proves the wider impact of psychoanalytic criticism and the analysis of human mind.

Ans to Q 3: Though related to psychoanalytic criticism, Freudian and Jungian schools of thought cannot be categorised as identical… …each of them has distinctive ways of perceiving human psyche and the art… …if Freud saw art being structured along sexual lines, Jung regarded it as an offshoot of archetypes… …instead of focusing on individual traits that Freud found of utmost importance, Jung considered "collective unconscious" as stepping stone… …also the Freudians take recourse to literary creations as wish-fulfilment of the author… …but the Jungians accept the nature of art as a matter of aesthetics…

Ans to Q 4: Jacques Lacan initiated linguistic reading of Freudian psychoanalysis… …his observation relates that people may access to truth only through language… …his frequently quoted saying, "The unconscious is structured like a language"… …draws recognition among the academics… …major formulations being the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real… … … …many schools of study got influenced… …even practitioners like Louis Althusser, Julia Kristeva, among many others, owe much to Lacan.

Ans to Q 5: Psychoanalytic criticism is an influential segment in literary studies… …with the core issues relating to human mind being of major thrust, psychoanalytic critics discern the inner workings of the mind of characters and also of the authors… …as some of them regard artistic works as wish-fulfilment of the authors, some others consider aesthetic values in line of unfolding the hidden activities of the mind… …provided the mind being a complex phenomenon, psychoanalytic approach to literary studies turns out interesting.



6.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the major changes psychoanalytic criticism effects in literary studies? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 2: Discuss the major thinkers and their contribution in the field of psychoanalytic criticism.

Q 3: How did Jung and Lacan differ from Freudian psychoanalysis despite their affiliation with the said school of thought?

Q 4: What are the major theories Sigmund Freud gave major thrust upon? How did they deconstruct earlier theories of study?

Q 5: How did psychoanalytic criticism impact literary studies? What space does psychoanalytic criticism occupy in the domain of literary criticism? Discuss with illustrations.

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UNIT 7: PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Introducing Phenomenological Criticism

7.4 Major Thinkers

7.5 Reception of Phenomenological Criticism

7.6 Let us Sum up

7.7 Further Reading

7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.9 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- write on the basic formulations relating to phenomenology
- identify the major thinkers impacting the course of Phenomenology and their contributions
- discuss the changes in ideas that came with each of the thinkers
- discuss the use of phenomenology in literary studies

7.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed Psychoanalytic criticism. In this unit, we shall deal with the idea of Phenomenological criticism, which appears to be an important segment in literary studies. It goes without saying that this school of criticism is unfailingly related to the Geneva School of critics whose theoretical and practical approach formulated a base succeeding practitioners owed a greater deal in their pursuit of literary studies. However, the consolidated phase the Geneva critics and other followers experienced did not come overnight since the preceding thinkers and their observations were indeed the real signposts in giving a decent shape. Of those, mention may be made of German thinker and philosopher Edmund Husserl who established phenomenology as a philosophical

perspective in analysing human consciousness and its effectiveness in getting into touch with different objects. In his way to phenomenology, what Husserl did was the utter rejection of traditional dualism centering strict separation between subject and object, a development that had been dominating the whole of Western philosophy since the time of Descartes.

Instead of focusing strong subject-object divide, Husserlian philosophy championed the cause of things and phenomena as experienced in one's consciousness. It is consciousness that matters a lot with utter rejection of pre-suppositions or other pre-conceived assumptions that are usually given topmost priority on most of the occasions. For Husserl, describing the "Lebenswelt", his most popular phrase meaning the "lived world" becomes very much crucial in phenomenological approach. Indeed experiencing the lived world independently of any prior affiliation comprises major space for most of its followers. With Husserl founding the basic premises of phenomenology, the trend was adopted by another German philosopher Martin Heidegger whose diversified use of phenomenological observations turned out effective in Hermeneutics or Existential Phenomenology to a great extent. However, it is not true that phenomenology was only confined to Germany; rather it found its noble postulation in most of the countries. For instance, adoption of phenomenology by French thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Sartre or Polish thinker Roman Ingarden points out the far-reaching impact the distinctive branch of study exerts across the nations.

7.3 INTRODUCING PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITICISM

As phenomenology developed with the tag of heterogeneity, various pertinent issues including inter-subjectivity, embodiment, sociality, language, historicity, and interpretation come under its purview, and they have acquired a new dimension in their applicability. If Husserl's transcendental phenomenology heralded a new temperament, it is Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology or Merleau Ponty's existential phenomenology that facilitated the introduction of diversified themes and issues. This is a pointer towards the multi-faceted aspects phenomenology

inherits and this phenomenon is of much appeal for the academics and other scholars. Of course, its application to literary studies bears special relevance since it takes both the author and reader into account particularly in respect of their consciousness and its role in formulating the text and discerning the intended meaning as embedded. Indeed the approach warrants "active" participation of the author and reader and the act strives to concretize the schematic aspect in the text. With the Polish theorist Roman Ingarden's adaptation of phenomenological concepts in his approach to the analysis of literature, phenomenological criticism hoisted itself as a preferred zone for most of the practitioners. Ingarden's formulations were further developed by another influential thinker, Wolfgang Iser whose observations on the idea of superior texts having the possibility of making us re-think about preconceptions that are usually assigned to reading practice has done a commendable job in accelerating the pace of the movement. Of course, the Geneva school of critics imparted the consolidated base to the critical school with such a dignity that was simply incredible. Indeed succeeding critical pursuits, especially the Reader Response criticism owed a greater deal to phenomenology and its basic formulations.

Phenomenological criticism relates the method of analyzing a text without presuppositions about ontology or epistemology. Sidelining presuppositions, inferences and judgments, a phenomenologist gives major thrust upon consciousness and its active role in framing meaning once objects appear to it. Keeping this major formulation in mind, the Geneva School of critics approached literary texts as a fictional world created out of the lived world of the author and their engagement of the author's consciousness is a defining trait. Of course, phenomenological criticism is not to be understood as similar to other critical schools like Formalism or New Criticism that are very much objective in their approach to literature. However, a twentieth century development, phenomenological criticism maintains some sort of affinity with the romantic Expressive Criticism, which takes a literary work as a revelation of its author's personality. It is awareness of the personality as revealed in the text that conditions the value of literature.

With the Geneva School of critics, phenomenological criticism achieved an orientation that was remarkable because it opened up a novel approach to studying literature and its values. Distinguished scholars such as Marcel Raymond, Albert Beguin, Jean Pierre Richard, Jean Rousset, Georges Poulet, and J. Hillis Miller tried their hand in giving a shape to this school of criticism. However, it is to be mentioned that the phenomenological approach made by the Geneva critics was not completely new since people like Hans Georg Gadamer and other notable practitioners recognised understanding language as a conscious activity, something that is very much connected with phenomenological perception. In the 1930s, Roman Ingarden, a Polish theorist par excellence, made adaptation of phenomenological concepts in understanding and responding a literary text. For Ingarden, a literary work consists of the intentional acts of consciousness, and the intentional acts are directed towards an object. It is through active reading on the part of the reader that the potential segments embedded in the text come to one's purview. Focus on active reading turns out operational because it addresses the indeterminate aspects of the text as well. As such, the concretisation of the schematic text easily finds its way to reading practice. Ingarden's formulations were further developed by Wolfgang Iser, a German theorist making his presence felt in the later part of the twentieth century. Iser observes that superior texts compel the readers to re-think about pre-conceptions that are usually assigned to reading practice. Indeed one's reading practice performs an important role in connection with filling up gaps embedded in the text. Iser's formulations played a major role in the development of Reader Response criticism that came into prominence in the second half of the twentieth century.

Widely known as "critics of consciousness", the Geneva School of critics treated a literary text as an embodiment of the author's expression of consciousness, a proposition phenomenology accords the topmost priority. Keeping this in mind in the analysis of literary texts, the Geneva critics imbibed many a good, but interesting concept of Husserl, Heidegger, and other phenomenologists in their critical domain. In their view, the "cogito" of the author makes its presence felt throughout the text, and the contents

correlate the consciousness in a befitting manner. Various events and objects, characters, imagery, and the distinctive style in writing turn out faithful renditions in which the author's consciousness projects itself, and it is through reading that the projection inherits the desired meaning. One of the major concerns for phenomenological critic is to place together various passages of a single work and, through proper analysis, find out the unity of the creative mind. The logic behind putting together various passages within the single text is that they provide us with myriad problems, difficulties, attitudes, and obsessions and these are the sides related to human beings and their psychological propositions. It deserves mention that the criticism of consciousness that has been an inseparable part of phenomenology reached its height of circulation in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the trend fell upon critical days in succeeding periods with the advent of developments like cultural semiotics, Poststructuralism and Deconstruction. Although they are opposed to phenomenological postulations, indirectly they help sustain some of the key concepts, albeit in contestatory parlance. Of course, other critical modes such as Reader-Response criticism and Reception Aesthetics follow a few vital developments connected with phenomenological approach to literary texts.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 1: What are the basic formulations of Phenomenological criticism? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 2: How would you connect the Geneva School of critics to Phenomenological criticism?

7.4 MAJOR THINKERS

The following are the major thinkers of Phenomenological criticism

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)

A German philosopher and well-known mathematician, was a pioneer of the school of phenomenology giving emphasis upon subject position to

which objects appear with the whole set of knowledge and information. In strict opposition to studying the external world, Husserl's was the stance championing subjectivity and human consciousness as of utmost significance. The bracketing of the external world is what Husserl calls "phenomenological reduction", which constitutes a major space in phenomenology. Though an empiricist at the early stage nurturing great admiration for the writings of J. S. Mill, Husserl, interestingly, critiqued the formulations of empiricism relating the limits set by transcendental consciousness. In his unique fashion, Husserl went back to the potent questions that had interested thinkers including Descartes. For Husserl, there is a complex series of concepts engaged in the perception of phenomena, and this is something that rules out the possibility of having objectively verifying knowledge. Hence, he rejected the representational parlance of reality pointing out the lacuna early empiricists including Locke, Berkley, and Hume materialised placing too many pre-suppositions upon the brunt of experience. In his critique of historicism and psychologism, Husserl circulated the logic of intentionality as a defining trait in one's approach to various events or phenomena. Be it the idea of intentionality or subjectivity, Husserl's position exerted wide-ranging influence on the Geneva School of criticism, Reception theories of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, and perhaps most significantly on Martin Heidegger.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

Heidegger was another influential practitioner of phenomenology starting his career as student of Husserl. However, Heidegger did not continue as a faithful follower to Husserlian philosophy in letter and spirit wholeheartedly. With his publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger challenged Husserl's phenomenological ideals primarily on the basis of their being descriptive percolation. In his outright rejection of human beings as mere spectators of objects, Heidegger observes that there is no division between subject and object. What he took for granted was the acknowledgement of existence as being in the world. Phenomenological reduction and transcendental ego that comprised an important aspect in

Husserl's philosophy experienced strong opposition from Heidegger. Challenging Cartesian dualism, Heidegger gave topmost priority to the concept of being, being in the world, and encounter with various entities in the world, being with spatiality and temporality, among many other vital issues. In showing being as an inseparable entity, Heidegger introduced the significant concept of "Dasein" that refers to being there, indeed being in the world. The phenomenon of being in the world is unitary which must be seen as a whole. In fact, Heidegger presents the world in two contexts—one of the common, while the other of the subjective experience. It is in connection between the two that the world hood of the world makes its presence felt.

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

Jean Paul Sartre was an influential French thinker giving major thrust upon existentialism as an important segment in the life of human beings, which achieved a new orientation in the twentieth century. His deep interest in the lectures delivered by Husserl at the Sorbonne and close reading of the works of Heidegger formulated a solid base for his philosophical speculations. Of many a good of his thought-provoking observations, Sartre's prompt response to one's consciousness deserves special mention, and this perhaps turns out elemental to his connection with phenomenology. For Sartre, consciousness is an activity to be distinguished from what it intends. Indeed consciousness is free to do anything, and this distinctive characteristic provides myriad knowledge and information with the concerned individuals. However, this noble venture becomes much effective as it is directed at the world. In addition, imagining the world other than what it is comprises another important aspect to Sartre's philosophical stance. Though consciousness is an inseparable entity in an individual, it is not identical with the self. As the self is an ongoing project in the world, consciousness is, as mentioned earlier, an activity directed at the world. With his usual radical position, Sartre announced that humans are "condemned to be free". Be it in his famous lecture entitled "Existentialism is a Humanism" or his frequently referred text *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre showcased some of his influential views that proved themselves unique

too. For instance, he distances himself from Husserlian philosophy in *Being and Nothingness*, despite being immensely influenced by Husserl himself in his formative years.

Merleau Ponty (1908-61)

Merleau Ponty was a French philosopher who championed both existentialism and phenomenology in his observations. Widely known for his works on ontology, embodiment and perception, Ponty's acumen was no less significant in the fields of art, history, nature, language and politics. Influenced by thinkers like Henri Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, Max Scheler, and Sartre, Ponty extended the bounds of phenomenology seeking to integrate the discipline with psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, Marxism and Saussurian linguistics. Given his wide-ranging studies, later poststructuralist icons such as Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Derrida saw Ponty as an effective influence on their stance. What Ponty observed were the problems of perception and also those of embodiment for the clarification of relation between the mind and body. His prime objective was to identify an alternative to intellectualism or idealism on one hand, and empiricism or realism on the other by pointing out their pre-suppositions about the world. In his eye, intellectualist accounts inspired by Kantian philosophy do not hold much water since they could hardly deliver the essence of things and issues. To describe the phenomenology of perception, one's approach to traditional empiricism and rationalism is faulty that fails considerably to do the needful in the said category.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95)

Levinas is at times called the Heidegger of the French language. Though the observation is too simplistic since both the thinkers differ from each other ontologically, it is a pointer towards the position and dignity Levinas enjoyed in the field of philosophy and other modes of serious study. In fact, the style of writing Heidegger and Levinas shared has gone a long way in placing them at the level of close connection. Levinas turned out very much influential in phenomenology since he gave a radically ethical orientation to it, something that had been missing with the death of the German philosopher, Max Ferdinand Scheler. As such, his basic concern was with

an ethical "face-to-face" relation with the Other. Reiterating the influence of the Bible upon him, Levinas observed that subjectivity is not for itself; rather for the other. Hence, it warrants that one should have responsibility for the other as well. For Levinas, ethics is not a system of values; it is based on man's relationship to the infinite Being. Indeed his publication of *Totality and Infinity* makes an in-depth study of the idea of the Being and the complex issues involved in it. Besides, his untiring effort at the separation between ontology and metaphysics by purging the former off its privileged position is another significant rendition in his philosophical enquiry. It is to be noted that Levinas' insightful position did not come overnight since the impact created by the Hebrew Bible, Russian classics including those of Pushkin, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, and the lectures by Husserl and Heidegger comprised an incredible space in his formative phase.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 3: How would you analyze the phenomenological observations made by Husserl and Heidegger? Do you find the two thinkers identical in their philosophical pursuits?

Q 4: What was the approach made by succeeding practitioners of phenomenology? Give a reasoned answer.

7.5 RECEPTION OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITICISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN LITERARY STUDIES

Phenomenological criticism has been widely adopted in studying literature and culture as well. Like most other critical schools, it opened up new vistas of learning and understanding various themes and issues as they come upon one's purview. As the concept of the life-world (Lebenswelt) is one of the core sides to phenomenology, and this was what Husserl sought beyond the layers of idealisation, literary texts always strive to remain within its bounds. Indeed different facets to the so-called life-world find their easy access to literature, and this interesting side characterises the well-

deserving search of the phenomenologists in their approach. In addition to the life-world, questions of space and place have always been at the heart of phenomenological enquiry. Much of literary creations and their studies have taken to this particular aspect and the phenomenological postulations of the said areas get a deserving treatment. When Merleau Ponty observes that "phenomenology can be practised and identified as a manner of thinking", he points out the subjective experience of the world, which is very much similar to what one accumulates in a given literary text. For postulation of such an important aspect, phenomenological criticism occupies a distinctive position in the critical circle.

Phenomenological critics view literature quite diversely, and the great variety in their distinctive mode inculcates the extended bounds of the school. As such, aspects of application, aesthetic reflection, existential themes and problems, among many others, draw the attention of the critics of this school. Of these, the problems of one's existence as accomplished in the text are of immense interest for the critics. Gosetti-Ferencei's monograph published in 2007 may be conveniently cited in connection with presenting existential problems human beings face in society. There are scores of literary creations in which phenomenological viewpoints may be applied, and such a conditioning establishes the relevance of the distinctive mode. Cormac McCarthy's award-winning novel *The Road* has been studied from the perspective of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy. Going by the ethical dimension to the Other, Levinas' formulation is well executed in the said text. Following his philosophy, one comes up with the realisation that one is able to explore ethical values against the backdrop of violence and seek the depth of evil from the vantage point of ethical philosophy. The ethical dimension to phenomenology that had been a major thrust in Levinas' philosophical enquiry finds its prompt accomplishment in the said novel by McCarthy.

Given the interesting dimension materialised by phenomenological criticism, especially the pro-active role-played out by one's consciousness in accumulating knowledge for the concerned; the critical circle seemed very much receptive to the development. Apart from the practitioners

imbibing phenomenological concepts in their pursuits of learning, other critical developments such as the Reader Response criticism and Reception theories have approached phenomenology. This points out the relevance of the school of thought in the later part of the twentieth century as well. With a focus on the experience of the reader, phenomenology becomes a preferred mode for the critics concerned with studying the process of reading required in a given text. Wolfgang Iser's major focus on the importance of reading process owed much to the developments conditioned by phenomenology. Of course, phenomenological criticism failed to hold its soil once the arrival of cultural semiotics, poststructuralist and postmodernist theories was pronounced. Their critique of phenomenology was based on its being adaptive to the unified subjectivity coupled with utter ignorance of the social and ideological dimensions of various issues. Fortunately, recent works particularly those penned down by influential thinkers such as Michel de Certeau and Paul Carter have gone a long way in imparting a new orientation to the study of phenomenology and its application.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 5: What is your understanding about the use of phenomenological criticism in studies of literature?



7.6 LET US SUM UP

We have learnt from this unit that Phenomenological criticism occupies a distinctive space in the domain of literary criticism, which has been given due impetus with the passage of time. Thanks to the Geneva School of critics for their renewed interest in analyzing literary texts from the vantage point of phenomenological concepts and observations, and this has turned out handy in giving a new orientation to the school of thought. With their major thrust upon the works of literature as a fictional world engaging the author's consciousness, the Geneva critics directed their

attention to many a good, but effective development enunciated by Husserl, Heidegger and a few other phenomenologists. As the text, an engagement with the unique mode of consciousness, is all-important for a phenomenologist in his or her pursuit of literature and culture, some might assume the trend being in close proximity to Formalism and New Criticism. However, such a proposition is too simplistic because both the text-oriented schools of criticism are objective in spirit while phenomenological criticism is very much subjective. Defying presuppositions, inferences and judgments, phenomenological criticism gives priority to the "cogito" of the individual author and the way it correlates with different aspects in the text. Despite such an interesting engagement, phenomenological criticism could not continue its hold with the arrival of cultural semiotics, poststructuralism, and postmodern theories. Their point of dissent at phenomenological criticism is its preference for a unified subjectivity and its apparent bracketing of the social and ideological dimensions related to various issues. Of course, it is good to see the trend being continued under the banner of Reader Response criticism and Reception Theory. Moreover, groundbreaking works that have come into effect in recent times equally exert much impact on giving a new tempo to phenomenological criticism. In this connection, mention may be made of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay,* among others.



7.7 FURTHER READING

Bassie, Ashley. (2012). *Expressionism*. New York: Parkstone International. e-Book.

Chanter, Tina. (1995). "Levinas and the Question of the Other." *Ethics of Eros.* New York: Routledge.

Dahl, Espen. (2010). *Phenomenology and the Holy: Religious Experience after Husserl.* London: SCM Press.

Harland, Richard. (1999). *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes- An Introductory History.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Parsons, Charles. (2012). *From Kant to Husserl: Selected issues.* Cambridge MA- Harvard University of Press.

Zahavi, D. (2005). *Subjectivity and Selfhood.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Phenomenological criticism inspects a text with no consideration into pre-suppositions… …ontological or epistemological inferences and judgments are sidelined… … the consciousness of the author matters a lot… …as phenomenological criticism is subjective in its postulation, it stands in opposition to other contemporary critical modes such as Formalism and New Criticism which are very much objective in their approach… … Phenomenological criticism traces resemblance to the nineteenth century critical school, Expressive Criticism… …as the author's consciousness turns out effective in the text, that of the reader is no less significant.

Ans to Q 2: The Geneva School of critics that came into prominence in the 1950s and 1960s… …Phenomenological criticism achieved a consolidated position… …owing much to Russian Formalism and Phenomenology, the critics of the school approached works of literature as faithful renditions of the author's consciousness in relation to the lived world… … the Geneva critics incorporated a number of concepts and viewpoints formulated by phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, and a few others… …the phenomenological approach to literature made by the Geneva critics was not completely new since theorists like Hans Georg Gadamer and Roman Ingarden capitalised some of the basic tenets of the school of philosophy.

Ans to Q 3: They are two most influential thinkers and practitioners of Phenomenology in the early part of the 20th century… …Husserl's preferred "phenomenological reduction", an idea of transcendental consciousness setting limits to all possible knowledge etc. gave a deserving orientation to Phenomenology… …Heidegger, a disciple of

Husserl had his own way of approaching phenomenology… ...his rejection of strict subject-object divide, dissent at the reduction theory of Husserl placed Heidegger at an advantageous position as a phenomenologist… …he introduced the concept of "Dasein" referring to being there, being in the world is of utmost significance.

Ans to Q 4: Succeeding thinkers made invaluable contribution to phenomenology… …although their approach considerably varied from one another, what turned out good was the extension of scope and area within the discipline… …when Husserl championed the place of consciousness because of its active role in providing knowledge, Sartre regarded it as an activity free to do anything in the world… …he gave so much focus on the independent nature of consciousness that he differentiated it from intentional acts as well… …another successor Maurice Ponty's outright rejection of traditional empiricism and rationalism combined with the critique of Kantian philosophy came out handy in understanding the problems of the phenomenology of perception… …Emmanuel Levinas' ethical orientation formed an interesting side to phenomenology.

Ans to Q 5: Phenomenological criticism bears special relevance in studying literary texts… …with the Geneva critics, the distinctive mode of criticism attained a consolidated base… …be it the concept of the life-world or consciousness on the part of the author or philosophical enquiry into place and space, phenomenology accords the top most priority, and literary creations are seen to have been within the limits of these areas… … though phenomenological criticism is subject to criticism with the advent of cultural semiotics, poststructuralist and postmodernist theories, its reception has not dried out completely… … various schools including the Reader Response criticism and Reception theories take to phenomenological concepts and viewpoints in a befitting manner.



7.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How would you situate phenomenological criticism in the annals of literary criticism? What is the novelty of expression the critical school brought into effect?

Q 2: Discuss the major thinkers who came out influential in facilitating a solid base of phenomenology. What are the new ideas the thinkers initiated in their approach to phenomenology?

Q 3: Do you find Husserl and Heidegger following the same course of ideas in their approach to phenomenology? What are the points of similarities and differences the prominent thinkers sustained?

Q 4: What is the close bond you observe between phenomenology and existentialism? Discuss in light of formulations enunciated by Sartre and a few others associated with the field.

Q 5: Elucidate the concept of the "Other" in phenomenological parlance. To what extent does the concept affect the practitioners of phenomenology?

Q 6: What are the implications phenomenological criticism conditions in literary studies?

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UNIT 8: READER RESPONSE THEORY

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Introducing Reader Response Theory

8.3.1 Major Theorists

8.3.2 Important Concepts

8.4 Reception of Reader Response Theory

8.5 Let us Sum up

8.6 Further Reading

8.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.8 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the important points in Hermeneutics
- trace the growth and development of Reader Response Theory
- discuss Reader Response Theory as an important trend in Literary Theory
- make a list of the major theorists of Reader Response who contributed immensely to the field of theory
- assess the reception of Reader Response in subsequent critical periods

8.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the third unit of the Block. This unit will introduce us to the theoretical approach commonly known as Reader Response that gained importance in around 1980s. At the centre of Reader Response Theory are the responses of readers to a text over a given period of time. As literary theory, Reader Response focuses on the reader (or “audience”) and their experience of a literary work, in contrast to other schools and theories that focus attention primarily on the author or the contents or the form of the

work. Modern reader-response criticism began in the 1960s and 70s, particularly in the US and Germany, in works of Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, Roland Barthes, and others. We shall note that Reader-response theory recognises the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. Reader-response criticism argues that literature should be viewed as a performing art in which each reader creates his or her own, possibly unique, text-related performance. It stands in total opposition to the theories of Formalism and the New Criticism, in which the reader's role in re-creating literary works is ignored. New Criticism had emphasised that only that which is within a text is part of the meaning of a text. No appeal to the authority or intention of the author, nor to the psychology of the reader, was allowed in the discussions of orthodox New Critics. By the time we finish reading this unit, we should be in a position to discuss Reader Response in terms of its different important aspects and the different theorists.

8.3 INTRODUCING READER RESPONSE THEORY

Reader Response Studies begin with the assertion that the study of literature cannot overlook the role of the reader. This kind of study has a long history. Is origin can be traced in Plato's concerns regarding poetry in his famous *Republic*, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, and in the 18th century discourse on beauty and the sublime. However, contemporary Reader Response studies distinguish itself from this tradition, as it concentrates more on the text and the reader. It can be assumed that modern Reader Response theory begins with Husserlian **Phenomenology**, continues through what you already know as the "linguistic turn" and finally became entangled with Post structuralism, Marxism, and New Historicism.

In his book *Cartesian Meditations* (1929), Edmund Husserl characterised phenomenology as a "criticism of consciousness" or a study of "transcendental self experience". By this, Husserl wanted to mean that it studied the nature, the acts, and the structures of a "transcendental" or constituting consciousness. One notable omission in Husserl's extensive

writings was an account of aesthetics in general and of the act of reading in particular. **Roman Ingarden**, the Polish phenomenologist, found a solution to this omission in his *The Literary Work of Art*. What interested him about the literary work was the way in which it opened up a previously neglected dimension of Husserlian thought.

Wolfgang Iser, one of the founding members of the **Constance School** of Reader Response criticism, greatly expanded on the work of Roman Ingarden. Despite his originality, Iser argues, Ingarden remained tied to a classical aesthetics, which privileged and sought out the organic unity of the text. He further stated that the 'indeterminacy' of the text is irreducible. He thus shifts our attention to the "disjunctions" which make the indeterminacy of the text unavoidable. Iser describes two kinds of indeterminacy: "blanks" (or "gaps") and "negations." Blanks and negations disrupt the normal flow of reading and prompt the reader to make connections, fill in the gaps, or resolve the contradictions. Crucially, the imaginative filling of gaps does not bring us closer to an ideal unity of the work. Rather it opens up further gaps. The structure of indeterminacy changes with each subsequent reading. According to Iser, reading always takes place in a temporal horizon in which the reader makes connections between what has happened, what could happen, and what is happening at the moment. The text for Iser is a set of rules; the reader is a power of synthesis. It is a space of play between text and reader in which the two meet up, interact, and mutually create the work as an effect. The second major figure of the Constance School, **Hans Robert Jauss** too focuses on the role of readers in the constitution of the literary work, but, almost exclusively, he emphasised the effect that historically and sometimes politically determined conventions of reading have on our interpretations of a given text. These conventions, which can be generic, stylistic, and even thematic, form what Jauss calls a "horizon of expectations." He argues that it is the shifting nature of this horizon that should be the proper object of literary studies.

Jean Starobinski, Marcel Raymond, Albert Beguin, Jean-Pierre Richard, and Georges Poulet, among others, make up the second major

school of reader-response theory, the "Geneva School." They shared a common concern to continue the Husserlian project of a criticism of consciousness – a description of the field of transcendental experience – but unlike the members of the Constance School, they tended to distance themselves sharply from the Husserlian concepts and methodologies, and in some cases, even rejected outright the designation "Husserlian." Poulet was one of the more prominent members of the Geneva School. In his famous essay "Phenomenology of Reading," Poulet suggested that the unread text was no different from any other material object. If a book is different from other objects, however, it is because the moment we pick it up and begin reading, the book as object disappears and we become immersed in another world of words, images, and ideas. What really fascinates Poulet is that once we enter this world of images and ideas we cannot say that the ideas we think are ours.

You will note that the appearance of Reader Response Theory in England and the United States differs from the continental versions of the Constance and Geneva Schools in two important ways. **First**, in its early days, it was developed in relation to new developments in psychology, not the radicalisation of Husserlian Phenomenology. Later in the century, Norman Holland transformed Freudian psychology into a literary theory, arguing that the meaning of a text is produced in the reader's unconscious compensations for the ways in which that text challenges their sense of identity or their "identity theme." **The second way** in which Reader Response criticism differed in England and America was that the critical orthodoxy it attempted to overturn was not a canonical historicism as in France and Germany, but the opposite: new criticism's rejection of historical and biographical approaches in favour of the formal unity of the text. I. A. Richards's impressive blend of psychology, linguistics, and ethics would have seemed to have got a reader-based theory of literature off to a good start.

LET US KNOW



Phenomenology:

From our reading of Unit 1 of this Block, we have learnt that Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness. As a discipline, it is distinct from but related to other key disciplines in philosophy such as—ontology, epistemology, logic, and ethics. Phenomenology in the early 20th century can be traced in the works of the philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau Ponty and others. Phenomenological issues of intentionality, consciousness, and first-person perspective have been prominent in recent philosophy of mind.

Contemporary critical theory, following the works of the various Reader Response Theorists, offers a rich panoply of types of readers—**ideal readers**, **super readers**, **implied readers**, **virtual readers**, **real readers**, **historical readers**, **resisting readers**, **critical readers**, and so on. In reading a novel, one can sometimes extrapolate from it an **implied reader**, a figure whom the text seems to be addressing and who occasionally functions as a character in the work (for example, the characters to whom Marlow tells his story in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness).* An **implied reader** differs both from a **virtual reader**, to whom the text is vaguely addressed by the author, and from a **historical reader,** who actually reads the text at the time of its publication. The hypothetical perfect decoder of the work, who knows everything necessary to make sense of it, is the **ideal reader**; but the most original and innovative texts require a **superreader**, a special reader endowed not only with extensive linguistic and literary knowledge but also with superior aesthetic sensibility. Both the **critical** and the **resisting** reader, situated in definite historical moments and possessing strong values and interests, find themselves opposing and interrogating texts (imagine an average American today reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf),* **Real readers** are people whose actual responses to novels, plays, poems, and other texts have been recorded by theorists and, in some cases, analysed for their individual styles and for the personal psychological quirks

that they reveal. Theories of meaning accompany these accounts of various readers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which are the two major Schools of Reader Response Theory? Who are the theorists associated with these Schools?

Q 2: What are the different types of readers one finds in Reader Response Theory?

8.3.1 Major Theorists

In the previous section, you are introduced to the important theorists of Reader Response criticism. In this section, you will get to read about them in some detail.

Roman Ingarden (1893-1970)

Ingarden was a Polish phenomenologist, ontologist and aesthetician. His aesthetic theories were influenced by his teacher Edmund Husserl. Ingarden focussed less on the basic structures of consciousness than on the ontology of objects, their essential structure and status. His complex studies of the **ontology** of the literary work of art, offer a critical philosophical analysis of its "strata" and structures. His main idea was to find out the object of literary study: how it is "given to consciousness" and what kinds of knowledge we can expect of aesthetic experience. His primary philosophical concern was with the realism/idealism problem and he saw in aesthetics, in the category of the work of art.

Ingarden summarises his basic ideas in his Introduction to *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*. Every literary work, he stated, is a multilayered formation composed of four heterogeneous "strata" which are like the following:

(a) "word sounds" and phonetic formations of a higher order, for example, rhythms, alliteration, the melody of sentences, and so on;

(b) "meaning units" ranging from the meaning of individual words to that of sentences and whole paragraphs;

(c) "schematised aspects" through which the objects of the work are presented (e.g., visual or auditory or psychological facets).

(d) the stratum of "represented entities" (the "state of affairs," as he called them – the objects, events, and other elements forming the work's characters, plot, setting, and so on).

Ingarden addressed many aspects of reading and understanding works of art, which typically remain unconscious. He provided many avenues for literary critics to explore. His analysis of 'literary time' and of the temporal sequentiality of the written text has enabled analyses of how reading is directed by, but also creates, the work. Similarly, the ways individual reading needs to overcome the indeterminacies of the text explains the plurality of "interpretations" of a work. Ingarden has been a major attraction for the critics who proclaim self conscious fictionality in a text.

Stanley Fish (1938-)

Stanley Eugene Fish is an American literary theorist. He is a major figure associated also with Postmodernism. He is also viewed as being a major influence in the rise and development of Reader Response Criticism. Educated at the University of Pennsylvania and Yale University, he taught English for many years at Johns Hopkins University. His early work was on medieval literature and on the poet John Skelton in particular. His second book *Surprised by Sin* (1967) argued that the "center of reference" of Paradise Lost was not Adam or Satan, but, rather, the reader of the poem, and that the purpose of the work was to "educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man" by recreating in the "mind of the reader the drama of the Fall, to make him Fall again, exactly as Adam did and with Adam's troubled clarity". This argument, inspired by theorists like Wolfgang Iser and Roman Ingarden, was the basis for a new school of criticism in the US, often referred to as Reader Response because it focused on the effects that a literary text renders on readers.

Fish went on to develop what he called **Affective Stylistics,** a way of thinking about interpretation that lent more weight to the way readers construct meaning in texts. Affective Stylistics, a decisive move away from Formalism and the New Critical assumption that the text was an autonomous object, is a way of thinking about texts "without the assumption that the text and reader can be distinguished from one another and that they will hold still". In his remarkable essay, "Is there a text in this class?" Fish argues that the literary text in fact does not exist until it is read. A poem is just some markings on a page until readers activate it and lend it meaning. Communities of readers learn competencies that enable them to ascribe meaning to particular words or images in a text.

Fish also argues that critics as well as readers are part of, and indeed shaped by, **Interpretative Communities—a concept** that has some affinity to what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls "language games." These Interpretive Communities also determine what are "acceptable" and "unacceptable" interpretations. He believes that values such as truth and justice are the products of interpretive communities rather than being trans-historical or universal. As he put it in his essay "Interpreting the Variorum," "the choice is never between objectivity and interpretation but between an interpretation that is unacknowledged as such and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself."

Wolfgang Iser (1926–2007)

Wolfgang Iser is a German literary theorist and critic. He became influential in the English-speaking world in the 1970s when Reader Response criticism emerged as an alternative to New Criticism. He later wrote extensively about creativity and about literature from a philosophical anthropological perspective. In 1981, Stanley Fish pointed out that Iser's "The Implied Reader and The Act of Reading", were widely studied in graduate courses on literary theory during the 1980s. Like some other English and European literary intellectuals who lived through World War II, Iser eschewed

politics and history as determining frames for understanding literature and literature's place in culture. That choice was in itself a political act, since it put him at odds with Marxist literary theory, which was important throughout Europe in the post war era. He argued that literature provides evidence and an arena for the exercise of human plasticity, a self-transforming capacity within us that we experience when we read literary works.

Iser was influenced by the **Hermeneutics** of Hans-Georg Gadamer, with whom he studied, but his influential writings concerning the reading process draw significantly on the interpretation of Roman Ingarden who instead borrowed his ideas from Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology. Iser's investigation of reading does not concern subjective reactions, because phenomenology focuses on mental acts as processes that occur generally, not on the level of personal responses.

His inaugural lecture at Konstanz in 1969, "Indeterminacy and the reader's response in prose fiction," was soon presented at the English Institutes in the US, and published in *Aspects of Narrative*, edited by J. Hillis Miller. Iser's claim that "indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation" provides the key to his books that appeared in English in the 1970s. The chapters of his famous book *The Implied Reader* survey widely across prose narrative in English from Bunyan to Scott, and Thackeray to modernist fiction. The chapters on Joyce were particularly influential, suggesting that Iser's theory of reading, with its emphasis on gaps that the reader fills, is well suited for interpreting modernist narrative, which is more dissonant, fragmented, and experimental than realistic writing. The last chapter of the book in its English version, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," moves beyond the previous essay toward the theoretical model of *The Act of Reading.* Here, he distinguishes his approach from the literary phenomenology of Georges Poulet, who understood reading as the author taking over the reader's consciousness.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Mention the important concepts in Roman Ingarden?

Q 4: Mention the important concepts popularised by Stanley Fish.

Q 5: Discuss Wofgang Iser as a Reader Response critic.

8.3.2 Important Concepts

In the previous section, we are already introduced to these concepts. The following is an attempt to discuss them more specifically.

Implied Reader and Implied Author:

The concepts "implied author" and "implied reader" were introduced into literary criticism by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). He set out to examine what he calls "the technique of non-didactic fiction, viewed as the art of communicating with readers". This concern for the reader led Booth to re evaluate the conventions associated with authorship and reading; specifically, to identify the authors and readers implied by the reading process. The implied author and implied reader are figures imagined or "inferable" by the reader or critic based on formal and rhetorical elements of the text.

The idea of the **implied reader** was systematically theorised by Wolfgang Iser who relied less on a separate category of reader on the idea of a reader defined by the very structure of reading itself. However, the concept of the implied reader, that has enjoyed considerable theoretical attention, occupies a structurally analogous position to the **implied author**, by functioning as a mediating presence between a narratee or listener in a story and the real, individual reader of a text. In the narratological conception of the implied reader, which complements Booth's implied author, the emphasis is laid on the image of the reader 'implied' or 'intended' by the text itself. The implied reader is thus distinguished from an

audience, reader, or narratee that exists within the narrative. This definition of the implied reader is closely related and sometimes indistinguishable from other narratological concepts, such as Michael Riffaterre's "superreader," Jonathan Culler's "ideal reader," and Umberto Eco's "model reader," that seek to describe how texts assume, demand, and imply readers equipped with specific linguistic competencies, kinds of knowledge, and experience. The implied reader, Iser intends to state, incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualisation of this potential through the reading process.

Along with early Reader Response theorists like Stanley Fish, Iser helped to redefine the nature of the reader's engagement with texts and textuality. The ambivalence and indeterminacy so often attributed by the Poststructuralists to the text could now be regarded as an essential component of the reading process. In *The Act of Reading* (1978), in which Iser developed further the role of the reader that he had first outlined in *The Implied Reader* (1974), the emphasis falls less on the nature of the reader implied in the reading practice than on the nature of the reader's aesthetic response while reading. Iser's implied reader exists in a less determined relationship to the text and stresses instead the cognitive act of reading. For Iser, the implied reader exists in the mind of the reader and is formed in the dynamic point of contact between the singularity of the individual act of reading and the formal indeterminacies of the text. In this sense, the conception of the implied reader is an important attempt to produce a theory that accounts for both the structuring effect of reading and the autonomy and specificity of the individual reader's response.

Interpretive Community:

It is a concept developed by Stanley Fish. Fish proposes that a reader's interpretation of a text is governed by the interpretive community or communities that govern the cultural assumptions about how one reads, meaning, interpretation, value and so on. For

Fish, one is never outside one's interpretive community because one cannot define the limits of any presumed community as such; moreover, the impossibility of assigning limits to an interpretive community is impossible because such communities, in communicating with one another, are porous and malleable.

Affective Stylistics:

Affective Stylistics is a critical method, which is based on the idea that a work's meaning, is to be found not in its formal architecture but in the sequence of interpretive decisions, which the text elicits in its readers. This method became prominent through the 1970 manifesto "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" written by Stanley Fish. The central tanet of Affective Stylistics is that **the meaning of a work inheres in the experience of its reading**. Contradicting Formalist views of the work as a unified structure; Fish examines the parts of the text as they succeed each other in time, concentrating on what the sequence of words does to the reader who are trying to make sense of it. Mostly, Fish used this term to describe necessary reliance of the critics upon his or her affective responses to stylistic elements in the text. Fish opined that the literary text is never self sufficient as it is created in parts by the interpretive strategy that the reader deploys. The work and its result are one and the same thing. What a text is what a text does.

Fish has positioned his "affective stylistics" as a theoretical antidote to a dogmatic formalism. Fish admits that attention to the emotional whims of readers does indeed end in impressionism and relativism. However, he makes two important points in addition to this. **First**, he argues that the reader's contribution is not at all limited to whimsical connotations grounded in personal experience. This is because the reader does not come after the text. For Fish, the reader creates the text in the first place. Interpretation is not a second order activity, which one undertakes after an objective and independent description of a poem. Interpretation is always unavoidably there from the start, at the level of our very perception

of the poem. **His second** point is that this in no way implies that interpretation is arbitrary, relative, or impressionistic. The relative stability of interpretations, the fact that we can agree and disagree about an interpretation, and the fact that we can say one interpretation is better than another are all accounted for by Fish's concept of the "interpretative community." These trans-subjective communities determine which "interpretative strategies" are legitimate and which are not. Further, they change over time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the important concepts of Reader Response?

8.4 RECEPTION OF THE READER RESPONSE THEORIES

There have been several important criticisms of Reader-based theory, both practical and theoretical. The American critic Jane Tompkins (1988) has pointed out that while most Reader Response critics claimed to break radically with the New Critical assumptions, in practice they still held strongly to two of the most central of those assumptions: that the text is the centre and ground of all critical activity, and that the role of the critic is simply to explicate the text. Most of the theoretical criticisms address the nature of the subject employed by various critics and even whether the category of the subject is even necessary. Theorists such as Stanley Fish, conceive of the notion of a Reader Response criticism in terms of a text's psychological effects. While other thinkers such as Norman Holland and David Bleich have defined Reader Response in terms of the text's self-reflexive and ultimately subjective possibilities.

Marxist critics, for example, have argued that Reader Response criticism overlooks the role of ideology both in the production of meaning and in our most general relations to texts. For example, Wolfgang Iser opines that language acts on the reader directing his or her response. What seems to be missing in his account, according to many Marxist critics, is the degree

to which language and the subject position are ideologically determined or even produced. Language simply appears as a set of pre given rules, and the subject as an innocent space, which these rules organize. Scholar from German democratic republic such as Robert Weimann, Manfred Naumann and Rita Schober objected to some of the propositions of Jass and Iser. They suggested Marxist alternatives because they believed that the most productive East West post war dialogue in literary theory involved both the issues of Reception and Response.

With its focus on meaning as an 'event' that takes place in mental acts of reading, Reader-Response criticism directly challenges the idea that readers' emotions are not pertinent to the making of meaning. However, here, it is also important to note that Reader-response criticism is not concerned with the fallacy that Wimsatt and Beardsley describe. Rather, a critic like Stanley Fish, in his theory of Affective Stylistics, redefines the reader's affect as something far more complex and linguistically grounded than the common notion of psycho-physiological emotional response. The first decade of the 20st century has seen a number of innovative developments in the growing interdisciplinary field called Affect Theory. Affect theorists like Sianne Ngai and Jane Thrailkill draw on cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy in order to analyze rigorously the emotive import of a literary text. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work forges connections between performance theory and affect, suggesting that the conjunction has pedagogical and political as well as critical implications. In this work, we see the legacy of New Criticism, which, far from being superseded, has provided the foundation for new, interdisciplinary theories of reading and criticism.



8.5 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have learnt that Reader Response gained importance in around 1980s. At the center of Reader Response Theory is the response of readers to a text over a given period. Reader Response critics contend that literary works do not function as self-contained and

autonomous objects, but rather as realities that become established by the readers who consume them. By now, we have noted the major theorists of Reader Response who contributed immensely to the field of theory. We have also familiarised ourselves with the important concepts popularised by the theorists in question.



8.6 FURTHER READING

Edgar, Andrew & Peter Sedgwick. (2002). *Cultural Theory: The Key Thinkers.* London: Routledge.

Julian Wolfreys, Ruth Robbins and Kenneth Womack. (Eds.). (2002). *Key Concepts in Literary Theory.* Edinburgh University Press.

Leitch, Vincent B. (Ed.). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* New York. W. W. Norton & Company.

Makaryk, Arena. (Ed.). (1993). *The Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars and Terms.* Canada: University of Toronto Press.



8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Firstly, the "Constance School" which includes Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser… …secondly, the "Geneva School" which includes such critics as Hans Georg Gadamer and Roman Ingarden.

Ans to Q 2: Ideal readers… …super readers… …implied readers… …virtual readers… … real readers… …historical readers… …resisting readers… …critical readers and so on.

Ans to Q 3: His main idea was to find out the object of literary study: how it is "given to consciousness"… … in his Introduction to *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, he stated that every literary work, is a multilayered formation composed of four heterogeneous "strata"… …his analysis of 'literary time', and of the temporal sequentiality of the written text has enabled analyses of how reading is directed by, but also creates, the work.

Ans to Q 4: Stanley Fish is viewed as being a major influence in the rise and development of Reader Response Criticism… …Affective Stylistics, a way of thinking about interpretation that lent more weight to the way readers construct meaning in texts…. … Interpretative Communities who determine what are "acceptable" and "unacceptable" interpretations.

Ans to Q 5: Wolfgang Iser is a German literary theorist and critic… …he was influenced by the Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer… …his views on the reading process draw significantly on the interpretation of Roman Ingarden… ...he propounded the concept of *The Implied Reader.*

Ans to Q 6: Implied Reader and Implied Author… …Interpretive Community.. …Affective Stylistics



8.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Reader Response Studies begin with the assertion that the study of literature cannot overlook the role of the reader. Discuss.

Q 2: Marxist critics, for example, have argued that Reader Response criticism overlooks the role ideology. Discuss.

Q 3: What do you understand by the term Reader Response? Illustrate with references to the major theorists of Reader Response.

Q 4: In what ways, did Reader Response transform literary studies from an author centric approach to a reader- centric discourse. Discuss.

Q 5: Mention the important theorists of Reader Response and discuss their specific contributions.

Q 6: How are the concepts of the reader and the author viewed in Reader Response? Discuss with particular reference to the concepts of Implied Reader and Implied Author.

Q 7: Write a note on the concept of Affective Stylistics.

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UNIT 9: RECEPTION THEORY

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Introducing Reception Theory

9.4 Major Theorists

9.5 Let us Sum up

9.6 Further Reading

9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.8 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss Reception Theory as an important trend in Literary Theory
- trace the growth and development Reception Theory
- make a list of the major theorists of Reception
- examine the concepts popularised by the theorists in question
- assess the reception of Reception Theory in subsequent critical periods

9.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit, which needs to be studied along with the previous unit on Reader Response, shall introduce us to the theoretical approaches commonly known as Reception Theory gaining importance in around 1980s. Reception Theory, refers to the school of criticism that explores the many and often divergent ways in which literary works are received following their initial publication. Hans Robert Jauss gave birth to the concept of 'aesthetic distance' to explain the differences between the immediate reception of a work and its contemporary profile. Jauss argues that this notion intersects with a given reader's **horizon of expectations** or the textual elements that impact the reader's expectations regarding the text in question. There are two principal schools of thought attached to Reception Theory. Firstly, the

"Constance School" which includes Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, maintains that the reader, who draws upon his or her individual experiences during the act of reading, should function as the literary critic's primary concern. Secondly, the "Geneva School" which includes such critics as Hans Georg Gadamer and Roman Ingarden, on the other hand, contends that a series of 'essential conditions', or a given reader's expectations about the present and the future, inevitably influencing our reading experiences. By the time we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to gain a better perspective regarding Reception Theory.

9.3 INTRODUCING RECEPTION THEORY

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, along with the Reader Response critics, the professors and students at the University of Constance in West Germany turned to the reading and reception of a literary text instead of to the production of a text or a close examination of the text itself. Although developed by the Constance School in Germany, this theory was not well known in the English-speaking world till 1980s when most of the works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser were published. The Constance School became popular at a period of great political turbulence in West Germany. Throughout the whole Germany, the university students agitated for educational reforms and questioned educational methods and traditional standards. The experimental University of Constance was at the forefront of such reformist moves and fostered an atmosphere of new ideas in literary theory and aesthetics. One of the leading Reception theorists Jauss proposed that one could truly understand literature as a process by recognising the role of the consumer or the reader. Interaction between author and public replaces literary biography as the basis for literary historiography. The historical significance of a literary work is established not by the qualities of the work or by the genius of the author but by the chain of receptions from generation to generation. Thus, Jauss envisions a kind of historiography that would play a mediating role between the past and the present. Subsequently, past meanings are understood as part of the prehistory of present experience.

Terry Eagleton in his "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory" states the following about the idea of Reception Theory: (pp 64-68) Please go through it carefully to understand the concepts better.

Hermeneutics, as we have seen, tends to concentrate on works of the past: the theoretical questions it asks arise mainly from this perspective. This is hardly surprising, given its scriptural beginnings, but it is also significant: it suggests that criticism's main role is to make sense of the classics. It would be difficult to imagine Gadamer grappling with Norman Mailer. Along with this traditionalist emphasis goes another: the assumption that works of literature form an 'organic' unity. The hermeneutical method seeks to fit each element of a text into a complete whole, in a process commonly known as the 'hermeneutical circle': individual features are intelligible in terms of the entire context, and the entire context becomes intelligible through the individual features. Hermeneutics does not generally consider the possibility that literary works may be diffuse, incomplete and internally contradictory, though there are many reasons to assume that they are. It is worth noting that E. D. Hirsch, for all his antipathy to Romantic organicist concepts, also shares the prejudice that literary texts are integrated wholes, and logically so: the unity of the work resides in the author's all-pervasive intention. There is in fact no reason why the author should not have had several mutually contradictory intentions, or why his intention may not have been somehow self-contradictory, but Hirsch does not consider these possibilities.

The most recent development of Hermeneutics in Germany is known as 'reception aesthetics' or 'reception theory', and unlike Gadamer, it does not concentrate exclusively on works of the past. Reception theory examines the reader's role in literature, and as such is a fairly novel development. Indeed one might very roughly periodise the history of modern literary theory in three stages: a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the 19th century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years. The reader has always been the most underprivileged of this trio strangely, since without him or her there would be no literary texts at all. Literary texts do not exist on

bookshelves: they are processes of signification materialized only in the practice of reading. For literature to happen, the reader is quite as vital as the author. What is involved in the act of reading? Let me take, almost literally at random, the first two sentences of a novel: ‘”What did you make of the new couple?” The Hanemas, Piet and Angela, were undressing.’ (John Updike, *Couples.)* What are we to make of this? We are puzzled for a moment, perhaps, by an apparent lack of connection between the two sentences, until we grasp that what is at work here is the literary convention by which we may attribute a piece of direct speech to a character even if the text does not explicitly do this itself. We gather that some character, probably Piet or Angela Hanema, makes the opening statement; but why do we presume this?

The sentence in quotation marks may not be spoken at all: it may be a thought, or a question, which someone else has asked, or a kind of epigraph placed at the opening of the novel. Perhaps, it is addressed to Piet and Angela Hanema by somebody else, or by a sudden voice from the sky. One reason why the latter solution seems unlikely is that the question is a little colloquial for a voice from the sky, and we might know that Updike is in general a realist writer who does not usually go in for such devices; but a writer’s texts do not necessarily form a consistent whole and it may be unwise to lean on this assumption too heavily. It is unlikely on realist grounds that the question is asked by a chorus of people speaking in unison, and slightly unlikely that it is asked by somebody other than Piet or Angela Hanema, since we learn the next moment that they are undressing, perhaps speculate that they are a married couple, and know that married couples, in our suburb of Birmingham at least, do not make a practice of undressing together before third parties, whatever they might do individually….

The process of reading, for reception theory, is always a dynamic one, a complex movement and unfolding through time. The literary work itself exists merely as what the Polish theorist Roman Ingarden calls a set of ‘schemata’ or general directions, which the reader must actualise. To do this, the reader will bring to the work certain ‘pre-understandings’, a dim context of beliefs and expectations within which the work’s various features

will be assessed. As the reading process proceeds, however, these expectations will themselves be modified by what we learn, and the hermeneutical circle moving from part to whole and back to part will begin to revolve.

Striving to construct a coherent sense from the text, the reader will select and organise its elements into consistent wholes, excluding some and foregrounding others, 'concretising' certain items in certain ways; he or she will try to hold different perspectives within the work together, or shift from perspective to perspective in order to build up an integrated 'illusion'. What we have learnt on page one will fade and become 'foreshortened' in memory, perhaps to be radically qualified by what we learn later.

Reading is not a straightforward linear movement, a merely cumulative affair: our initial speculations generate a frame of reference within which to interpret what comes next, but what comes next may retrospectively transform our original understanding, highlighting some features of it and backgrounding others. As we read on we shed assumptions, revise beliefs, make more and more complex inferences and anticipations; each sentence opens up a horizon which is confirmed, challenged or undermined by the next. We read backwards and forwards simultaneously, predicting and recollecting, perhaps aware of other possible realisations of the text, which our reading has negated. Moreover, all of this complicated activity is carried out on many levels at once, for the text has 'backgrounds' and 'foregrounds', different narrative viewpoints, alternative layers of meaning between which we are constantly moving.

Wolfgang Iser, of the so-called Constance school of reception aesthetics, whose theories I have been largely discussing, speaks in *The Act of Reading* (1978) of the 'strategies' which texts put to work, and of the 'repertoires' of familiar themes and allusions which they contain. To read at all, we need to be familiar with the literary techniques and conventions, which a particular work deploys; we must have some grasp of its 'codes', by which is meant the rules, which systematically govern the ways it produces its meanings. Recall once more the London Underground sign I discussed in the Introduction:

'Dogs must be carried on the escalator.' To understand this notice I need to do a great deal more than simply read its words one after the other. I need to know, for example, that these words belong to what might be called a 'code of reference' - that the sign is not just a decorative piece of language there to entertain travellers, but is to be taken as referring to the behaviour of actual dogs and passengers on actual escalators. I must mobilise my general social knowledge to recognise that the sign has been placed there by the authorities, that these authorities have the power to penalize offenders, that I as a member of the public am being implicitly addressed, none of which is evident in the words themselves. I have to rely, in other words, upon certain social codes and contexts to understand the notice properly. But I also need to bring these into interaction with certain codes or conventions of reading - conventions which tell me that by 'the escalator' is meant *this* escalator and not one in Paraguay, that 'must be carried' means 'must be carried *now',* and so on. I must recognise that the 'genre' of the sign is such as to make it highly improbable that the ambiguity I mentioned in the Introduction is actually 'intended'. It is not easy to distinguish between 'social' and 'literary' codes here: concretising 'the escalator' as 'this escalator', adopting a reading convention, which eradicates ambiguity, itself depends upon a whole network of social knowledge.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which are the two principal schools of Reception?

Q 2: How does Terry Eagleton periodise the history of literary theory? And what does he state about the reader?

9.4 MAJOR THEORISTS

The following are the most important theorists of Reception theory.

Hans Robert Jauss (1921-)

Hans Robert Jauss, a German academic, was one of the important figures of the Constance School and is best known for his aesthetics of reception. In 1967, he drew the attention of the literary theorists with his

inaugural address at Constance entitled “What is and for what purpose does one study literary history?” Here he outlined the main principles of his aesthetics of reception, which sought to combine the best features of two opposite schools of criticism: Russian Formalism and Marxist Criticism. From the former, he took the insight that perception is fundamental to our encounter with a text, from the later, he found that literature is thoroughly historical and can only be understood as a product of historical meditations. Thus, Jauss placed the perceiving subject at the center of a literary historiography that seeks to locate the text in a larger artistic, social, and political context. He became famous with his ideas on “Horizon of Expectations”. His works became well known to the English-speaking world around 1980s when they were translated into English.

Hans Robert Jauss is best known for promoting the importance of Reception history in literary interpretation. Countering the assumption that we confront texts as self-sufficient entities, on their own merits and in their own terms, Jauss stressed how the expectations that we bring to reading govern our response and aesthetic judgment. For example, while reading James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), a student probably starts with the assumption that it is a literary masterpiece, unlike a bestseller chosen for casual reading. And this hypothetical student might know that Joyce is considered one of the most influential modernist novelists who popularised the concept of **Stream of Consciousness**. Our present-day experience of *Ulysses* differs from that of Joyce’s own day, in part, because Stream of Consciousness has become a familiar technique-what was innovative to his first readers has been assimilated into literary practice. It is interesting to note that such expectations-sometimes to be fulfilled, sometimes to be surprised-shape our thinking as we open the pages of *Ulysses.*

You must have noticed that the Constance School draws on the philosophical traditions of aesthetics inaugurated in 18th-century German philosophy by Alexander Baumgarten, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Von Schiller of hermeneutics. It also draws on the theory of interpretation, propounded, in the 19th century by Chiller and Wilhelm, and the twentieth by Martin Heidegger and Gadamer, and from Phenomenology, developed

by Edmund Husserl who emphasises perception and the interaction of subjects and objects. In particular, Hans Robert Jauss's work employs Gadamer's concept of historical "horizons" and the changing nature of interpretation and aesthetic judgment over time. Like Iser, Jauss sees the literary work as an event rather than a fixed object, a view that reflects the influence of Phenomenology. His "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" aims to revitalise literary study by examining the history of reception. While proclaiming the importance of literary history, Jauss severely criticises its accepted forms, which center on individual authors, genres, or current ideas. Jauss expanded literary history to encompass readers and the background against which a work is received. Shifting the focus away from authors and works, Jauss argues that an audience does not receive a literary work simply on its own merits; it is received and judged against the background of other works of art as well as against the background of the everyday experience of life. This background he terms the "horizon of expectations"

LET US KNOW



For Jauss, it is only through studying the history of a work's reception that one can fully understand it. He presents seven key points in this regard which are as follows.

1. Reception history influences both the writing and reading of literary works.
2. A literary historian can ascertain a non subjective, objectifiable aspects of expectations that a reader brings to the text.
3. These form a "horizon" that determines interpretations.
4. Reception works dialogically through a process of question and answer, at each point in time.
5. Expectations change, and literary history properly records this evolution.
6. Literary historians and philologists can look at reception both over time and at one moment, and

7. Literary history constitutes a "special history" that dialogically relates to "general history," largely through the revision of moral ideas.

In order to re-define interpretation and historiography, Hans Robert Jauss employs the notion of "Horizon of Expectation" which refers to a system or structure of expectations that are literary, cultural and social. However, Jauss's theory is an adaptation of the notion of 'horizon' established most prominently by his teacher Hans Georg Gadamer who took 'horizon' as a fundamental tenet for the hermeneutical situation. Jauss proposed that literary scholarship should try to determine the "horizon of expectations" for any particular work and then try to measure the distance between the two. Only those works that violate or break the "horizon of expectation" confirm artistic merit. One can find examples of aesthetic distance in the array of reactions to a given work by its initial audience, literary critics, and by other writers and scholars. Thus, the aesthetic of reception suggests newness or deviation from an established standard as both a criterion for evaluation and as the force for change in literary history. After establishing the "horizon of expectation", the critic can proceed to determine the artistic merit of a given work by measuring the distance between the work and the horizon. If the expectations of the reader are not 'disappointed' or 'violated' then the text will be of second rate; if it breaks through the "horizon of expectation", it will be considered an example of high art.

Wofgang Iser (1926–2007)

We have already discussed Iser in the previous section. Along with his contributions in Reader Response Theory, he is also best known for his work on Reception theory. His theory is best represented in the book *The Act of Reading* (1976). In the preface to his book Iser states:

"As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analyzing the reading process. Reading is therefore the focal point of this study, for it sets in motion a whole chain of activities that depend both on the text and on the exercise of certain basic human faculties. Effects and responses

are properties neither of the text nor of the reader; the text represents a potential effect that is realized in the reading process."

What interests Iser most is how and under what conditions a text has meaning for a reader. To examine the relation between the reader and the text he looks at the qualities in the text that makes it readable or which influence our reading and at those features of the reading process essential for understanding a text. He was strongly influenced by the Phenomenology of Roman Ingarden and Edmund Husserl and by the Hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer.

Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002)

One of the most famous disciples of Martin **Heidegger,** Gadamer is probably best known in the English-speaking world for his book *Truth and Method* (1960). In this work Gadamer presents his theory of 'philosophical hermeneutics'. Hermeneutics, the theory of textual interpretation and analysis, has its origins in the interpretation of legal and biblical texts. In general terms, hermeneutics seeks to offer an analysis of the nature of textual interpretation and, in relation to this, the nature of understanding. In line with this, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics attempts to elucidate the conditions that are essential to any act of understanding. In other words, Gadamer is not interested in providing us with a 'methodology' that can be applied rigidly to a variety of texts (e.g. literary or philosophical) in order to decode their meaning. Indeed, the concept of 'method', according to Gadamer, hinders a proper understanding the nature of truth: truth, in effect, is opposed to method. Against the claims of method, Gadamer's aim is to articulate the nature of understanding in general. The starting point for Gadamer's project is Heidegger's claim that understanding is an abiding and universal condition of human existence. To be human, for Gadamer, is to be one who is endowed with understanding. We necessarily engage in interpretation simply in terms of our being the kind of entity that we are.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is meant by Reception Theory? Who are the main theorists of Reception Aesthetics?

Q 4: What do you mean by the term "Horizon of Expectation"?



9.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Reception Theory refers to the school of criticism that explores the many and often divergent ways in which literary works are received following their initial publication. Hans Robert Jauss gave birth to the concept of 'aesthetic distance' to explain the differences between the immediate reception of a work and its contemporary profile. Jauss argues that this notion intersects with a given reader's 'Horizon of Expectations', or the textual elements that impact the reader's expectations regarding the text in question. There are two principal schools of thought attached to Reception Theory— "Constance School" and "Geneva School". By now, we must have identified the major theorists of Reception who contributed immensely to the field of theory. We have also noted the important concepts popularised by the theorists in question.



9.6 FURTHER READING

Eagleton, Terry. (1996). "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory," in *Literary Theory an Introduction.* Blackwell Publishing.

Edgar, Andrew & Peter Sedgwick. (2002). *Cultural Theory: The Key Thinkers.* London: Routledge.

Julian Wolfreys, Ruth Robbins & Kenneth Womack. (Eds.). (2002). *Key Concepts in Literary Theory.* Edinburgh University Press.

Leitch, Vincent B. (Ed.). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* New York. W. W. Norton & Company.

Makaryk, Arena. (Ed.). (1993). *The Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars and Terms.* Canada: University of Toronto Press.



9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Constance School of Jauss and Wolfgang Iser who maintained that the reader, who draws upon his or her individual experiences during the act of reading, should function as the literary critic's primary concern… …Geneva School of Hans Georg Gadamer and Roman Ingarden, who opined that a series of 'essential conditions', or a given reader's expectations about the present and the future, inevitably influence the reading experience.

Ans to Q 2: The three stages ate: a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years… …according to Eagleton, the reader has always been the most underprivileged of this trio strangely, since without him or her there would be no literary texts at all.

Ans to Q 3: It developed during the late 1960s and early 1970s… …the professors and students at the University of Constance in West Germany turned to the reading and reception of a literary text instead of to the production of a text or a close examination of the text itself… …Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser were the most significant reception theorists… …Jauss proposed that one can truly understand literature as a process by recognising the role of the consumer or the reader.

Ans to Q 4: Hans Robert Jauss employs the notion of "Horizon of Expectation"… … refers to a system or structure of expectations that are literary, cultural and social… …Jauss proposed that literary scholarship should determine the "horizon of expectations"… …only those works that violate or break the "horizon of expectation" confirm

artistic merit…. …after establishing the “horizon of expectation”, a critic can proceed to determine the artistic merit of a given work.



9.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: In what ways, has Reception Theory transformed literary studies from an author centric approach to a reader-centric discourse? Discuss.

Q 2: Who are the important theorists of Reception Aesthetic? Discuss the history of Reception in terms of their works.

Q 3: Which are the important concepts in Reception Theory? Give a detailed answer.

Q 4: Write in your own words what Terry Eagleton states about Reception Theory.

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UNIT 10: MARXIST CRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Introducing Marxist Criticism

10.4 Major Phases of Marxism and the Theorists

- 10.4.1 Soviet Socialist Realism
- 10.4.2 Lukács and Brecht
- 10.4.3 The Frankfurt School and After: Adorno and Benjamin
- 10.4.4 'Structuralist' Marxism: Goldmann, Althusser, Macherey
- 10.4.5 'New Left' Marxism: Williams, Eagleton, Jameson

10.5 Let us Sum up

10.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.7 Further Reading

10.8 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- trace the growth and development of Marxist criticism and theory
- discuss Marxist criticism as an important trend in 20th century Literary Theory
- makea list of the major Marxist critics/theorists who contributed immensely to the field of theory
- assess the reception of Marxist criticism in the interpretation of literary works

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of Block 2 of the course on Literary and Critical Theory I. In this unit, we shall try to discuss Marxist criticism in which *social class* and *class relations* function ascentral instruments of analysis. Marxist criticism and theory as an intellectual perspective provides a wholesome

counterbalance to ourpropensity to see ourselves and the writers that we read as completely divorced from the socio-economic circumstances. As we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to reflect on Marxist criticism and theory in sufficient detail.

10.3 INTRODUCING MARXIST CRITICISM [Adapted from Hans Bertens]

The German philosopherKarl Marx (1818-1883), and a German sociologist Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), jointly founded the school of thought known as Marxism. Marx was the son of a lawyer but spent most of his life in great poverty as a political exile from Germany living in Britain. Engels too had left Germany in 1842 to work in Manchester for his father's textile firm. They both met after Marx had read an article by Engels in a journal towhich they contributed. They called their economic theories 'Communism' (rather than 'Marxism'), designating their belief in the state ownership of industry, transport, etc., rather than private ownership. Marx and Engels announced the advent of Communism in their seminal joint work *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means ofproduction, distribution, and exchange.

Marxism is seen as a 'materialist' philosophy and it tries to explain things without assuming the existence of a world or of forces beyond the natural world around us, and the society we live in. It looks for concrete, scientific, logical explanations of the world of observable facts. In this regard, it opposes 'idealist' philosophy, which 'does' believe in the existence of a spiritual 'world elsewhere' and would tend to offer, for instance, religious explanations of life and conduct. However, whereas other philosophies merely seek to understand the world, Marxism seeks to change it. Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes. This view of history as class struggle (rather than as, for instance, a succession of dynasties, or as a gradual progress towards the attainment of national identity and sovereignty) regards it as 'motored' by the competition for economic, social, and political advantage.

In the context of Marxism, the exploitation of one social class by another is seen in modern industrial capitalism, particularly in the 19th century. The result of this exploitation is 'alienation',a state which occurs when the worker is 'deskilled' and made to perform fragmented, repetitive tasks in a sequence of whose nature and purpose he or she has no overall grasp and control. By contrast, in the older 'pre-industrial' or 'cottage industry' system of manufacture, home and workplace were one and the worker completed the whole production process in all its variety, and was in direct contact with those who might buy the product. These 'alienated' workers have undergone the process of 'reification',which is a term used in Marx's major work, *Das Kapital,* but not developed there. It concerns the way, when capitalist goals and questions of profit and loss are paramount, workers are bereft of their full humanity and are thought of as 'hands' or 'the labour force', so that, the effects of industrial closures are calculated in purely economic terms. People, in a word, become 'things'.

The Marxist model of society is constituted by a **base** (the material means of production, distribution, and exchange) and a **superstructure,** which is the 'cultural' world of ideas, art, religion, law, and so on. The essential Marxist view is that the latter things are not 'innocent', but are 'determined' (or shaped) by the nature of the economic base. This beliefabout culture, known as **economic determinism***,* is a central part of traditional Marxist thinking. However, Marx and Engels themselves did not put forward any comprehensive theory of literature. As very cultured and highly educated Germans, Marx and Engels had that reverence for 'great' art and literature which was typical of their class, and there is an obvious desire in such pronouncements to emphasise the difference between art and propaganda. All the same, Marxist literary criticism maintains that a writer's social class, and its prevailing 'ideology' (outlook, values, tacit assumptions, half-realised allegiances, etc.) have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class. Therefore, instead of seeing authors as primarily autonomous 'inspired' individuals whose 'genius' and creative imagination enables them to bring forth original and timeless works of art, the Marxist sees them as constantly formed by their social contexts in ways, which they themselves

would usually not admit. However, we shall do well if we ponder upon the different types of Marxist criticism as can be read in terms of the following.



LET US KNOW

According to Marx, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on thecontrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." He also once stated, "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point isto *change* it."

Both statements were intentionally provocative. By contradicting widelyaccepted doctrines, Marx was trying to put people's thought into reversegear. Even if we reject a privileged status for literature, there remains thequestion of how far literature's historical development is independent ofhistorical development in general.

'Leninist' Marxist Criticism

In the1920s, during the early years after the Russian revolution, the official Soviet attitude to literature and the arts was very enlightened and 'experimental', and characteristically modern forms of art were encouraged. The 1930s saw reaction throughout the whole of Soviet society, and the State began to exert direct control over literature and the arts as well as everything else. At the first Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, liberal views were outlawed and a new orthodoxy imposed, based on the writings of Lenin rather than those of Marx or Engels. In 1905, Lenin had argued that literature must become an instrument of the party. 'Literature', he argued, 'must become Party literature...Literature must become part of the organised, methodical, and unified labours of the social-democratic party'. Experimentation was effectively banned in Leninist Marxism.

Engelsian Marxist Criticism

From the 1930s, however, a rich variety of 'Engelsian' Marxist criticism flourished. The group now called the 'Russian Formalists' had flourished in the 1920s, until disbanded by the Party, even though their work is not strictly Marxist in spirit. The most prominent members of the group

were Victor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, and Boris Eichenbaum whose ideas included the need for close formal analysis of literature. They held the view that the language of literature has its own characteristic procedures and effects, and is not just a version of ordinary language. Victor Shklovsky propounded the idea of 'defamiliarisation' or 'making strange' which claimed that one of the chief effects of literary language is that of making the familiar world appear new to us, as if we were seeing it for the first time, and thus laying it open to reappraisal.

The influence of Althusser

Much recent Marxist thinking on literature has been influenced by the work of the French Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser (1918-1990). Ideologyis a key term for Althusser, as for all Marxists. It is a broad concept variously defined within Marxism. Althusser however defined ideology as the following:Ideology is a system (possessing its logic and proper rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and an historical role at the heart of a given society. This Althusserian distinction is closely related to the notion of 'hegemony', which was given prominence by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1934) who contrasts 'rule', which is direct political control, which uses force when necessary, and 'hegemony', which is 'the whole lived social process as practically organised by specific and dominant meanings, values and beliefs of a kind which can be abstracted as a "world-view" or "class outlook'".



LET US KNOW

What do Marxist Critics do? [Adapted from Peter Barry]

1. They make a division between the 'overt' (manifest or surface) and 'covert' (latent or hidden) content of a literary work and then relate the covert subject matter of the literary work to basic Marxist themes, such as class struggle, or the progression of society through various historical stages, such as, the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. Thus, the conflicts in *King Lear* might be read as

being 'really' about the conflict of class interest between the rising class (the bourgeoisie) and the falling class (the feudal overlords).

2. Another method used by Marxist critics is to relate the context of a work to the social-class status of the author. In such cases, an assumption is made that the author is unaware of precisely what he or she is saying or revealing in the text.

3. A third Marxist method is to explain the nature of a whole literary genre in terms of thesocial period, which 'produced' it. For instance, *The Rise of the Novel,* by Ian Watt, relates the growth of the novel in the eighteenth century to the expansion of the middle classes during that period. The novel 'speaks' for this social class, just as, for instance, Tragedy'speaks for' the monarchy and the nobility, and the Ballad 'speaks for' for the rural and semi-urban'working class'.

4. A fourth Marxist practice is to relate the literary work to the social assumptions of the time in which it is 'consumed', a strategy which is used particularly in the later variant of Marxist criticism known as cultural materialism.

5. A fifth Marxist practice is the 'politicisation of literary form', that is, the claim that literary forms are themselves determined by political circumstance.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How is the Marxist philosophy different from other philosophies?

Q 2: How would you explain the concept of alienation?

Q 3: How is an author viewed in Marxist Literary Criticism?

Q 4: What was Lenin's view on literature?

10.4 MAJOR PHASES OF MARXISM AND THE THEORISTS [Adapted from Raman Seldon]

In this section, we shall discuss the development of Marxist criticism and theory in some detail. The following are some of the different phases of

Marxist thoughts as discussed by Raman Selden in his book*A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory.*

10.4.1 Soviet Socialist Realism

As the doctrine expoundedby the Union of Soviet Writers (1932–4),Socialist Realism appealed to certain of Lenin's pre-Revolutionary statements. The theory addressed certain major questions about the evolution of literature, its reflection of class relations and its function in society.The Revolution of 1917 encouraged the Formalists to continue developing a revolutionary theory of art. Subsequently, there emerged at the same time an orthodox Communist view, which frowned upon Formalism and regarded the 19th century tradition of Russianrealism as the only suitable foundation for the aesthetics of the new Communist society. The 'modernist' revolutions in European art, music and literature, which occurred around 1910 (through the works of Picasso, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Joyce, Woolf, and T. S. Eliot), were to be regarded by Soviet critics as the decadent products of late capitalist society. The modernist rejection of traditional realism paradoxically left Socialist Realism as the leading custodian of bourgeois aesthetics. We shall note that the combination of 19th-century aesthetics and revolutionary politics remained the essential recipe of Soviet theory. The principle of 'partinost' (commitment to the working-class cause of the Party) is derived almost exclusively from Lenin's essay 'Party Organisation and Party Literature' (1905). While this was a reasonable demand to make in the precarious circumstances of 1905, it took on a much more despotic significance after the Revolution, when the Party controlled publishing.

Socialist Realism was considered a continuation and development of bourgeois realism at a higher level. Bourgeois writers are judged not according to their class origins or explicit political commitment, but by the extentto which their writings reveal insights into the social developments of their time. The Soviet hostility to

modernist novels can best be understood inthis context. Karl Radek's contribution to the Soviet Writers' Congress in1934 posed the choice 'James Joyce or Socialist Realism?' During a discussion, Radek directed a vitriolic attack against another Communist delegate, Herzfelde, who had defended Joyce as a great writer. Joyce's preoccupation with the sordid inner life of a trivial individual indicates his profound unawareness of the larger historical forces at work in modern times. He concludes, 'if I were to write novels,I would learn how to write them from Tolstoy and Balzac, not from Joyce.'This admiration for 19th-century realism was understandable. Balzac, Dickens, George Eliot, Stendhal and others developed a sophisticated literary form, which explores the individual's involvement in the complex network of social relations. Modernist writers abandoned this project and began to reflect a more fragmented image of the world, which was often pessimistic and introverted, exploring the alienated individual consciousness in retreat from the 'nightmare of history' which is modern society. Andrey Zhdanov, who gave the keynote speech at the 1934 Congress, reminded writers that Stalin had called upon them to be the 'engineers of the human soul'. At this stage, the political demands upon writers became brutally insistent. Engels was clearly doubtful of the value of overly committed writing, but Zhdanov dismissed all such doubts: 'Yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, for in epochs of class struggle there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature, not tendentious, allegedly non-political.'



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What was the foundation of Socialist Realism?

Q 6: Why did socialist realism reject modernist literature?

10.4.2 Lukács and Brecht

Georg Lukács is perhaps the first major Marxist critic, as his work is inseparable from orthodox Socialist Realism, and then from the views of his 'opponent' the dramatist/theorist Bertolt Brecht in their debate about realism. It can be argued that Lukács anticipated some of the Soviet doctrines, but he developed the realist approach with great subtlety. He inaugurated a distinctively Hegelian style of Marxist thought, treating literary works as reflections of an unfolding system. A realist work must reveal theunder lying pattern of contradictions in a social order. His view is Marxist in its insistence on the material and historical nature of the structure of society. Rejecting the 'naturalism' of the then recent European novel, Lukács returns tothe old realist view that the novel reflects reality, not by rendering its mere surface appearance, but by giving us 'a truer, more complete, more vividand more dynamic reflection of reality'.

In a series of works, especially *The Historical Novel* (1937) and *Studies in European Realism* (1950), Lukács refines and extends his theory, and in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1957), he advances the Communist attack on modernism. He refused to deny Joyce the status of atrue artist, but asked to reject his view of history, and especially the wayin which Joyce's 'static' view of events is reflected in an epic structure, whichis itself essentially static. For Lukács, this failure to perceive human existence as part of a dynamic historical environment infects the whole of contemporary modernism, as reflected in the works of writers such as Kafka,Beckett and Faulkner. These writers, he argues, are preoccupied with formal experiment–with montage, inner monologues, the technique of 'streamof consciousness', the use of reportage, diaries, etc. All this formalistic virtuosity is the result of a narrow concern for subjective impressions, aconcern which itself stems from the advanced individualism of late capitalism.Instead of an objective realism, we have an *angst*-ridden visionof the world.

The fullness of history and its social processes are narrowed down to the bleak inner history of absurd existences. This 'attenuation of actuality' is contrasted to the dynamic and developmental view of society to be found in the great 19th-century novelists and in their latter-day heirs like Thomas Mann, who, though not 'socialist', achieve a genuinely 'Critical Realism'.

During his brief stay in Berlin during the early 1930s, he found himself attacking the use of modernist techniques of montage and reportage in the work of fellow radicals, including the outstanding dramatist Bertolt Brecht. Bertolt Brecht's early plays were radical, anarchistic and anti-bourgeois,but not anti-capitalist. After reading Marx in about 1926, his youthful iconoclasm was converted to conscious political commitment, although he always remained a maverick and never a Party man. Around 1930, he was writing the so-called *Lehrstücke*, didactic plays intended for working-class audiences, but he was forced to leave Germany when the Nazis took power in1933. He wrote his major plays in exile, mainly in Scandinavian countries. Later, in America, he was brought before the McCarthy Committee for un-American Activities and finally settled in East Germany in 1949. He had trouble too with the Stalinist authorities of the GDR, who regarded him as both an asset and a liability.

His opposition to Socialist Realism certainly offended the East German authorities. His best-known theatrical device, the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), recalls the Russian Formalists' concept of 'defamiliarisation'. Socialist Realism favoured realistic illusion, formal unity and 'positive' heroes. He called *his* theory of realism 'anti-Aristotelian', a covert way of attacking the theory of his opponents. Aristotle emphasised the universality and unity of the tragic action, and the identification of audience and hero in empathy, which produces a'catharsis' of emotions. Brecht rejected the entire tradition of 'Aristotelian' theatre and opined that the dramatist should avoid a smoothly interconnected plot and anysense of inevitability or universality.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What was Georg Lukac's view on realist novels?

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10.4.3 The Frankfurt School and After:Adorno and Benjamin

While Brecht and Lukács held conflicting views of realism, the Frankfurt School of Marxist aesthetics rejected realism altogether. The Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt practised what it called 'Critical Theory', which wasa wide-ranging form of social analysis grounded in Hegelian Marxism and including Freudian elements. The leading figures in philosophy and aesthetics were Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. Exiled in 1933,the Institute was relocated in New York, but finally returned to Frankfurt in 1950 under Adorno and Horkheimer. They regarded the social system as a totality in which all the aspects reflected the same essence. Their analysis of modern culture was influenced by the experience of fascism, which had achieved hegemonic dominance at every level of social existence in Germany. In America, they saw a similar 'one-dimensional' quality in the mass culture and the permeation of every aspect of life bycommercialism.

Art and literature have a privileged place in Frankfurt thinking. Adorno criticisedLukács' view of realism, arguing that great literature does not, nor needs to, directly address social reality. In Adorno's view, art's detachment from dominant reality gives it its special significance and power. Modernist writings are particularly distanced from the reality to which they allude and this allows them the space to critique conformist trends in theirworld. While popular art forms are forced to collude with the economic system which shapes them, 'autonomous' works have the power to 'negate' the reality to which they relate. Because modernist texts reflect the alienate dinner lives of individuals, Lukács attacked them as 'decadent' embodiments of

late capitalist society and evidence of the writers' inability to transcend the atomistic and fragmented worlds in which they were compelled to live. Adorno argues that art cannot simply reflect the social system,but acts within that reality as an irritant, which produces an indirect sort of knowledge: 'Art is the negative knowledge of the actual world.'

Walter Benjamin, a friend of Adornoand Brecht was the most idiosyncratic Marxist thinker of his generation. His association with the Frankfurt School was fleeting. He depended on its journal for a small income but had alsoto contend with Adorno's editorial strictures upon his ideas and writing.His early 'academic' criticism, devoted to Goethe and to German Baroquedrama, is legendarily obscure, and much of his cultural journalism istantalisingly enigmatic. His life's work and major achievement was the 'Arcades Project', a fascinating exploration of the emerging commercial culture of Paris,'capital of the 19th century', which remained unfinished at his death (but was published in translation in the late 1990s). Benjamin's best-known essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', argues that modern technical innovations (above all, photography and cinema) have profoundly altered the status of the 'work of art'. Once, artistic works had an 'aura' deriving from their uniqueness. This was especially true of the visual arts, but was true also of literature. The new media shatter the quasi-religious ethos of the supposed uniquely original (as if 'sacred') work of art. To a greater and greater extent the *reproduction* of art objects (by means of photography or radio transmission) means that they are actually designed for reproducibility; and in the emergence of cinema we discover 'copies' without an 'original'. Here, Benjamin argued, was the technical basis of a new ethos of artistic production and consumption, one in which awe and deference would give way to a posture of analysis and relaxed expertise, in which art, no longer steeped in 'ritual', would be opened to politics.

Benjamin's companion essay, 'The Author as Producer', on the politics of artistic practice, was written principally with Bertolt Brecht's theatre inmind, and has made its own distinctive, but probably now less regarded,contribution. Here, Benjamin argued that while new technology might have revolutionary potential, there was no guarantee of its revolutionary effect. It was necessary for socialist writers and artists to realise this potential in their work. Benjamin rejects here too the idea that revolutionary art is achieved by attending to the correct subject matter. Instead of being concerned with a work of art's position within the social and economic relations of its time, he asks the question: what is 'the function of a work within the literary production relations of its time'? The artist needs to revolutionise the *artistic* forces of production of his or her time.In addition, this is a matter of *technique*, although the correct technique will arise inresponse to a complex historical combination of social and technical changes.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What is the significance of Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"?

Q 9: How did the Frankfurt thinkers view art and literature?

10.4.4 'Structuralist' Marxism: Goldmann, Althusser, Macherey

The intellectual life of Europe during the 1960s was dominated by Structuralism. Marxist criticism was not unaffected by this intellectual environment. Both traditions believe that individuals cannot be understood apart from their social existence. Marxists believe that individuals are 'bearers' of positions in the social system and not free agents. Structuralists consider that individual actions and utterances have no meaning apart from the signifying systems, which generate them. However,structuralists tend to

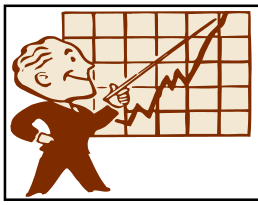
regard these underlying structures as timeless and self-regulating systems, but Marxists see them as historical, changeable and fraught with contradictions.

Lucien Goldmann, a Romanian theorist based in France, rejected the idea that texts are creations of individual genius and argued that they are based upon 'trans-individual mental structures' belonging to particular groups (or classes). These 'world-views' are perpetually being constructed and dissolved by social groups as they adjust their mental image of the world inresponse to the changing reality before them. Such mental images usually remain ill defined and half-realised in the consciousness of social agents, but great writers are able to crystallise world-views in a lucid and coherent form.His later work, especially *Pour unesociologie du roman* (1964), appears to resemble that of the Frankfurt School by focusing on the 'homology' between the structure of the modern novel and the structure of the market economy. He argues that by about 1910 the transition from the 'heroic' age of liberal capitalism to its imperialist phase was well under way. Therefore, the importance of the individual within economic life was drastically reduced.

We have already referred to Louis Althusser in the previous section. This French Marxist philosopher has had a major influence on Marxist literary theory especially in France and Britain. According to Althusser, a great work of literature does not give us a properly conceptual understanding of reality but neither does it merely express the ideology of a particular class. He draws upon Engels' arguments about Balzac and declares that art 'makes us *see*', in a distanced way, 'the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art,and to which it alludes'. Althusser defines ideology as 'a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'.The imaginary consciousness helps us to make sense of the world but also masks or represses our real relationship to it. For example, theideology of 'freedom' promotes the belief in the freedom of all, including

labourers, but it masks the real relations of liberal capitalist economy. Adominant system of ideology is accepted as a common-sense view of things by the dominated classes and thus the interests of the dominant class are secured. Art, however, achieves 'a retreat' (a fictional distance deriving fromits formal composition) from the very ideology, which feeds it. In this way,a major literary work can transcend and critique the ideology in which itis nevertheless 'bathed'.

Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966) was the first extended Althusserian discussion of art and ideology. Rather than treat thetext as a 'creation' or a self-contained artefact, he regards it as a 'production'in which disparate materials are worked over and changed in the process.These materials are not 'free implements' to be used consciously to create a controlled and unified work of art. Irrespective of prevailing aesthetic norms and authorial intentions, the text, in working the pre-given materials, is never fully 'aware of what it is doing'. It has, so to speak, an'unconscious' – a notion explored in terms of a text's repressed historical narrative in Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious.* In effect, this is an account of the way ideology enters and deforms a would-be unified text. Ideology is normally lived as if it were totally natural, as if its imaginary and fluid discourse gives a perfect and unified explanation of reality. Once it is worked into a text, all its contradictions and gaps are exposed. The realist writer intends to unify all the elements in the text, but the work that goes on in the textual process inevitably produces certain lapses and omissions which correspond to the incoherence ofthe ideological discourse it uses: 'for in order to say anything, there are otherthings *which must not be said*'. The literary critic is not concerned to showhow all the parts of the work fit together, or to harmonise and smooth over any apparent contradictions. Like a psychoanalyst, the critic attends to thetext's unconscious – to what is unspoken and inevitably repressed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: What is Louis Althusser's concept of Ideology?

10.4.5 'New Left' Marxism: Williams, Eagleton, Jameson:

Marxist theory in the United States has been dominated by the Hegelian inheritance of the Frankfurt School (the journal *Telos* was the standard-bearer of this tradition). The revival of Marxist criticism in Britain was fuelled by the 1968 'troubles' and by the ensuing influx of continental ideas (*New Left Review* was an important channel). As a Marxist critic, Raymond Williams began with a critical reassessment of the main English tradition of critical cultural thought (*Culture and Society 1780–1950*,1958). He embarked on a radical theoretical construction of the whole domain of social meaning–'culture' as 'a whole way of life'. This general perspective was developed in particular studies of drama, the novel, television, and historical semantics as well as further theoretical work. Williams's general project – the study of all forms of signification in their actual conditions of production–was always emphatically historical and materialist. Yet, it was only in 1977, with the publication of a developed statement of his theoretical position that he began to characterise his workas 'Marxist' (*Marxism and Literature*, 1977). What most importantly defined this position was the use of the concept of 'hegemony' developed by the Italian philosopher and political activist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Hegemony, Williams explained, related the 'whole social process' to structures of power and influence and thus to patterns of domination, subordination and opposition. It went beyond the formal operation of ideology and beyond the idea of social control as manipulation or indoctrination to see relations of power as 'in effect a saturation of the whole process ofliving', as operating by 'consent' and at such a depth that the hegemonic order of a class society passes as 'common sense' and 'the way things are'.

In *Criticism and Ideology*, Eagleton, like Althusser, argued that criticism must break with its 'ideological prehistory' and become a 'science'. The central problem is to define the relationship between literature and ideology, because in his view texts do not reflect historical reality but rather work upon ideology to produce an *effect* of the 'real'. The text may appear tobe free in its relation to reality (it can invent characters and situations at will), but it is not free in its use of ideology. 'Ideology' here refers not to formulated doctrines but to all those systems of representation (aesthetic,religious, judicial and others) which shape the individual's mental picture of lived experience. The meanings and perceptions produced in the text area reworking of ideology's own working of reality. This means that the textworks on reality at two removes. Eagleton goes on to deepen the theoryby examining the complex layering of ideology from its most general pretextual forms to the ideology of the text itself. He rejects Althusser's view that literature can distance itself from ideology; it is a complex reworking of already existing ideological discourses. However, following Macherey, the literary result is not merely a reflection of other ideological discourses but a special *production* of ideology. For this reason,criticism is concerned not with just the laws of literary form or the theory of ideology but rather with 'the laws of the production of ideological discourses as literature'.

In America, where the labour movement has been partially corrupted and totally excluded from political power, the appearance of Fredric Jameson a major Marxist theorist is an important event. In *Marxism and Form* (1971), he explores the dialectical aspect of Marxist theories of literature. After a fine sequence of studies (Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, Bloch, Lukács and Sartre), he presents the outline of a 'dialectical criticism'. Jameson believes that in the post-industrial world of monopoly capitalism the only kind of Marxism which has any purchase on the situation is a Marxism which explores the 'great themes of Hegel's philosophy–the relationship of part to

whole, the opposition between concrete and abstract, the concept of totality, the dialectic of appearance and essence, the interaction between subject and object'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Explain Raymond William's concept of Hegemony?



10.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that all Marxist critics agree that in the study of literature, the social dimension is absolutely indispensable. Writers can never completely escape ideology and their social background so that the social reality of the writer will always be part of the text. A central question in Marxist approaches to literature concerns the reliability of literary texts as social 'evidence'. For example, if Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and George Eliiot's *Middlemarch* are conditioned by the capitalist society of Victorian England what then are we going to find in these novels: a true picture of Victorian England, or an ideologically distorted reflection? In short, is it possible for writers, or for literary texts to present history as a never-ending struggle between antagonistic classes foreconomic and social gains and to present contemporary reality as only the latest instance of that struggle? Over time, Marxist critics have given different answers to this question, although most have been inspired by the notion–first formulated by Friedrich Engels in 1888–that the meaning of a literary work must be seen as independent of the political (and ideologically coloured) views of its author.



10.6 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Marxism is a 'materialist' philosophy… …unlike the 'idealist' philosophy, which believes in the existence of a spiritual 'world

elsewhere' Marxism believes in the forces beyond the natural world… …other philosophies merely seek to understand the world, Marxism seeks to change it… …it sees progress in society as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes.

Ans to Q 2: 'alienation' occurs when the worker is 'deskilled' and made to perform repetitive tasks in a sequence… …in the 'pre-industrial' or 'cottage industry' system of manufacture, home and workplace were one and the producer was in direct contact with those who might buy the product… …the 'alienated' workers negatively represents the capitalist goals where questions of profit and loss are paramount.

Ans to Q 3: It maintains that a writer's social class and its prevailing 'ideology' have a major bearing on what is written… …the author is not an autonomous 'inspired' individuals whose 'genius' and creative imagination enables to bring forth original and timeless works of art… …he is constantly being formed by the social contexts.

Ans to Q 4: 'Literature', he argued, 'must become Party literature...Literature must become part of the organised, methodical, and unified labours of the social-democratic party'. Experimentation was effectively banned in Leninist Marxism.

Ans to Q 5: As the doctrine expoundedby the Union of Soviet Writers (1932–4), Socialist Realism appealed to certain of Lenin's pre-Revolutionary statements. The theory addressed certain major questions about the evolution of literature, its reflectionof class relations and its function in society.

Ans to Q 6: According to the socialist realists authors like Balzac, Dickens, George Eliot, Stendhal explored the individual's involvement in the complex network of social relations… …the Modernist writers however abandoned began to reflect a more fragmented image of the world, which was often pessimistic and introverted, exploring the alienated individual consciousness in retreat from the 'nightmare of history' of the modern society.

Ans to Q 7: Rejecting the 'naturalism' of the then recent European novel, Lukács returns tothe realist view that the novel reflects reality, not by

rendering its mere surface appearance, but by giving us 'a truer, more complete, more vivid and more dynamic reflection of reality.'

Ans to Q 8: Benjaminargues that modern technical innovations have profoundly altered the status of the 'work of art'… …artistic works are known for their uniqueness… …new media shatter the quasi-religious ethos of the supposed uniquely original work of art… …they are actually designed for reproducibility.

Ans to Q 9: Art and literature have a privileged place in Frankfurt thinking… …Adorno criticised Lukács' view of realism… …art's detachment from dominant reality gives it its special significance and power… …'autonomous' works have the power to 'negate' the reality to which they relate… …Adorno believed that art cannot simply reflect the social system, but acts within that reality… …'Art is the negative knowledge of the actual world.'

Ans to Q 10: Althusser defines ideology as 'a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'. The imaginary consciousness helps us to make sense of the world but also masks or represses our real relationship to it.

Ans to Q 11: Hegemony, Williams explained, related the 'whole social process' to structures of power and influence and thus to patterns of domination, subordination and opposition. It went beyond the formal operation of ideology and beyond the idea of social control as manipulation or indoctrination to see relations of power.



10.7 FURTHER READING

Seldon, Roman. (1985). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Great Britain: The Harvester University Press.

Bertens, Hans.(2001). *Literary Theory: The Basics* London: Routledge.

Barry, Peter. (2009). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory.* (3rd Edn) Manchester: Manchester University Press.



10.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the growth and development of Marxist Criticism and theory.

Q 2: What are the basic premises of Marxism? How did it influence literary activities?

Q 3: What does a Marxist critic usually do? Discuss in detail.

Q 4: Provide a detailed account of Soviet Socialist Realism. How did it influence literary practices of the time?

Q 5: The Soviet hostility to modernist novels can best be understood inthis context of Soviet socialist realism. Discuss.

Q 6: Discuss the contribution of the Frankfurt school towards the development of the Marxist aesthetics.

Q 7: Discuss ideology and hegemony as the two important concepts in Marxist criticism.

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UNIT 11: POST COLONIALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Introducing Postcolonialism

11.4 Major Thinkers/Theorists of Postcolonialism

- 11.4.1 Edward Said (1935 - 2004)
- 11.4.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942 -)
- 11.4.3 Franz Fanon (1925 - 1961)
- 11.4.4 Homi Bhabha (1949 -)

11.5 Important Concepts of Postcolonialism

- 11.5.1 Orientalism
- 11.5.2 The Idea of the “Subaltern”
- 11.5.3 Hybridity

11.6 Reception of Postcolonialism

11.7 Let us Sum up

11.8 Further Reading

11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.10 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss Postcolonialism as an important trend of Literary and Critical Theory
- trace the history of Postcolonial criticism and assess its significance
- make a list of the major critics of Postcolonialism and understand their contributions
- explain the concepts popularised by the postcolonial theorist and critics
- assess the significance of Postcolonialism in the subsequent critical/theoretical development in the humanities.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 3 of the course on Literary and Critical Theory I. In this unit, we shall discuss Postcolonialism and try to grasp the difficult ideas often discussed under Postcolonialism. We shall note that in around 1980s, Commonwealth literary studies and colonial discourse analysis became part of the then emergent field of literary, cultural, anthropological, political, economic, and historical enquiry. This emerging field is called Postcolonial studies. Whereas it tacitly assumed common ground between the cultural products of the former colonies and the culture of the metropolis, postcolonial theory and criticism emphasises the tension between the metropolis and the former colonies. At the heart of Postcolonial studies, there is a critique of Eurocentrism and a strong focus on those who in one way or another have become the victims of Eurocentric thought, attitudes, politics, exploitation, and other unwarranted intrusions. We shall learn from the unit that Postcolonial theory and criticism radically questions the expansionist premises of Imperialism of the colonisingpowers and, in particular, the system of values that supported Imperialism. Postcolonial theorists find the ambivalences and hybrid cultural forms the vantage points that allow them to expose the internal doubts and resistance that the West has so far suppressed.

11.3 INTRODUCING POSTCOLONIALISM

Postcolonial literature as well as criticism arose following the struggles of many nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, which now are referred to as the “tricontinent” rather than the “third world”, for independence from colonial rule. According to Robert Young, Postcolonial criticism has embraced a number of aims to re-examine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonised; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonised peoples and the colonisingpowers; to analyse the process of decolonisation; and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities.

Colonial/colonialism denotes the manner in which one culture appropriates the land, people and resources of another to further its imperialist ends. Edward Said defines Colonialism as the necessary consequence of imperialist practices and attitudes, thereby suggesting a causal relation- ship. As a consequence of colonial occupation and the discourses and practices generated and maintained by colonisers, the idea of Colonialism may also be said to designate the attributes of the specific political and epistemological discourses by which the colonising power defines those who are subjected to its rule. Postcolonialism in literary studies refers to literary texts produced in countries and cultures that were under the control of European powers at some point in their history.

Peter Barry provides a list of what Postcolonial critics usually do. They are as the following:

1. They reject the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature and seek to show its limitations of outlook, especially its general inability to empathise across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference.
2. They examine the representation of other cultures in literature as a way of achieving this end.
3. They show how such literature is often evasively and crucially silent on matters concerned with Colonisation and Imperialism.
4. They foreground questions of cultural difference and diversity and examine their treatment in relevant literary works.
5. They celebrate hybridity that is, the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture (for instance, that of the coloniser, through a colonial school system, and that of the colonised, through local and oral traditions).
6. They develop a perspective, not just applicable to Postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived 'Otherness' are seen as sources of energy and potential change.

The year 1950 saw the publication of some seminal texts of Postcolonialism: Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialism* and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*,

George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and so on. According to Robert Young, the "founding moment" of Postcolonial theory was the journal called *Tricontinental*, launched by the Havan Tricontinental of 1966, which "initiated the first global alliance of the peoples of the three continents against imperialism". Edward Said's landmark work *Orientalism* appeared in 1978. More recent works of Postcolonialism include *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin and *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990) by Gayatri Spivak as well as important works by Homi Bhabha, Benita Parry, and Kwame Anthony Appiah and so on. All these have shaped what we today call Postcolonial Studies.

Although Said, Bhabha, and Spivak still remain the most prominent influences, Postcolonial Studies, in recent years, can be said to have moved away considerably from its Poststructuralist inspiration. The broadly historical-materialist (Marxist) perspective that we find in a number of recent Postcolonial studies has also left its mark on Postcolonial literary studies. Especially Benita Parry and Robert Young (Young in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) have worked to direct attention to a politics grounded in the material, social, and existential conditions of the colonised people, Young's revisionist attitude towards religion, nationalism, pan-Africanism has substantially broadened our view and understanding of colonial and postcolonial resistance.

Interestingly, in postcolonial fiction we find a similar move away from some of the central concerns of postcolonial literary theory. Cultural self-definition and political self-determination are two sides of the same coin. The desire for cultural self-determination, or cultural independence, is one of the moving forces behind the literatures that sprang up in the former colonies in the 1960s and 1970s. Wilson Harris (Guyana), Yambo Ouologuem (Mali), Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), Wole Soyinka, the winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize for literature (also from Nigeria), Derek Alcott, the 1992 Nobel laureate (from Santa Lucia), and a whole range of other writers wrote novels and poems that respond to, and reflect their immediate cultural environment. In their response to specific cultural contexts, these texts signal the emergence of new national literatures. The desire to draw directly on

one's own culture is defended vigorously in an essay called "Colonialist Criticism" (1974) by Chinua Achebe. Arguing that the 'universal' qualities that Western criticism is'universal', he attacks the idea that literary art should transcend its time and place. Paradoxically, his own magnum opus *Things Fall Apart* (1958), describes the effects of colonialism on an Igbo community in moving detail, and is liked by audiences all over the world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What does the term Postcolonialism signify?

Q 2: What do postcolonial critics usually do?

11.4 MAJOR THINKERS/THEORISTS OF POSTCOLONIALISM

The following are some of the important theorists whose works established Post colonialism as an important critical and theoretical phase in recent times. However, the entries are too short. We shall do well to read about them in detail in the books from Further Reading.

11.4.1 Edward Said (1935–2004)

Known as a literary and cultural theorist, Edward Said was born in Jerusalem, Palestine. He received his BA from Princeton in 1960, and his PhD from Harvard in 1964. From 1963 until his death, he was Parr Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He was also visiting professor at prestigious universities like Harvard, Stanford, Johns Hopkins, and Yale. Said's thinking has embraced three broad imperatives:

Firstly, to articulate the cultural position and task of the intellectual and literary critic. Said's formulations in this area, influenced by Foucault, provided a crucial impetus to the so-called New Historicism in the 1980s which was in part a reaction against the tendencies of Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction either to isolate literature from its various contexts or to reduce those contexts to an indiscriminate "textuality."

Secondly, Said's concern has been to examine the historical production and motivations of Western discourses about the Orient in general, and about Islam in particular.

Thirdly, he makes an attempt to bring to light and clarify the Palestinian struggle to regain a homeland. Some regarded him as a model of the politically engaged scholar while others viewed his enterprise as incoherent.

Beginnings (1975) is Said's first influential book. Focusing on the question "What is a beginning?" Said, in this book, Said traces the ramifications and diverse understanding of this concept in history. Here he adapted insights from the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico's *New Science* (1744). Said defines beginning as its own method, as a first step in the intentional production of meaning, and as the production of difference from pre-existing traditions. Said argues that the novel represents the major attempt in Western literary culture to give beginnings an authorisingfunction in experience, art, and knowledge. In postmodernist literature, beginning embodies an effort to achieve knowledge and art through a "violently transgressive" language. In his next book *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Said argues that critical theory has retreated into a "labyrinth of textuality" whereby it betrays its "insurrectionary" beginnings in the 1960s.

Orientalism (1978) is perhaps Said's one of the most important achievements. Here, Said examines the vast tradition of Western "constructions" of the Orient. This tradition of Orientalism has been a "corporate institution" for coming to terms with the Orient, for authorisingviews about it, and ruling over it. Central to Said's analysis is that the Orient is actually a production of Western discourse, a means of self-definition of Western culture as well as of justifying imperial domination of Oriental peoples. Said concentrates on the modern history of British, French, and American engagement with primarily the Islamic world. Given his crucial treatment of Orientalism as a discourse, his aim is not to show that

this politically motivated edifice of language somehow distorts a "real" Orient, but rather to show that it is indeed a language, with an internal consistency, motivation, and capacity for representation resting on a relationship of power and hegemony over the Orient. Said's subsequent book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) is a continuation of the themes raised in *Orientalism* in that it examines the power relations between Occident and Orient hinted at in the earlier work in a more focused manner. Said's uniqueness as a cultural critic lay in the range of his interests, which allowed him to explore the nexus of connections between literature, politics, and religion in a global rather than national or Eurocentric context.



LET US KNOW

The book *Orientalism* is an attempt to display Orientalism as a complex example of the politically and ideologically rooted nature of all discourse, even those forms which have been veiled under the mantle of innocence. Thus, according to Said, "liberal cultural heroes" such as Mill, Arnold, and Carlyle all had views, usually overlooked, on race and imperialism (*Orientalism*, 14). Using a vast range of examples, from Aeschylus' play *The Persians* through Macaulay, Renan, and Marx to Gustave von Grunbaum and the *Cambridge History of Islam*, Said attempts to examine the stereotypes and distortions through which Islam and the East have been consumed. These stereotypes include: Islam as a heretical imitation of Christianity (*Orientalism*, 65–66); the exotic sexuality of the Oriental woman (*Orientalism*, 187); Islam as a uniquely unitary phenomenon and as a culture incapable of innovation (*Orientalism*, 296–298). Also considering America's twentieth-century relations with the Arab world, Said suggests that the electronic postmodern world reinforces dehumanised portrayals of the Arabs, a tendency both aggravated by the Arab–Israeli conflict and intensely felt by Said himself as a Palestinian.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are some of the imperatives of Edward Said?

Q 4: What is the significance of Edward Said's book *Orientalism?*

11.4.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942—)

Gayatri Spivak was Born in Calcutta, and was educated at both Indian and American universities. She was a student of Paul de Man at Cornell University. She is known for her translation of and lengthy preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, her central concern with the structures of colonialism, the postcolonial subject, and the possibility of postcolonial discourse drawn on deconstructive practices, the feminist movement, Marxism, and Freud. In her influential and controversial essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1983), later expanded in her book *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), she addresses precisely this issue of whether peoples in subordinate, colonised positions are able to achieve a voice. A "subaltern" refers to an officer in a subordinate position; the term was used by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to refer to the working masses that needed to be organised by left-wing intellectuals into a politically self-conscious force. The term as Spivak uses it also insinuates the "Subaltern Studies Group" in India, a radical group that attempted to articulate and give voice to the struggles of the oppressed peasants of the Indian subcontinent.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has drawn our attention to the large majority of the colonised people who had left no mark upon history, simply because they could not, and were not allowed to make themselves heard. Spivak is also supposed to be the first postcolonial theorist with a fully feminist agenda, which includes the complicity of female writers with imperialism. Spivak writes in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism"

(1985): "It should not be possible to read 19th century British fiction without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English."

11.4.3 Franz Fanon (1925–1961)

Franz Fanon was a leading third world intellectual whose work helped inspire the struggle against colonialism and influenced the growth of postcolonial culture. Thus, he became one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century with his views on third world struggle against colonial oppression. He is also one of the most powerful voices of revolutionary thought in the 20th century. Born on the French Martinique, Fanon fought against Nazism in France where he subsequently trained as a psychiatrist. His origins and his experience in both Martinique and France exposed him to the issues of racism and colonialism. An important influence on him was his teacher Aimé Césaire, a leader of the so-called **Negritude movement** which called for cultural separation rather than assimilation of the Blacks. Fanon's books included *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), translated as *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), which explored the psychological effects of racism and colonialism. This book includes the important chapter 'The Fact of Blackness," which describes Fanon's growing awareness of racism in France. As stated already this book shows the strong influence of Fanon's psychiatric training, as he concentrates primarily on the impact of racism and colonialism on the psyche of the black. It also engages in a critical dialogue with French Existentialism, particularly that of Jean Paul Sartre, and exhibits the influence of the *negritude* movement which called for a distinctive black cultural identity rather than complete assimilation into French culture in the 1940s and 1950s.

In 1954, while Fanon was working as a psychiatrist in Algeria, the Algerians rebelled against French rule. The violent struggle for

Algerian independence was led by the National Liberation Front. Fanon edited the Front's newspaper and remained involved in the revolution until his death in 1961. Fanon produced a number of writings connected with Algerian and African revolution; his most comprehensive and influential work was *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), translated as *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). This book analysed the conditions and requirements for effective anti-colonial revolution from a Marxist perspective. It also articulated the connections between class and race. Fanon's works have been an inspiration to the black movement in the United States during the 1960. At the same time, he was a key theoretical resource for the generation of intellectuals and writers who struggled to create viable postcolonial cultural identities in Africa and elsewhere. In the last decades of the 20th century, Fanon was joined by scholars, such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, who often drew on Poststructuralist theorists in describing the postcolonial condition.

11.4.4 Homi Bhabha (1949—)

Homi Bhabha extends certain tenets of Poststructuralism into his discussion of colonialism, nationality, and culture. These tenets include a challenging of the notion of fixed identity, the undermining of binary oppositions, and an emphasis on language as underlying our understanding of cultural phenomena. He is one of the most prominent postcolonial theorists, and has stated the following that postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south. These theorists formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within modernity. He further opined that the Postcolonial perspective is a substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity– progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the

long past. For Bhabha, the postcolonial perspective has that disruptive potential because the effects of colonialism have in a curious way foreshadowed current poststructuralist views and concerns.

One of the questions that is central to the work of Homi Bhabha is what actually happens in the cultural interaction between coloniser and colonised. In earlier writings on colonialism, such an interaction had often been denied. Aime Cesaire, for instance, claimed in his *Discourse on Colonialism* that between coloniser and colonised there is '[n]o human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonisingman into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production'. Rethinking questions of identity, social agency and national affiliation, Bhabha provides a working theory of cultural hybridity – one that goes far beyond previous attempts by others. In his seminal book *The Location of Culture (1994),* he uses concepts such as mimicry, interstice, hybridity, and liminality to argue that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent. In this book he writes about the way in which colonial subjects are represented as colonial stereotypes.

Bhabha also draws on Frantz Fanon's revolutionary work on colonialism, as well as on the concept of "nation" as defined in Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* (1983). The notion of "hybridity" is central to Bhabha's work in challenging notions of identity, culture, and nation as coherent and unified entities that exhibit a linear historical development. Hybridity expresses a state of "in betweenness," as in a person who stands between two cultures. The West has always been convinced that its presence overseas greatly affected the 'natives', but has never been comfortable with the idea that its sons and daughters might in their turn be affected by the cultures they encountered. It is mostly in literature that we find alternative perspectives. In Joseph Conrad's

Heart of Darkness (1899) the colonial experience has the effect of turning the ivory collector Kurtz into a megolamaniacal barbarian and in E.M. Forster's *Passage to India* (1924) two British women suffer permanently unsettling experiences in India. For Bhabha, who is a major theorist of the subjectivities of coloniser and colonised, their encounter always affects both. Colonialism, with the displacements and terrible uncertainties that it brings, is such a radically unsettling 'affective experience of marginality that the plight of the colonised subject can be seen as prefiguring poststructuralist indeterminacy and fragmentation. However, the colonial experience also affects the coloniser. More specifically, for Bhabha the coloniser cannot escape a complex and paradoxical relationship with the colonised. Drawing on Lacan's views of the way identity gets constructed, Bhabha offers an analysis in which the identity of the coloniser–in Bhabha's work the British coloniser of India – cannot very well be separated from that of the colonised. The coloniser's identity has no 'origin' in himself and is not a fixed entity, but is differential, a product of relations. The 'British' identity of the coloniser as coloniser can only become a 'reality' after the colonial contact which truly confirms it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Discuss briefly Homi Bhabha's contributions to Postcolonial studies?

Q 6: Discuss Bhabha's notion of "hybridity"?

11.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS OF POSTCOLONIALISM

The following are some of the important concepts of Post Colonialism.

11.5.1 Orientalism

Postcolonial studies perhaps start with the publication of Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978). Drawing on Foucault and,

to a lesser extent, Gramsci, Said's study deeply influenced the agenda of the study of non-Western cultures and their literatures and pushed it in the direction of what we now call Postcolonial theory. The book *Orientalism* is a devastating critique of how through the ages, but particularly in the 19th century Western texts have represented the East, and more specifically the Islamic Middle East during the heyday of imperialist expansion. Using British and French 'scholarly works . . . works of literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, religious and philological studies', Said examines how these texts *construct* the Orient through imaginative representations, through seemingly factual descriptions (in journalistic reports and travel writing), and through claims to knowledge about Oriental history and culture (histories, anthropological writings, academic studies etc.). Together, all these texts constitute a Foucauldian *discourse* that constructs a field of supposed 'knowledge'. Such discourses, although seemingly interested in knowledge, always establish relationships of power and for Said, the West's representations of the East ultimately work within the framework of a conscious and determined effort at subordination.

For Said, the concept of Orientalism has traditionally served 'hegemonic' purposes. According to Antonio Gramsci 'hegemony' which means domination by consent, is the way the ruling class succeeds in oppressing other classes with their apparent approval. In Gramsci's analysis, it does so through culture: the ruling class makes its own values and interests central in what it presents as a common and neutral culture. Orientalism has traditionally served two purposes—one it has legitimised Western imperialism in the eyes of Western governments and their electorates, and second, it has insidiously worked to convince the East that Western culture represented 'universal' civilisation. For Said, Western representations of the Orient, no matter how well intentioned, have always been part of this damaging discourse.

However, many shortcomings, it revolutionised the way Western scholars and critics looked at representations of non-Western subjects and cultures. Said's book drew attention to the way in which the discourse of Orientalism serves to create the West as well as the East. West and East form a binary opposition in which the two poles define each other. The inferiority that Orientalism attributes to the East simultaneously serves to construct the West's superiority. The sensuality, irrationality, primitiveness, and despotism of the East in fact construct the West as rational, democratic, and progressive. The West always functions as the 'centre' and the East is a marginal 'other' that simply through its existence confirms the West's centrality and superiority.

Thus, the concept of Orientalism offered a challenging theoretical framework and a new perspective on the interpretation of Western writing about the East as well as other non-Western cultures.

11.5.2 The idea of the "Subaltern"

Of all postcolonial theorists, Spivak has most consistently focused on what has come to be called the "subaltern"—literally, the category of those who are lower in position or who are always appropriate to the colonial situation, and are lower in rank. Spivak employs the term to describe the lower layers of colonial and postcolonial society: the homeless, the unemployed, the subsistence farmers, the day labourers–in short, those groups with the least power of all. Speaking about the female subaltern—a very large and differentiated category among the colonised, she argues that women has traditionally been doubly marginalised. As she states, "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow."

In her seminal essay **"Can the Subaltern Speak?"**, Spivak, in the wider context of a critique of what she sees as appropriations

of the colonial subject, examines the 19th century controversy between the colonised Indians and their British colonisers over what she calls 'widow-sacrifice'—the burning of widows on the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands. Spivak concludes that neither party allowed women – the victims of this practice – to speak. The British texts construct a position for the woman in which she is made to represent Western individualism and, by implication, a superior Western civilisation that emphasises modern freedom, while the Indian ones present her as choosing duty and tradition. Although both parties claim that they have them on their side, the women themselves remain unheard. It is this concern with misrepresentation that had led Spivak to intervene in the project of the so-called Subaltern Studies group, a group of Indian historians trying to write history outside the frameworks of both colonialism and Indian elite politics.



LET US KNOW

"Subaltern" was first deployed as a critical term by the Italian communist thinker Antonio Gramsci. In his use, it refers to the non-elite classes, including the proletariat. In India however, the term "Subaltern" became prominent through its discussion around the late 1970s and early 1980s by a group of Marxist historians who later became known as the "Subaltern Studies Group". These historians adapted Gramscian ideas about hegemony, subordination, and "subalternity" within a discourse designed to contest the dominance of elitist historiographies of colonial India. Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyanendra Pandey, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are some of the most prominent members of the Indian group.

For Spivak, the naive traditional faith in reconstructing history of the Subaltern Studies group – 'real historical experience' as one of them put it – no matter how well intentioned could only lead to

further damage. It is because we must take the 'subaltern' seriously. Spivak combines a Marxist perspective – the emphasis on class as a differentiating factor – with a deconstructionist approach to texts and to identity. In dealing with colonialist texts, she tries to demonstrate how they attain their coherence by setting up false oppositions between a supposed centre and an equally fictive margin and how their language invariably deconstructs the coherence, they try to establish. Given this perspective, Spivak cannot very well escape the conclusion that our identity is without a fixed centre and inherently unstable.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What do you mean by the term Subaltern?

11.5.3 Hybridity

The concept of the hybrid made considerable strides into the vocabulary of cultural studies during the 1990s in the context of discussions about globalisation, diaspora cultures and Postcolonialism. Perhaps the most influential of Bhabha's contributions to postcolonial theory is his notion of *hybridity*. While Said's *Orientalism* keeps the spheres of coloniser and colonised rather firmly apart, Bhabha, with his interest in their interaction, sees important movements going both ways. Shifting his focus from 'the noisy command of colonial authority' and 'the silent repression of native traditions' to 'the colonial hybrid', Bhabha argues that the cultural interaction of coloniser and colonised leads to a fusion of cultural forms that from one perspective, and confirms the power of the colonial presence, but that as a form of mimicry simultaneously 'unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power'. Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence. Thus, Bhabha's focus on interaction and his notion of

hybridity have sharpened our awareness of what actually happens (or may happen) under the colonial or postcolonial situation.

11.6 RECEPTION OF POSTCOLONIALISM

Early voices of anti-imperialism stressed the need to develop or return to indigenous literary traditions so as to exercise their cultural heritage of the spectres of imperial domination. Other voices advocated an adaptation of Western ideals toward their own political and cultural ends. The fundamental framework of postcolonial thought has been furnished by the Marxist critique of colonialism and imperialism, which has been adapted to their localised contexts by thinkers from Frantz Fanon to Gayatri Spivak.

The importance of postcolonial criticism within contemporary literary studies is reflected in the number of good introductions that have appeared in the last ten years. Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (2nd edn 2005) provides a very readable historical overview of literary writing from both the colonial and the postcolonial period that in one way or another is concerned with imperialism. Other useful guides include Gareth Griffiths, *African Literatures in English, East and West* (2000), Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction* (2003), Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (2006), S. Patke Rajeev, *Postcolonial Poetry in English* (2006), and Richard J. Lane, *The Postcolonial Novel* (2006).

Under the influence of important theorists such as Bhabha, the postcolonial often was 'associated', in Elleke Boehmer's terms, 'with metropolitan, diasporic, migrant and minority spaces for which the nation as a horizon of expectation had retreated'. However, the most recent generation of postcolonial writers has moved beyond such a privileging of hybridity. They 'work', to quote Boehmer again, 'to build local "structures of feeling" positioned at several removes from the dominant North, drawn from their life worlds', to the point that contemporary African novelists 'turn increasingly towards local audiences and narrative traditions, and away from the implied European reader'. In what seems a post postcolonial development, Europe no longer dominates the cultural horizon. However, this is not the complete story of contemporary literatures in English.

The effects of globalisation, hybridisation, and nationalism always attract the scholars of postcolonial studies. Most recent postcolonial literary criticism focuses specifically on literatures produced by subjects in the context of colonial domination, most notably in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. The concerns of postcolonial literary studies overlap with those of race and ethnicity studies, a broad field that examines a wide array of topics.



11.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, I am sure, we have gained some ideas regarding Postcolonial studies, which critically analyses the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, from the earliest days of colonial exploration. Drawing on Foucault's notion of 'discourses', on Gramsci's 'hegemony', on Derrida's Deconstruction, and on Marxism, it focuses on the role of texts, literary and otherwise, in the colonial enterprise. It examines how these texts construct the coloniser's superiority and the colonised's inferiority, and in so doing have legitimated colonisation. You have learnt that Postcolonial Studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines the global impact of European colonialism, from its beginnings in the 15th century up to the present. Broadly speaking, it aims to describe the mechanisms of colonial power, to recover excluded or marginalised "subaltern" voices, and to theorise the complexities of colonial and postcolonial identity, national belonging, and globalisation. Following the groundbreaking Edward Said's *Orientalism,* Postcolonial critics have examined the ways in which Western representations of third world countries serve the political interests of their makers. Postcolonial critics problematise any kind of objective perception, pointing out the unbalanced power relations that typically shape the production of knowledge. In this unit, you have read about the major exponents of Postcolonial studies who include important names like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. We have in this unit also learnt about important concepts like Orientalism, Hybridity, Subaltern and so on.



11.8 FURTHER READING

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11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Postcolonialism refers to literary practices in the countries and cultures that were under the control of European powers at some point in their history… …Postcolonialism re-examines the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonised… …determines the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonised peoples and the colonising powers… …analyses the process of decolonisation… …participates in the goals of political liberation.

Ans to Q 2: They reject claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature… …examine the representation of other cultures in literature… …expose how such literature is often evasively and crucially silent on matters concerned with Colonisation and Imperialism… …foreground questions of cultural difference… …celebrate hybridity… …conditions of marginality, plurality and 'Otherness' are seen as productive sources for potential change.

Ans to Q 3: To articulate the cultural position and task of the intellectual and literary critic…. … to examine the historical production and motivations of Western discourses about the Orient in general, and about Islam in particular…. …to bring to light and clarify the Palestinian struggle to regain a homeland.

Ans to Q 4: In the book *Orientalism,* Said examines the vast tradition of Western "constructions" of the Orient… …he opined that Orientalism helped to come in terms with the Orient, for authorising views about it, and ruling over it… …central to Said's analysis is that the Orient is actually a production of Western discourse.

Ans to Q 5: One of the questions that is central to the work of Homi Bhabha is what actually happens in the cultural interaction between coloniser and colonised…. …rethinking questions of identity, social agency and

national affiliation, Bhabha provides a working theory of cultural hybridity… ... in his seminal book *The Location of Culture (1994),* he writes about the way in which colonial subjects are represented as colonial stereotypes.

Ans to Q 6: The notion of "hybridity" is central to Bhabha's work… … "hybridity" expresses a state of "in betweenness," as in a person who stands between two cultures… …he viewed that the encounter between coloniser and colonised always affects both.

Ans to Q 7: The subaltern literally refers the lower in position or who are always appropriate to the colonial situation, and are lower in rank… …Gayatri Spivak employs the term to describe the lower layers of colonial and postcolonial society: the homeless, the unemployed, the subsistence farmers, the day labourers… …in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak examines the 19th century controversy between the colonised Indians and their British colonisers.



11.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What does a Postcolonial critic usually do? Discuss with reference to some of the renowned critics of Postcolonialism.

Q 2: How do the Postcolonial critics view the processes of 'representation' under colonialism? Elaborate.

Q 3: Do you think that Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity best serves as an answer to the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised? Discuss.

Q 4: In what ways, do you think, Edward Said's book *Orientalism* inaugurated what we call Postcolonial studies?

Q 5: Discuss the contribution of Gayatri Spivak to Postcolonial Studies with reference to the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak"?

Q 6: What, according to you, is the significance of Franz Fanon's contributions to Postcolonial discussions of the plight of the Black people?

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UNIT 12: FEMINISMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Introducing Feminism

12.4 Different Phases of Feminism

12.4.1 First Wave Feminism

12.4.2 Second Wave Feminism

12.4.3 Third Wave Feminism

12.5 Other Trends of Feminism

12.5.1 Socialist/Marxist Feminism

12.5.2 French Feminism

12.6 Reception of Feminism

12.7 Let us Sum up

12.8 Further Reading

12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

12.10 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss Feminism as an important trend in Literary Theory
- trace the history of Feminism in terms of its various phases
- make a list of the major critics associated with the feminist movement and understand their contributions
- explain the concepts popularised by the feminist thinkers and critics
- assess the significance of Feminism in the subsequent critical/ theoretical development in the humanities.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

Feminism came into vogue in English usage around 1890s, with women's conscious struggle to resist patriarchy and to disturb the

established patriarchal culture, to assert a belief in sexual equality, and to eradicate sexist domination in the transformation of society. In recent times, Feminist Criticism, in all its many and various manifestations, has also attempted to free itself from naturalised patriarchal notions of the literary and the literary-critical. In this respect, you may argue that Feminism and feminist criticism may better be termed a *cultural politics* than a 'theory' or 'theories'. It is because, feminist criticism is part of the broader political movement that seeks to rectify all sorts of discrimination and inequalities based on gender. Thus, it is pertinent to state that there is not one but many feminisms. In their literary criticism, many feminist critics, however, have attempted to expose the masculinist stereotypes in male-centric literature. Instead, they have turned to study female creativity, genres, styles, themes, careers, and literary traditions and to discover and evaluate lost and neglected literary works by women. Besides, some feminists, like the French counterparts, often seek develop feminist theoretical concepts and methods. By the time we finish reading this unit, besides being introduced to the various feminist critics, we shall also be able to discuss how Feminist theory and criticism have brought revolutionary change into literary and cultural studies by critiquing sexist representations and values, by stressing the importance of gender and sexuality, and by proposing institutional and social reforms.

12.3 INTRODUCING FEMINISM

Feminism takes into considerations the different campaigns, activities, and texts concerned with challenging and transforming the ways women are treated and represented in society. It is in fact a political movement and discourse that encompass a diverse range of perspectives, theories, and methods. Besides analysing patriarchal set up, Feminist theory seeks to propose new ways of 'reading' women to bring about social change. Such a drive undercuts feminist activities ranging from public campaigns for political rights for women, to the search for a new writing that may be termed 'feminine'. For the convenience of discussion, the history of Western feminism can be divided into three movements or "waves". The **"First**

Wave" dates from the end of the 18th century through the beginning of Suffragette (1918-28) and New Women's movements in Britain and the US. The 1960s, on the other hand, signalled the beginnings of the **"Second Wave"** with collective campaign by women on a broad range of issues like sexual health and contraception, domestic abuse, and gender discrimination in the workplace and so on. However, feminist theory in later periods, which may be roughly called the **"Third Wave"** is marked by the emergence of three different models: **Liberal Feminism**, which focuses on achieving full equality and opportunities within existing social structures; **Radical Feminism**, which is revolutionary rather than reformative in its conviction that creating alternative, woman centered institutions and realities will bring about social change; and **Socialist Feminism**, which sees "femaleness" and "femininity" as socially and historically contingent, and is concerned with the economic and cultural contexts of women's oppression.

It is important for you to discuss the history of Western feminism. You should note that Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is often regarded as a beginning of modern feminism in Britain. Here, Wollstonecraft called for reform against the social, political, and economic marginalisation of women at a time when the question of the "rights of man" was being debated in France and the US. She argued that that the existing social structures constructed female inequality as "natural" and that women do not choose to behave as they do, but are instead 'enslaved' by a society that forces them to behave in certain "sentimental" ways. She even identified gallantry and sensibility as major social fabrications which had been developed (by men) to encourage women's subordination. The overarching problem, she argued, was women's lack of access to education, which held them in a "state of perpetual childhood". The book *The Vindication* became an immediate international success and was quickly translated into other languages and published. Following Wollstonecraft's articulation of 'femininity' as a condition resembling slavery, encouraged American women involve themselves in antislavery campaigns and turn their attention to female suffrage.

LET US KNOW



Women writers and women readers always had to work 'against the grain'. For instance, Aristotle declared that 'the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities', and St Thomas Aquinas believed that woman is an 'imperfect man'. When John Donne wrote 'Air and Angels' he alluded to (but did not refute) Aquinas's theory that form is masculine and matter feminine: the superior, godlike, male intellect impresses its form upon the malleable, inert, female matter. Thus, you will be surprised to how, throughout the history of Western culture, women have been viewed as inferior to men. Feminism seeks to counter such a treatment of women.

In Britain, in the second half of the 19th century, debates about women's lack of access to education expanded into a wider questioning of women's political inequality. Gradually, the terms "feminism" and "feminist" entered public usage by the 1890s. The British philosophers and political theorists John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor developed aspects of Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist thought, campaigning for women' suffrage and equal access to education. Mill, in his famous *The Subjection of Women* (1869) argued that all women were repressed citizens. Although *The subjection* is recognised as a progressive feminist text in its call for gender equality, Mill's stance has been criticised for its refusal to question women's position in the domestic sphere. The latter part of the 19th century, following the activities of National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), and Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the British suffrage movement represented a demand for equality, grounded in political and legislative reform.

The passing of the 1928 Representation of the People Act marked the culmination of over six decades of political and social agitation, and extended the partial suffrage that women had received ten years previously in 1918. The same period is marked by different sorts of literary experimentation and innovation to address the relation between women

and literature, and gender and language, by noted authors such as Virginia Woolf, Hilda Dolittle, Edith Wharton, Zola Neale Hurston, and Djuna Barnes. The most influential of these was Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). This small book addresses the question of "women and fiction" and the various ways in which this relationship had been imagined. Her underlying and much celebrated assertion is that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction". She argued: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size". She also highlights how woman's exclusion from electoral and civil privilege is not the result of political legislation and economic inequity only, but also of cultural mores. She foregrounded why women need to undertake critical and creative activity alongside political activity. Sketching out a critical language for addressing questions about gender and sexuality, the canon and literary production, and language and subjectivity, *A Room of One's Own* foreshadows many of the debates that characterise the **"Second Wave"** feminism, and remains one of the most influential texts of the 20th century.

Feminist criticism till 1960s formed part of the broader cultural questioning and collective challenges to authority made by civil rights, student, and antiwar movements. Drawing on previous suffragette activities, women once again began to form organised political bodies, including the liberal National Organisation for Women (NOW) in 1966. Rooted in a conviction that sexism (which means women's subordination to men), is one of the main causes of the cause of women's oppression, **radical feminism** stressed women's experiences of subjugation as women. A key aim was to encourage all women to become involved in political activity and to challenge the separation between the personal and the political.

Of pressing concern to many Anglo- American and European theorists from the late 1960s onward were the androcentric scripts of Freudian psychoanalysis and, in particular, a representation of woman as **"lacking a sexual organ".** Constructions of woman as lack or absence are addressed in two seminal texts of **"Second Wave"** feminist criticism, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*

(both published in Britain in 1970). Millett in particular established an influential reading of Freudian 'penis envy' as a misogynist model, which disallowed the little girl any desire of her own other than to become a man. Alternatively, the British psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell presented a feminist revision of Freudian psychoanalysis in her study *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), which argued Freud's theories opened up new ways of thinking about the construction of sexual subjectivity for women. The 1970s saw serious critical attention paid to women's writing and its traditions by Anglo-American academics. The focus on the sexist ideologies underlying the male-authored canon integral to "images of women" criticism was followed by a female centered approach or, in Elaine Showalter's coinage, **"gynocritics,"** that is, an approach that was engaged with "woman as writer – with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women".



LET US KNOW

In the second half of the decade, there appeared three key texts of feminist thinking: Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*, *British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Offering revisionist literary histories, these works were concerned with rereading women writers with established literary reputations (such as Jane Austen, the Brontes, Emily Dickinson, and Ann Radcliffe), but also with extending the female canon to recover forgotten or marginalised female writers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Discuss the main concerns of Feminism or feminist criticism.

Q 2: What are the different phases or waves of Feminism?

Q 3: Name some of the important texts that introduced feminist criticism.

12.4 DIFFERENT PHASES/WAVES OF FEMINISM

In the previous section, you have been provided some glimpse of the different 'phases' or 'waves' of Feminism. This section will, however, help you to discuss them in some greater detail.

12.4.1 First Wave Feminism

The activities of the **First Wave** Feminism may be seen mainly through the works of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir (the others being Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, Rebecca West, and so on). Virginia Woolf is often considered 'the founding mother of the contemporary debate' as she 'announces' many of the issues later feminist critics were to focus on and who herself becomes the terrain over which some debates have struggled; and Simone de Beauvoir, with whose *The Second Sex* (1949), the **"First Wave"** may be said to end.

Virginia Woolf's (1882-1941) fame rests on her being a very talented woman writer. However, many feminist critics have analysed her novels from different perspectives. It has been unanimously accepted that *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) are her important contributions to Feminist criticism—the first focussing on the history and social context of women's literary production, and the second on the relations between male power and the professions like law, education, medicine, etc. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argued that women's writing should explore female experience and not form a comparative assessment of women's experience in relation to men's. The essay therefore forms an early statement and exploration of the possibility of a distinctive tradition of women's writing.

Woolf's general contribution to feminism, however, is her recognition that gender identity is socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed. However, feminist criticism, she seemed to have argued, also need to continually examine the problems facing women writers. She believed that women had always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions, and was herself conscious of the restricted education she had received (she was taught no Greek, for example, unlike her brothers). Rejecting a 'feminist' consciousness, and hoping that she might 'escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness' (*A Room of One's Own*), she appropriated the Bloomsbury sexual ethic of **'androgyny'** and tried to achieve a balance between a 'male' self-realisation and 'female' self annihilation.



LET US KNOW

Virginia Woolf in her essay "Professions for Women" regards her own career as hindered in two ways. First, she was imprisoned and constrained by the dominant ideologies of womanhood. Second, the taboo about expressing female passion prevented her from 'telling the truth about [her] own experiences as a body'. Her attempts to write about the experiences of women, therefore, were aimed at discovering linguistic ways of describing the confined life of women, and she believed that when women finally achieved social and economic equality with men, there would be nothing to prevent them from freely developing their artistic talents.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) the French feminist, marks the moment when "**First Wave"** feminism begins to slip over into the "**Second Wave"**. Her book *The Second Sex* (1949) established with great clarity the fundamental questions of modern feminism. She stated that when a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying 'I am a woman': no man would do so. This fact reveals the

basic asymmetry between the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine': man defines the human, not woman, in an imbalance, which goes back to the Old Testament. Being dispersed among men, women do not have no separate history, no natural solidarity; nor have they combined as other oppressed groups have. Woman is riveted into a lop-sided relationship with man: he is the 'One', she the 'Other'. She further argued that Man's dominance has secured an ideological climate of compliance: 'legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth', and, the assumption of woman as 'Other' is further internalised by women themselves.

De Beauvoir's work carefully distinguishes between sex and gender, and sees an interaction between social and natural functions as she states: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman . . . it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature . . . Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*." It is the systems of interpretation in relation to biology, psychology, reproduction, economics, etc. which constitute the (male) presence of that 'someone else'. Making the crucial distinction between 'being female' and being constructed as 'a woman', de Beauvoir can posit the destruction of patriarchy if women will only break out of their objectification.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Name some of the important texts that introduced "First Wave" Feminism.

Q 5: In what ways, can Virginia Woof and Simone de Beauvoir be labelled as Feminist critics?

12.4.2 Second Wave Feminism

"Second Wave" feminism and feminist criticism are very much a product of the liberationist movements of the mid-to-late

1960s. Although it continues to share the "**First Wave's"** fight for women's rights in all areas, its focal emphasis shifts to the politics of reproduction, to women's 'experience', to sexual 'difference' and to 'sexuality', as a form of oppression as well as something to celebrate. Five main points are involved in most discussions of sexual difference: biology, experience, discourse, the unconscious, and social and economic conditions. The critics state that the arguments which treat biology as fundamental and which play down socialisation have been used mainly by men to keep women 'in their place'. If a woman's body is her destiny, then all attempts to question 'attributed' sex-roles will be essentialised. On the other hand, some radical feminists celebrate women's biological attributes as sources of superiority rather than inferiority, while others appeal to the special *experience* of woman as the source of positive female values in life and in art. Since only women, the argument goes, have undergone those specifically female life-experiences (ovulation, menstruation, giving birth), only they can speak of a woman's life. They further state that a woman's experience includes a different perceptual and emotional life, because women do not see things in the same ways as men and have different ideas and feelings about what is important or not.

Perhaps the most influential critic of the second wave is the American Feminist critic Elaine Showalter. In her book *A Literature of their Own: British Women novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) she traces the history of women's literature, suggesting that it can be divided into three phases:

Feminine: In the Feminine phase, (1840–1880) women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalised its assumptions about female nature. This phase includes Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot.

Feminist: The Feminist phase (1880–1920) was characterised by women's writing that protested against male standards and values, and advocated women's rights and values,

including a demand for autonomy. This phase includes such radical feminist writers as Elizabeth Robins and Olive Schreiner.

Female: The Female phase (1920—) is one of self-discovery. Showalter says, "women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" For Showalter, Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson were its most important early 'female' novelists.

Most feminists, however, consider that women have been brainwashed by this type of patriarchal ideology, which produces stereotypes of strong men and feeble women. Certain themes, then, dominate **"Second Wave"** Feminism: the omnipresence of patriarchy; the inadequacy for women of existing political organisation; and the celebration of women's difference as central to the cultural politics of liberation. In addition, these can be found running through many major **"Second Wave"** writings, like Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), which explores the destructive neutralisation of women within patriarchy, through the critical reassessments of socialism and psychoanalysis, to the radical (lesbian) feminism of Kate Millett and Adrienne Rich. In feminist literary theory more particularly, it leads to the emergence of so-called "Anglo-American" criticism, an empirical approach adopted by the **'gynocriticism'** of Elaine Showalter. This type of criticism concentrates on the specificity of women's writing, on recuperating a tradition of women authors, and on examining in detail women's own culture. Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' to describe literary criticism based in a feminine perspective. Probably the best description Showalter gives of 'gynocritics' is in *Toward a Feminist Poetics*: "In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to

adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture."



LET US KNOW

Anglo American Feminism is in dispute with the more theoretically driven 'French' feminist criticism, which draws especially on the work of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, and emphasises not the *gender* of the writer ('female') but the 'writing-effect' of the text ('feminine') hence, **Ecriture** feminism. It is worth noting here that this distinction between 'Anglo- American' and 'French' feminist criticisms is a significant faultline in **"Second Wave"** developments, and distinguishes two dominant and influential movements in critical theory since 1960s.

Another influential Feminist from the **"Second Wave"** is **Kate Millet** who is an American feminist writer, artist and activist. Millett is best known for her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) marks a moment when "**Second Wave"** feminism becomes a highly visible, self-aware and activist movement. Millett held the view that economic inequality is the cause of women's oppression. This was an argument which opened up **"Second Wave"** thinking about reproduction, sexuality and representation (especially verbal and visual 'images of women', and particularly pornography). Millett's title, *Sexual Politics*, announces her view of 'patriarchy', which she sees as pervasive and which demands 'a systematic overview as a political institution'. She opined that patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women. She borrows from social science the important distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', where sex is determined

biologically but 'gender' is a psychological concept, which refers to *culturally* acquired sexual identity. She recognises that women as much as men perpetuate these attitudes and the acting-out of these sex-roles in the unequal and repressive relations of domination and subordination is what Millett calls 'sexual politics'.

Sexual Politics was a pioneering analysis of masculinist historical, social and literary images of women. Millett's privileging of *literature* as a source helped to establish writing, literary studies and criticism as domains especially appropriate for feminism. One crucial factor in the social construction of femininity is the way literary values and conventions have themselves been shaped by men, and women have often struggled to express their own concerns through many 'inappropriate' forms. In narrative, for instance, the shaping conventions of adventure and romantic pursuit have a 'male' impetus and purposiveness. Further, historically the male writer has tended to address his readers as if they were men, while much contemporary advertising provides obvious parallel examples in mass culture. In order to resist indoctrination of the female reader, Millett exposes the oppressive representations of sexuality to be found in male fiction. By deliberately foregrounding the view of a *female* reader, she highlights the male domination, which pervades sexual description in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet, offering in the case of Lawrence, for example, often hilarious and devastatingly deflationary analyses of his phallocracy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: In What ways, is the "Second Wave" Feminism different from the "First Wave"?

Q 7: Discuss "Gynocriticism".

Q 8: What does Kate Millet state about sex and gender?

12.4.3 Third Wave Feminism

"Third Wave" Feminism is influenced and informed by Postmodern theory, as well as other anti-foundationalist discourses, such as Post colonialism and Post structuralism. It is sometimes conflated with an ambiguous and contested term Postfeminism that has two key meanings within an academic context. It is sometimes used to describe feminism's connection with Post structuralist, Postmodernist, and Postcolonial theorizing. However, another notion of Postfeminism implies that (radical) feminism is outdated and no longer a productive practice for a society which offers women varied channels of expression.

What has been described as a **"Third Wave"** of feminist activity and theorizing emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Moving away from **"Second Wave"** feminist identity politics, **"Third Wave"** feminist ideas about identity embrace notions of contradiction, multiplicity, and ambiguity, and emphasise the need for new feminist modalities in the twenty-first century. Following the decline of organised "Second Wave" activities in the 1980s, different accounts of feminism from **Black and Third World** women began to readdress the First World bias of the First and Second waves. These differing positions, alongside developments in the fields of Gender Studies, Postcolonial Theory, Queer Theory, and Postmodernism, inform "**Third Wave"** feminism, which accordingly takes a more global and plural view of the relationship between power and subjectivity.

However, within feminist circles themselves, there are political differences and conflicts of interest among coloured and white women, women from different classes, women of different sexualities, women belonging to different nations and groups, and women who are liberals, conservatives, radicals, and revolutionaries. For example, **Black women** have complained that white middle-class women, in academia as well as in the mass media, often end

up speaking for feminism or for all women, even though they tend to represent only their own interests; **Third world women**, feel similarly silenced and unrepresented in mainstream social agendas, which rarely consider their needs or issues; **Lesbian women** have likewise organised themselves to ensure that their voices are heard. The "politics of difference" opens onto a world of differences and multiple identities among and within women themselves. **Queer Theory,** on the other hand, has attacked the homophobic and patriarchal basis o£ heterosexuality. It aims beyond lesbian and gay rights philosophies to study other so-called perverse, deviant, and alternative sexualities.



LET US KNOW

Identity Politics:

One of the important points among feminist critics has been **identity politics**, by which is meant a politics of difference based on some fixed or definable identity (as a middle-class white woman, a working class black woman, a third world woman, and so on). Critics of identity politics have several major complaints. They argue that defining feminist identity by giving priority to race, class or geography tends to essentialise these features, reducing people to social indicators whose "real essence" is determined by race or class or country of origin. Advocates of the politics of difference however, respond to identity politics by stating that the act of herding all women into one homogeneous category (often called women) is a reductive totalisation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What is "Third Wave" Feminism?

Q10: What are the different groups that are reacting against the traditional feminist circles?

12.5 OTHER TRENDS OF FEMINISM

12.5.1 Socialist/Marxist Feminism

Socialist/Marxist feminism was a powerful strand of the "Second Wave" during the late 1960s and 1970s, in Britain in particular. It sought to extend the Marxist analysis of class into the history of women's material and economic oppression, and especially into how the family and women's domestic labour reproduce the sexual division of labour. Like other 'male' forms of history, it is assumed that Marxism had ignored much of women's experience and activity, and the primary task of Marxist feminism was to open up the complex relations between gender and economy. Juliet Mitchell's early essay, "Women: The Longest Revolution" (1966), was a pioneering attempt to historicise the structural control patriarchy exerts over women in terms of their reproductive functions. Similarly, Sheila Rowbotham, in *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973), recognised that working-class women experience the double oppression of the sexual division of labour both at work and in the home, and that Marxist historiography had largely ignored the domain of personal experience, and particularly that of female culture. Michèle Barrett, in *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (1980), presents a Marxist feminist analysis of gender representation. **First**, she applauds Virginia Woolf's materialist argument that the conditions under which men and women *produce* literature are materially different and influence the form and content of what they write: we cannot separate questions of gender-stereotyping from their material conditions in history. This means that liberation will not come merely from changes in culture. **Second**, the ideology of gender affects the way the writings of men and women are read and how canons of excellence are established. **Third**, feminist critics must take account of the *fictional* nature of literary texts and not indulge in 'rampant moralism' by condemning all male authors for

the sexism of their books and approving all women authors for raising the issue of gender.

12.5.2 French Feminism

Though it was Simone de Beauvoir, who infused a lot of seminal ideas to Feminism, yet, the phrase 'French Feminism' usually refers to a branch of feminist thinkers in France from the 1970s to the 1990s. French feminist theoreticians in particular, in seeking to break down conventional, male constructed stereotypes of sexual difference, have focused on **language as at once the domain in which such stereotypes are structured**, and evidence of the liberating sexual difference which may be described in a specifically 'women's language'. Literature is one highly significant discourse in which this can be perceived and mobilised. French Feminism has been deeply influenced by Psychoanalysis, especially by Jacques Lacan's reworking of Freud. A number of French Feminists have argued that female sexuality is a subterranean and unknown entity, which can nevertheless represent itself in literary writing. Hélène Cixous is a creative writer and philosopher who argues for a positive representation of femininity in a discourse she calls **'Ecriture Féminine'**, and her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) is a celebrated manifesto of 'women's writing' which calls for women to put their 'bodies' into their writing.

Unlike Virginia Woolf who abandoned the struggle to speak of the female body, Cixous writes ecstatically of the teeming female unconscious: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth.' The female imagination is infinite and beautiful; the truly liberated woman writer, when she exists, will say: I . . . overflow; my desires have invented new desire, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again . . . I have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst – burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune. Since writing is the place where subversive thought can germinate, it is especially shameful

that the phallocentric tradition has, for the most part, succeeded in suppressing woman's voice. Woman must uncensor herself, recover 'her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal'; she must throw off her guilt (for being too hot or too frigid, too motherly or too unmaternal)."

But the heart of Helen Cixous' theory is her rejection of the idea that women's writing 'will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system'. This liberating return to the 'Good Mother' is the source of Cixous' poetic vision of women's writing, and it opens the possibility of a new type of sexuality. She opposes the sort of neutral bisexuality espoused by Virginia Woolf, and advocates instead what she calls 'the other bisexuality', which refuses to 'annul differences but stirs them up'. Cixous' approach is essentially and strategically visionary, imagining a possible language for the women rather than describing an existing one.

Luce Irigaray's *Spéculum de l'autre femme (or Speculum of the Other Women)* (1974) develops, in more rigorously philosophical terms, ideas which resemble Cixous'. She considers that patriarchal oppression of women is founded on the type of negative constructions associated with Freud's theory of female sexuality. The concept of 'penis envy', for example, is based upon a view of woman as man's 'Other', lacking the penis which he possesses (precariously). She is not viewed as existing at all except as a negative mirror-image of a man. In this sense, women are invisible to the male gaze and can only achieve a sort of phantasmal existence in hysteria and in mysticism.

The French-Bulgarian linguist and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva's consideration of 'feminity' under patriarchy is somewhat different. Her consideration of feminity as marginality offers a position and not a definition. She refuses to define 'feminity'. In Kristeva's terms, it is simply that "which is marginalised by patriarchal symbolic order." This consideration of femininity in relational perspective is as shifting as the various forms of patriarchy itself.

It is therefore important to note the different trajectories of what we call Feminist Criticism under French Feminism. You will do well if you read some the important essays of the French feminist critics from David Lodge's book Modern Criticism and Theory.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: What do you understand by the "Ecriture feminine"?

Q 12: How does Luce Irigaray propose to uphold female sexuality?

12.6 RECEPTION OF FEMINISM

Feminism in general is concerned with the representation of women in literature and with changing the position of women in society by setting them free from all types of oppressive restraints of the patriarchal society. However, one needs to make all possible attempts to understand how contemporary feminist criticism has new things to say. The publication of the book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar had helped to locate women's experience at the center of attention. Following this, some other feminists wanted to focus the debate entirely on the political issues. However, other writers like the French theorists Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray, began to pay attention to the nature of 'woman herself'. As you are already told, their works introduced further challenges to the established ideas of feminism and raised complex questions about our understanding of human subjectivity and its relationship to language. While doing so they were both influenced by and reacting against the Deconstruction of Jacques Derrida and Psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. Although critics like Alice Jardine, Mary Jacobus and Jacqueline Rose produced feminist criticism within this deconstructive and psychoanalytic framework, many also criticised the French perspectives as remote from practical and political end.

An interesting theoretical turn came into feminist criticism during 1980s when the ideas of Michel Foucault and New Historicism were effectively used by works done by Feminists. Critics like Catherine Gallaghar,

Nancy Armstrong, Gillian Beer, Mary Poovey and others considered gender and class relations within 19th century society. No doubt, they were influenced by the discussion of identity and gender in Deconstruction, Lacanian Psychoanalysis and New Historicism. Another extension of Feminism could be seen in the rise of **gay** and **lesbian** criticism, which developed in part in response to the early phases of Feminism, which was based largely on the experiences of white, middle class heterosexual women and to offer that experience as universal. This directly challenged the traditional views of sexuality.

However, when we look at the reception of feminism, we find that the position reached now is no longer straightforward. Feminist criticism thus works with a shifting agenda of endlessly acknowledging the complexity of the past and the limits of interpretations in contemporary times. The Third Wave model has also come under criticism for forcing inauthentic cut-off points within the movement, and for alienating current feminists from their feminist precursors. Nonetheless, the tendency of feminist criticism to deconstruct its own theories is undoubtedly a strength of the movement.



12.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have realised that Feminism in general has a long political history, developing in America and Britain throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. You must also have learnt that there is no one Feminism but there are different Feminisms. The Women's Rights and Women's Suffrage movements were the crucial determinants in shaping the early phase. Then, Feminism has been seen in terms of its different waves. You must have realised that Feminist theory is the extension of Feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. Feminist theory mainly aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations, much of feminist theory also focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. The American theorist Elaine Showalter describes the

development of feminist theory as having three phases: the first being "feminist critique" in which the feminist reader examines the ideologies behind literary phenomena; the second being "gynocriticism", in which the "woman is producer of textual meaning"; and the last phase being "gender theory", in which the "ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system are explored". Such phases were paralleled by French Feminism and Marxist Feminism.



12.8 FURTHER READING

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Links:

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



12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Feminism takes into considerations the different campaigns, activities, and texts concerned with challenging and transforming the ways women are treated and represented in society. It is in fact a political movement and discourse that encompass a diverse range of perspectives, theories, and methods. Besides analysing patriarchal set up, Feminist theory seeks to propose new ways of 'reading' women to bring about social change.

Ans to Q 2: The **"First Wave"** dates from the end of the 18th century through the beginning of Suffragette (1918-28) and New Women's movements in Britain and the US…. … the **"Second Wave"** begins from 1960s with collective campaign on issues like sexual health and contraception, domestic abuse, and gender discrimination in the workplace and so on… …"Third Wave" is marked by the emergence of three different models: Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, and Socialist Feminism.

Ans to Q 3: Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929)… …Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics … …*Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch… …*Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976)… …Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*, *British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977)… …and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979).

Ans to Q 4: Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own, Three Guineas… …*Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949).

Ans to Q 5: Virginia Woolf is often considered 'the founding mother of the contemporary debate'… …*A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three*

Guineas (1938) are her important contributions to Feminist criticism—the first focussing on the history and social context of women's literary production, and the second on the relations between male power and the professions like law, education, medicine, etc…. …Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) established with great clarity the fundamental questions of modern feminism.

Ans to Q 6: "Second Wave" feminism and feminist criticism are very much a product of the liberationist movements of the mid-to-late 1960s. Although it continues to share the "First Wave's" fight for women's rights in all areas, its focal emphasis shifts to the politics of reproduction, to women's 'experience', to sexual 'difference' and to 'sexuality', as a form of oppression as well as something to celebrate.

Ans to Q 7: Gynocriticism concentrates on the specificity of women's writing, on recuperating a tradition of women authors, and on examining in detail women's own culture. ... ...Elaine Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' to describe literary criticism based in a feminine perspective… …she described the concept in her *Toward a Feminist Poetics.*

Ans to Q 8: Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, announces her view of 'patriarchy', which she sees as pervasive and which demands 'a systematic overview as a political institution'… …she makes important distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', where 'sex' is determined biologically but 'gender' is a psychological concept which refers to *culturally* acquired sexual identity.

Ans to Q 9: "Third Wave" Feminism is influenced and informed by Postmodern theory, Postcolonialism and Poststructuralism… …Moving away from "Second Wave" feminist identity politics, "Third Wave" feminist ideas about identity embrace notions of contradiction, multiplicity, and ambiguity, and emphasise the need for new feminist modalities in the twenty-first century.

Ans to Q 10: Black women have complained that white middle-class women often end up speaking for feminism or for all women, even though they tend to represent only their own interests… …Third world women,

feel similarly silenced and unrepresented in mainstream social agendas, which rarely consider their needs or issues… …Lesbian women have likewise organised themselves to ensure that their voices are heard… … Queer Theory has attacked the homophobic and patriarchal basis of heterosexuality.

Ans to Q 11: Hélène Cixous is a creative writer and philosopher who argues for a positive representation of femininity in a discourse she calls **'Ecriture Féminine'**, and her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) is a celebrated manifesto of 'women's writing' which calls for women to put their 'bodies' into their writing.

Ans to Q 12: Luce Irigaray's in her *Speculum of the Other Women* (1974) considers that patriarchal oppression of women is founded on the type of negative constructions associated with Freud's theory of female sexuality… …he concept of 'penis envy', for example, is based upon a view of woman as man's 'Other'.



12.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the different waves of feminism? How do the feminist critics raise their voice against the stereotyping of women?

Q 2: What is the scope of feminist theory and criticism? Discuss with reference to the various phases of Feminism.

Q 3: Who are the major exponents of the First Wave Feminism? Discuss their major contributions to the development of feminist criticism.

Q 4: How did the Second Wave and Third Wave Feminism deviate from the main concerns of the First Wave?

Q 5: Write a comprehensive note on the idea of French Feminism with reference to their radical concerns.

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UNIT 13: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND QUEER THEORY

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Introducing the Concepts of Gender, Sexuality and the Queer,

13.4 Major Thinkers

13.5 Implications in Literary Studies

13.6 Let us Sum up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

13.9 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- acquaint yourself with the feminist and queer movement.
- list the key feminist and queer theorists and their major works.
- explain the concept of gender and gender studies.
- understand the concept of sexuality and the three types of sexuality.
- explain the terms related to queer theory.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is based on a discussion on Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theory. Pages of history bring to light how knowledge, power, and agency play an important role in promoting hegemonic discourses of patriarchy (ruled by the patriarch/father) and heterosexuality. The knowledge systems, over the years, have inscribed or promoted an ideology where man is considered to be the superior gender in comparison to woman. These knowledge systems, relying on its sources, have a significant role in maintaining the hegemonic gender discourse. This same knowledge system promoted the gender discourse of the two sexes corresponding to two

genders; male for masculine and female for feminine. Hence, traditional societies have recognised only two types of gender roles corresponding with their biological sexes, masculine for male and feminine for female. This socially constructed gender role is assigned to them at birth. As the French feminist, Simone de Beauvoir in her groundbreaking text *The Second Sex* (1949) says "one is not born a woman, one becomes one…It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature…which is described as feminine." (267). The works of other feminist such as Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Virginia Woolf, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Betty Friedman, Kate Millett, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others, in their quest towards woman's emancipation, tried to locate how knowledge systems promoted patriarchy which was distinctively repressive towards other genders. Thus, the feminist movement started questioning the dominant knowledge systems and it was followed by the queer movement, which can be seen to have emerged out of feminist thought, the only difference being, while feminism follows a feminist agenda, queer follows a much broader, postmodern perspective, which by breaking structures, tries to embrace change and non-binaries. By the end of this unit, we shall learn that the most common characteristic of the feminist, as well as queer theorists, are questioning the origins of patriarchy, starting with the definition of the commonly used terms, 'gender' and 'sexuality'.

13.3 INTRODUCING THE CONCEPTS OF GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE QUEER

Gender:

The biological and anatomical identity of an individual is one's 'sex' and 'gender' is the social 'layer' on the sex, manifesting itself as being masculine or feminine. Sex is determined by anatomy and is the 'act' of being male, female or transsexual/intersexual, whereas, gender is not determined by anatomy or at birth but is a social construct along with being the 'state' of being male or female with regards to social and cultural differences, i.e., masculine or feminine. Gender being a social construct, it is diverse, varied and is multiple in nature and is dependent on historical

and cultural factors. According to some critics, gender has multiple characteristics which include 'sex', social roles or gender identity.

Traditional societies have recognised only two types of gender roles corresponding with their biological sexes, masculine for male and feminine for female. This socially constructed gender role is assigned to them at birth. Such systems are called 'gender binary'. The ones existing outside such systems is called 'gender non-binary' or 'genderqueer.'

A significant aspect is a person's 'gender identity', absolutely invisible and personal, it is the individual's internal and intensely felt sense of being as either a man or a woman or in between, or something entirely different. Gender identity is completely individualistic and private whereas gender expression is external and socially professed. It refers to a personal identification with a particular gender and gender role in society. The problem arises when the gender and social roles are categorised and forced upon the individuals of the society. The interaction between sex, gender, and sexuality has given rise to multitudinous understandings on desire. This multiplicity encompasses difference, race, gender, and sexuality, among others.

Gender studies, thereby analyse the varied "conceptions of gender and their role in the writing, reception, subject matter, and evaluation of literary works." (Abrams 119) It is an interdisciplinary field that includes women's studies, men's studies and queer studies.

Sexuality:

Sexuality, at the very basic level, refers to a person's sexual orientation or preference, towards individuals of the same or different sexes. There are, predominantly, three types of sexuality or sexual orientations, namely, homosexuality or towards the same sex/gender, second, heterosexuality or towards the opposite sex/gender and third, towards both sexes/genders. While a 'lesbian' is a woman who is attracted emotionally and sexually to individuals of the same sex or gender, which does not necessitate having sexual experiences, a 'gay' is a man who is attracted to other men. On the other hand, 'bisexual' refers to those people who are attracted to both males and females, though there may be a preference for

one gender over the other. 'Transsexual' is someone who changes his or her sex through medical procedures including surgery and/or hormonal therapy. 'Intersexual' refers to people who are born with a mixture of both male and female hormonal, chromosomal and/or genital characteristics (Srivastava 370).

The complication arises when people fail to comprehend this multiplicity and instead observe the gender binary based on archaic systems of discourse, knowledge and understanding. Such systems presuppose the idea that there are only two genders vis-a-vis male/female or masculine/feminine and that a person must strictly follow their gender roles and social codes, failing which has its consequences. To quote Maya Sharma from *Loving Women: Being Lesbian in Unprivileged India,* "those who violate these 'gender' roles and codes are categorised as transgressive, condemned as obscene, and perceived as appropriate subjects for various forms of persecution and punishment"(1-2).

Queer:

Queer Theory can be said to be an academic revolt which rose as a reaction against the hegemony of heterosexuals on what is to be considered as the norm of normalcy, with regard to sex, gender and sexuality – 'sex' (the act of being male, female or transsexual), 'gender' (the state of being male or female with regards to social and cultural differences) and 'sexuality' (a person's sexual preference). Thus it includes any variation which is considered unnatural to the dominant system of sexual classification, the many types of sexual non-conformity, be it gays/lesbians, cross-dressers, trans-sexualism, bisexualism, sadomasochism, butch/femme, etc. It questions what seems to be the dominant understanding of sexuality, gender, sex, identity or difference, and sameness. It thus places itself against the 'normal' rather than only the heterosexual. The term 'Emergent' has often been associated with queer theory to describe a growing scholarly field.

Queer theory, as it is today, has been deeply influenced by Michel Foucault's notions of power (and agency), as well as Judith Butler's analysis of 'performativity of gender' (23) with the collation of sex and gender, such

that there is no identity of sex without gender, apart from being influenced by the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lee Edelman, Teresa de Lauretis, among others. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler writes, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results," (23) where she differentiates performance from performativity. Performance presupposes a pre-existing subject; whereas performativity challenges the notion of a subject itself, such that the 'gender acts' create the subject. Moreover, language is the medium through which gender identities are created. "Bodies are produced," according to Butler, in such a way that the performative aspect of gender, reinforced through repeated acts, is what creates the body (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 134-135).

'Queer' can function as a noun, an adjective or a verb but in each case is defined against the 'Normal' or normalising, as Tamsin Spargo states in *Postmodern Encounters: Foucault and Queer Theory*. Queer theory is not a singular concept but a precinct where multiple unorthodox structures, diverse relations and a range of engagements play out between sex, gender, and sexual desire. As an umbrella term for LGBTIQ people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered People, and Intersex, Queer), 'Queer' is also a political utterance as well as an orientation which promotes breaking binary thought and advocates the multiple. It 'indicates a transgressive desire of all sorts, and enables a questioning of the supposed naturalness of the heterosexual identity' (Menon 110). The queer space emerged out of heterogeneous and multiple works that reflected the conflicts in society, beginning with gay intolerance and homophobia, lesbian hatred across the home and the workplace, to lesbian and gay politics across urban and rural diasporas.

Consequently, queer theory being a reaction against the hegemonic discourse of gender and knowledge systems, while investigating the relations between heterosexuality and homosexuality, examines the exclusions otherwise implicit in a heterosexual/homosexual opposition. In this process, transgender identities become a feasible cultural possibility (Namaste 221).

The very idea of transgender is a process of cross-fertilization across the structured divide and the indeterminate nature of that process. Furthermore, transgender is independent of sexual orientation and has more to do with psychological gender disposition and gender identity. Since its earliest formulations (the 1990s), the figure of the transgender has been imperative to Queer theory. Jay Prosser, best known in queer studies for his work on transgender studies interrogates how queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of the transgender since queer theory represented itself as traversing and mobilising methodologies and identities (Prosser 33). Moreover, the metaphor of crossing was most often impacted with by the transgendered subject's crossing their several boundaries at once, both the boundaries between gender, sex and sexuality and the boundary that structures each as a binary category, thus challenging the notion of gender as a biological or social construct. At a very elementary level, transgender because of the obvious prefix 'trans' suggests a difference from the genre or phenomenon understood as gender. Though the term 'transgender' was first used in the field of psychology by psychiatrist John F. Oliven of Columbia University, the lexical compound of 'trans+gender' was put to work and popularised by pioneering activist Virginia Prince in the 1960s. Prince coined the term 'transgenderist' to distinguish 'heterosexual' male-crossdressers from the 'transsexuals' and the 'homosexuals' in the 1970s. Later in the 1990s, transgender took a new life as a broad term including gender non-binaries and non-conforming people. Hence due to its prefix 'trans', it invites comparisons with the term 'gender' through a medium of difference, where 'gender' signifies the state or condition of being male or female, used with reference to social and cultural differences instead of biological. Though the term 'transgender' was initially used as a conjoined word 'trans+gender' where 'trans' was used as a prefix to gender and not as a verb, it indicated gender transverse or traversing gender, in other words, it involves going beyond what constitutes gender.

This fluidity, changeability, multiplicity and transgressiveness of the LGBTIQ community can precisely be encapsulated in the words of

Kannabiran for whom the LGBTIQ community's "counter-heteronormative assertions, foreground the ruptures, and implicitly or explicitly challenge the edifice of heteronormativity" (442). While 'Queer' is a broad term for the individuals who are 'not' heterosexuals and/or cis-genders, it at times overlaps with 'Transgender' which is also an umbrella term for individuals who are 'not' cis-genders, where cis-gender means identifying with the gender and sex, as was assigned at birth.

Thus, to conclude, the hegemonic discourse of patriarchy helped facilitate the hetero-patriarchal social order, which was reacted against by the feminist writers. Feminist thought, though like queer disrupts binarism in terms of gender, feminism assumes a feminist self. Though queer theory emerges out of feminism, it assumes a postmodernist agenda. Similar to the postmodernists, they tend to view the self as essentially arising out of discursive and deconstructive practices. It locates origins, exposes norms and hierarchies only to lead to the "deconstruction of the dominant central principle governing any structure" (Choudhury, *English Social and Cultural History* 304). By challenging the hegemony of heterosexuals and rigid definitions of gender and sexuality, they debunk hierarchies and offer space to varied gender choices, without privileging any. In addition, any attempt to define 'queer' would constitute a violation of its very character, for queer abhors fixity and celebrates fluidity, the undefined, the unheard.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What plays a vital role in promoting patriarchy and heterosexuality?

Q 2: Name some of the early feminist critics.

Q 3: What is the similarity between the feminist and the queer movement?

Q 4: How is the queer movement different from feminism?

Q 5: What do you understand by the term 'gender' and 'sex'?

Q 6: What is gender studies?

Q 7: Define sexuality.

Q 8: What are the three types of sexuality?

Q 9: What do you understand by 'gender identity' and 'gender expression'?

Q 10: Define queer and queer theory.

Q 11: How is the figure of transgender significant to queer theory?

13.4 MAJOR THINKERS

Queer theory, as it is today, has been deeply influenced by Michel Foucault's notions of power (and agency). Michel Foucault in his work *History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* observes that discourse is a mechanism for power and social control and through which knowledge, norms emerge, thereby validating only certain behaviours as culturally intelligible and acceptable, while marking out others as taboo and destabilising forces threatening social order. Discourse and knowledge play a very critical part in the creation of space as put forward by Foucault in his chapter "Of Other Spaces". Foucault gives examples of "real places," (24-7) or heterotopias (or spaces) in narratives where borders are transgressed, stories are generated, and events are unfolded outside the social order. Brothels, prisons, museums, cemeteries, theatres, museums, libraries are such examples. These examples of heterotopic sites are representative of spaces that are sites of larger cultural structures of crisis, deviation, incompatibility, juxtaposition, compensation, or continuity. (Friedman 199)

Another significant writer to critique foundations and question hegemonic gender discourse is Judith Butler who is controversially famous for her major works, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'* (1993). She is known for her analysis of 'performativity of gender' (23) with the collation of sex and gender, such that there is no identity of sex without gender. One of the pioneer voices to analyse the performative nature of the term 'queer' critically, Butler argues for a genealogical critique of 'queer', deconstructing how queer emerges as a site that raises questions about the possibilities of subversion, stability, multiplicity and variability with performativity. She differentiates performance (presupposes a pre-existing

subject) from performativity (challenges the notion of a subject itself, such that the 'gender acts' create the subject), all the while stressing how gender performance is both involuntary and imperfect.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is another revolutionary voice in the field of gender and queer theory whose all three influential publications dealt with the transgendered self and the deconstruction of heterosexuality. In *Between Men: English Literature and the Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) Sedgwick wrote that the beginning of normative heterosexuality depended on a degree of male identification and yet importantly the dismissal of this identification, with women as the object of desire. Thus by questioning origins and foundations, she exposes how heterosexuality has been constructed through the sublimation of a cross-gendered identification. Hence making visible this identification, the transgendered self became a key queer mechanism for deconstructing heterosexuality. In her second significant book *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick writes explicitly about this methodological function of transgender. Here she presents how transgender enters as a key figure in gender politics whereby it led to the development of a theory of (homo) sexuality distinct from feminism. Traversing feminism's view of gender, transgender demands a new theory of sexuality wherein a merge between gay men and lesbians occurs. Similarly, in her third radical book, *Tendencies* (1993) she begins with a figure of the transgender to summon the queer moment.

In the Indian Context, Gayatri Reddy in *With Respect To Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity In South India* (2006) challenges the marginalization and states that one cannot see queer simply through the lens of gender and sexual difference for at stake are questions of nationalism, citizenship, identity, religion, sex and economics. She traces how the queer communities in India including the Hijras were highly revered in ancient India and were recognised as "Tritiya Prakriti', an expression in Sanskrit that was used to define "third gender" in pre-colonial India, the term being taken from *Puranas*, Hindu texts and mythologies which defined them as encompassing any gender outside the dichotomous framework. Running on contrary lines is Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* where he critiques

colonialism and asserts how the Britisher's denial of India's golden past is another way of controlling the colonisers. Caught in this politics, the third gender lost its position and was relegated to the periphery during British colonial rule.

Colonialism, which started off with the initial mission of civilising the barbaric and non-West world by introducing the scientific temper and through Evangelism, also led to other faulty worldviews, as that of the superiority of the human over subhuman, masculine over feminine, adult over child, modern over savage or primitive, heterosexual over trans, thereby creating rigid binary opposites. Thus the colonisers, in order to authenticate their new imperialist identity, gave emphasis to the masculine, adult, heterosexual, modern in them, at the cost of the feminine, child-like, Trans, and the primitive.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: Who are some of the major thinkers?

Q 13: Differentiate between performance and performativity, following Judith Butler.

Q 14: Define the term 'discourse' as stated by Michel Foucault.

Q 15: What do you understand by the term 'Tritiya Prakriti'? What is the history behind it?

13.5 IMPLICATIONS IN LITERARY STUDIES

Literature and academia have a crucial role to play in queering structures and thereby interrogating centres. Concurrently, by critiquing foundations and questioning origins, it has the ability to re-read history to locate as well as render many forms of oppression and repression prevalent in society. Through the medium of literature, gender writers and queer theorists are able to speak about the marginalised sections and their secondary place in society. Writers within the queer spectrum, through the power of their pen, are narrating their varied experiences as well as occurrences and are aware of the immense potential of queer as a political

tool. Individuals from the LGBTIQ community started voicing and expressing through the genre of autobiography writing. These first-hand narratives epitomise their transition into society as well as emerge as a medium to advocate for their cause and community. It brings about transformation not only for their own identity but also enables the same for the community. Through their bodies, they are able to accept and express their true gender reality whereby the body symbolises the gendered self. All the experiences became a core of their life's essence and therefore, body-writing came not only as a cathartic medium but also an assertion of their rights, voices, and identities.

LET US KNOW



1. The culminating point for queer community in India is the verdict by a five-judge bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra. After centuries of being treated as social outcaste, the community won a landmark victory with the decriminalization of homosexuality by diluting Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code by the Supreme Court of India, ending the 158-year-old war and a historic moment for the LGBTIQ community on 7th of September, 2018.
2. In India, a range of transgender-related identities, such as Hijras, Aravanis, Kothis, Shiv Shaktis and Jogtas/Jogappas, among many others have existed since time immemorial. One look at Indian history and mythology makes it evident that their stories have been a prominent part of Indian culture and customs. In the ancient and sacred texts of the Vedas, individuals who were gender non-binary and did not conform to gender rules were mentioned, with gender variants being referred to as '*Prakriti-prakrti*,' or of the female nature, and '*Tritiya-Prakriti*' or the third gender.
3. Transgenders have been part of many Hindu mythologies and fables, their presence having informed many cultural traditions and practices in India even today. In the great epic *Ramayana*, hijras featured in the story during Lord Rama's 14-year exile.

4. The Hijras or the transgendered people of Tamil Nadu consider themselves descendants of the character Aravan, the son of Arjuna and Nagakanya, from the *Mahabharata*.
5. Under the Mughal Empire, transgendered people played an essential role in the palaces and courts. They were considered to be intelligent and trustworthy, and what actually gave them power in terms of social mobility was that they could access any part of the palace, including the queens quarters and harems where access was heavily monitored and restricted, and exclusive to the ruling patriarch, his wives, and female servants and so on.
6. At the time when the British first arrived in India, it was still common practice for hijras to receive gifts and benefits from some kingdom states in the Indian subcontinent. Hijras formed an essential part of cultural traditions and celebrations through song and dance, and offering their blessings on auspicious occasions. However, as the British gained administrative and political power, hijras were stripped of their land inheritance, having no way of proving their inheritance by blood.
7. The impact of colonial rule in India on the lives of hijra and queer community was profound, and it made living conditions very difficult. Having little understanding of cultural practices and traditions, the British failed to understand their unique cultural significance in the Indian social milieu, particularly with the royal families of India. In turn, the British began to scrutinise the mannerisms and behaviour of members of the community, along with their place in society. They put in place laws that criminalised homosexuality, such as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, making 'unnatural acts' punishable.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 16: How do literature and academia play a crucial role in queering structures?



13.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to understand the concepts of gender, sexuality and queer theory along with the major thinkers. The twenty-first century can be seen as the moment of an assertion of queer people. For years, the LGBTIQ community has been subjected to oppression and discrimination by the hetero-patriarchal society. The Trans movement, led by various individuals and organizations, has been advocating for the community, to influence public opinion, through awareness programmes and social work. Educated Trans writers, through their autobiographies, are gradually beginning to narrate the sufferings of the people, and their exploitation by heteronormative society – the family, the police, and society, at large. This fight against inequality in sexes/genders is gaining momentum, but a long road lies ahead as Trans resistance involves resisting fundamental social and legal structures that dictate the everyday lived realities of non-conforming sexes. As Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan in their anthology *Because I Have a Voice* wrote, "This queer resistance is about questioning the fundamentals of our society" (40). As already discussed, viewing sex and gender, as a binary has been the traditional and conventional position, a view that further limits the possibilities available even to the sexually conforming men and women in resisting gender roles. As already seen, gender identity is entirely individualistic and private whereas gender expression is external and socially professed. However, it is through social meanings that have been associated with the body that it has become far more than a physical entity and a factor of its (sexual) desires; instead, every aspect of its being and expression, are assigned "social meanings attached to signifiers of sex and sexuality" (Gagné and Tewksbury 61). In fact, it could be argued that the very reason why sexuality is socially governed the way it is, is because of the gendered roles ascribed to it that are deeply connected to the fundamental institution – the family, which is in some senses the basic unit of a heteronormative patriarchal system, on which cultural norms and traditions are constructed.



13.7 FURTHER READING

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Other Sources:

The Danish Girl, dir. Tom Hooper, 2015 (film)

Normal.dir. Jane Anderson, 2003 (film)

Accepting Alternative Sexualities. Satyameva Jayate, 2014 (Documentary)

My Transgender Kid. Dir. Nick Sweeney and Emma Young, 2015 (Documentary)

Gender Revolution. Producer: Katie Couric, 2017 (Documentary)

India's Third Gender Movement. The Zainab Salvi Project. Huffington Post, 2016 (Documentary)



13.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Knowledge, power, and agency play an important role in promoting hegemonic discourses of patriarchy and heterosexuality. The knowledge systems, over the years, have inscribed or promoted

an ideology where man is considered to be the superior gender in comparison to woman.

Ans to Q 2: Some of the early feminist critics are Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Betty Friedman, Kate Millett, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others.

Ans to Q 3: Both tried to locate how knowledge systems promoted patriarchy, which was distinctively repressive towards other genders.

Ans to Q 4: While feminism follows a strictly feminist agenda, queer follows a much broader, postmodern perspective, which by breaking structures, tries to embrace change and other non-binaries.

Ans to Q 5: While the biological and anatomical identity of an individual is one's sex, gender is the social 'layer' on the sex, manifesting itself as being masculine or feminine. Sex is determined by anatomy and is the 'act' of being male, female or transsexual/intersexual, whereas, gender is not determined by anatomy or at birth but is a social construct and is the 'state' of being male or female with regards to social and cultural differences, i.e., masculine or feminine.

Ans to Q 6: Gender studies analyse the varied "conceptions of gender and their role in the writing, reception, subject matter, and evaluation of literary works." (Abrams 119)

Ans to Q 7: Sexuality, at the very basic level, refers to a person's sexual orientation or preference, towards individuals of the same or different sexes.

Ans to Q 8: There are, predominantly, three types of sexuality or sexual orientations, namely, homosexuality or towards the same sex/gender, second, heterosexuality or towards the opposite sex/gender and third, towards both sexes/genders.

Ans to Q 9: Gender identity, absolutely invisible and personal, is the individual's internal and intensely felt sense of being as either a man or a woman or in between, or something totally different. Gender identity is completely individualistic and private. Gender expression refers to

a person's identification with a particular gender and gender role in society. It is external and socially professed.

Ans to Q 10: Queer Theory can be said to be an academic revolt, which rose as a reaction against the hegemony of heterosexuals on what is to be considered as the norm of normalcy, with regard to sex, gender and sexuality. Queer is a methodology of critical thinking that by deconstructing the gender system questions the foundations.

Ans to Q 11: Queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of the transgender since queer theory represented itself as traversing and mobilising methodologies and identities (Prosser 33). Moreover, the metaphor of crossing was most often impacted with by the transgendered subject's crossing their several boundaries at once, both the boundaries between gender, sex and sexuality and the boundary that structures each as a binary category, thus challenging the notion of gender as a biological or social construct.

Ans to Q 12: Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gayatri Reddy, among others.

Ans to Q 13: She differentiates performance (presupposes a pre-existing subject) from performativity (challenges the notion of a subject itself, such that the 'gender acts' create the subject), all the while stressing how gender performance is both involuntary and imperfect.

Ans to Q 14: Michel Foucault in his work *History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* observes that discourse is a mechanism for power and social control and through which knowledge, norms emerge, thereby validating only certain behaviours as culturally intelligible and acceptable, while marking out others as taboo and destabilising forces threatening social order.

Ans to Q 15: The queer communities in India including the Hijras were highly revered in ancient India and were recognised as "Tritiya Prakriti', an expression in Sanskrit that was used to define "third gender" in pre-colonial India, the term being taken from *Puranas*, Hindu texts and mythologies which defined them as encompassing any gender outside the dichotomous framework.

Ans to Q 16: Literature and academia has a crucial role to play in queering structures and thereby interrogating centers since by critiquing foundations and questioning origins, it has the ability to re-read history to locate as well as render many forms of oppression and repression prevalent in the society.



13.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What do you understand by the term 'gender'? Elaborate.

Q 2: Discuss the three types of sexuality.

Q 3: What do you understand by the term 'Queer'? Elaborate.

Q 4: Assess the contribution of Michel Foucault in Gender and Queer Studies.

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UNIT 14: ECOCRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Introducing the Concept of Ecocriticism: History of Emergence

14.4 History of Emergence

14.5 Major Thinkers

14.6 Implications in Literary Studies

14.7 Let us Sum up

14.8 Further Reading

14.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.10 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss how Ecocriticism attempts to see 'nature' as a unique physical creation as well as a cultural discourse.
- read about how Ecocriticism studies the ecological representation in literature.
- spread general awareness about the environmental crisis as narrated in literary texts by highlighting and rethinking about our contemporary ecological concerns.
- understand the fact that social responsibility as the concerns of Ecocriticism is not individualistic or local but global.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall deal with the concept of 'Ecocriticism' a term coined by William Rueckert in his seminal essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978) which deals with ecology and its various concepts to the study of literature. Ecocriticism attempts to trace all possible relationship between literature and the ecological world. According to Rueckert, ecocriticism is the application of ecology and

ecological concepts to the study of literature. For Rueckert, ecocriticism is not just an interest in translating ecological concepts to the study of literature but an attempt to see literature in the context of an ecological vision. Thus, by the end of the unit, we shall be able to see how ecocriticism has been seen as the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyse texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature.

14.3 INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF ECOCRITICISM

The sidelining of New Criticism since the 1960s has resulted in the foundation and reshaping of several theories like Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Reader response Theories, Postcolonialism, Marxism, Gender studies, Cultural materialism, New historicism and Psychoanalysis to name just a few. These critical approaches often clubbed together under the nomenclature 'Theory' have emerged as powerful and manipulative discourses that are in a constant state of flow and revision. In this flux, there has been a regular reshaping of boundaries to meet the newer challenges, desires and demands of the coming generations. Despite their essential differences, one common premise of most of these theories is that these focus on the humans as their centre of study and nothing outside them matters. The new wave of theories seems to have little concern for the ecological structures and its association with literature. This idea has been aptly captured in William Rueckert's significant essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978) where he states that literary criticism is an "endlessly dialectical process which helps to keep culture healthy and viable throughout history. Nothing about nature and the biosphere in all this."

In the contemporary world of theory, literature is not merely seen as the reflection of society but also as an active ideological agency shaping, challenging and reshaping cultural structures. In such orientations, it is often forgotten that the same literary texts also engage with nature in their own

overt and covert ways. Despite the overwhelming importance of nature in the human world and its constant presence in the literary writings, it has always been kept off the limits of mainstream critical and academic theories. This can be seen as a consequence of one of the dominant binary opposition rooted in Western civilization i.e. between humans and nature where humans occupied the place of the Self and nature perpetually gets Othered. However, during the 1970's, nature came to be regarded as an important area of study across the globe as a consequence of the rapid and unplanned development, industrialisation, world wars and the selfish actions of humanity that was blind to the rest of existence. This dire situation called in for urgency of awareness among humans, so that no further damage could be done to the ecology.

As a consequence, the study of ecological concerns got a formal and organised structure under the name of ecocriticism, which in today's world is seen as an important area of study despite its recent birth. Ecocriticism attempts to study the relationship between humans and nature in close proximity through the various literary narratives. William Rueckert in his seminal essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978), states the first law of Ecology, which is "Everything is connected to everything else". From this theorem, Rueckert states that ecocriticism needs to see even the smallest, most remote part in relation to a very large whole is the central intellectual action required by ecology and of an ecological vision.

The credit for coining the term 'ecology' in 1869 goes to the famous German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel who had founded the concept of biogenetics and was also the originator of the theorem, "ontogeny recapitulates phylogemy" (one organism's life repeats a species history). However, the concept of 'ecology' first appeared in English Literature in the year 1873 while the introduction of the term 'literary ecology' was done by the prolific writer, Joseph W. Meeker who in his influential work, *The Comedy of Survival: The Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) attempts to discover the roles played by literature and the environment. With this effort of Meeker, we see ecology enter into the world of literary and critical understanding as

a significant area of study, which for a long time since the advent of the age of Renaissance was considered to be an area of study for the natural and physical sciences.

The study of ecology by the scientific world of Renaissance was in the attempt to understand the mysteries of the natural world, which would thereafter enable humans to tame and control it for their benefits. However, the unpredictability and constantly changing boundaries of the natural world made it impossible to define it as a concept that could be studied as a result of which attempts to understand the dynamics of nature was undertaken by the school of social sciences and literature, whose politics of language and representation allowed the construction of the image of nature as a natural and cultural discourse.

As it is clear from the above discussions about the various contours of the term, a precise definition of ecocriticism is difficult to be penned down. It has several schools and positions associated with it like nature writings, ecofeminism, eco-theory, animal studies, green studies, bioregionalism—all of which attempt to challenge the canonical beliefs, so as to include unheard voices and also reinterpretation of canonical works of the past. These positions associated with the study of nature in literature, shows ecocriticism as a semi-overlapping project rather than a unitary approach to established claims. However, even as this school of thought has been described and labelled under several headings, all the ecocritical writers have a common point in their writings, a shared concern rising from the increasing awareness of the sensitive situation that humans have brought to themselves through their irreparable and destructive actions that have been rapidly depleting the quality of the ecology.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: 'The terminology of Ecocriticism is a gradual and natural outcome of several efforts to make readers become ecologically conscious.' Comment.

Q 2: Trace the events that paved way for the need of a critical theory called Ecocriticism.

14.4 HISTORY OF EMERGENCE

In the age of Antiquity, every aspect of the ecology was believed to have its own "genius loci", its guardian spirit which were accessible to men but unlike men. These spirits in the natural objects protected nature from men. This belief was the outcome of the prevailing ideologies of the social structure like animism and paganism which added the spiritual aspect to the understanding of nature. The period witnessed a nature centric attitude that fostered a mutual relationship of love, reverence and awe between the ecology and the humans. In fact, it was believed by Manes in his essay, "Nature and Silence" that all the phenomenal world was alive in the sense of being 'inspirited' not just by people, but also by animals, cultural artefacts, plants and even 'inert' entities. The nonhuman world was alive and filled with articulate subjects that were able to communicate with humans. The natural world was treated as a 'living organism' that co existed with mankind to make the daily life of humans easier as well as make human's survival and sustenance possible. The interconnectedness and interdependence of the natural world and humans was well balanced in more or less perfect harmony. The importance of the ecology in the lives of humans called for protection of the ecology making the natural world and humans shared a close-knit bond with each other.

The advent of Christianity and its dogma of creation revealed, "Since God made nature, nature also must reveal the divine mentality." This religious study of nature was called natural theology. Nature was conceived primarily as a symbolic system through which God speaks to men. According to the "Genesis", the natural world was created before the creation of humans who were created as an afterthought in the image of God. This eternal and permanent aspect of nature was further added to the biblical idea of the natural world as a paradise, divine like, diverse and unique creation, which added the religious element to the concept of nature. The Christian way of living slowly paved way for cultivation and domestication of the human life and the ecology with the rejection of animism and paganism which evaporated the 'spirits' of the ecology, thereafter giving humans the effective

monopoly to exploit the natural world. This soon fostered the urge to dominate and control the natural world, which was further encouraged by several social and religious ideologies like 'The Divine Rights of Kingship', 'Creation of Man in the image of God' and 'The Great Chain of Being'. These emphasised on the supremacy of humans over the natural world. In this regard, Christianity can be considered as the most anthropocentric religion. While many Christians identified the natural world as a blessing, others believed that nature was literally evil and therefore endorsed by God for utter exploitation and destruction, which was subtly hinted in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. The sacredness of nature was overlooked and was also regarded as the space of hostility and mediation for the revelation of God's master plan.

LET US KNOW



Most literary writings of the medieval period were a celebration of the pastoral and wilderness through several literary techniques, like allegory, which attempted in instilling attributes of virtues and morality in the actions of man so as to help him attain heaven in his afterlife. This supremacy of the Church during the medieval period encouraged the preoccupation with the creation. Nature was seen as a means to understand God as well as act as a link for the ultimate creator and the created. This idea added the spiritual aspect to the understanding of nature.

The coming of Renaissance, along with humanism, reformation, print revolution and scientific revolution not only opened the gates for the modern world but also witnessed the distancing of humans from the natural world, which was the outcome of the anthropocentric attitude. The age saw several radical changes brought about by discoveries and innovations as well as the increasing corruption steeping into the church lead to the questioning of the truths upheld by the Church. The dominant spirit of the period was 'individualism' which when blended with the capitalistic aspirations drifted humans further away from the concerns of the natural

world. The project of colonialisation, which attempted to discover an unknown world, also involved exploiting and controlling of the natural resources for political and economical gains. This relationship between the natural world and humans has been narrated in several literary works of the age but the most prominent was William Shakespeare's *Tempest* (1611). The age witnessed the celebration and glorification of humans who were placed at the centre as against the earlier centrality of God and nature. However, it would be misleading to say none voiced about and for Nature. Saint Francis Assisi through his sincere efforts showed the importance of Nature for the survival and sustenance of both humans and nature in the future. He was the greatest radical in Christian world since Christ. He rebelled against the disruption of the global environment due to dynamic technology and science, which is why he was regarded as the "patron saint for ecologist".

The drifting away of man from nature further intensified during the later part of the seventeenth century, which saw nature as 'dead'. This idea has been mentioned in Frederick Turner's essay, "Cultivating the American Garden" where he states that "the Puritans likes his nature as spiritually dead as a doornail". This was a natural outcome of the Puritan attitude that stood for rigid and extreme morality and virtues. The second half of the seventeenth century had an instrumental perception of nature as stated by the eminent thinkers of this period like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Thomas Hobbes believed the 'state of nature' was primitive as against the human community which was formulated on safety and comfort, while John Locke suggested that humans must treat land as their private property as he believed that the non human world was valueless.

The eighteenth century witnessed the scientific, intellectual and industrial revolution that radically changed the social structure and deepened the path for anthropocentricism. This age of enlightenment was ruled by logic and reason. Most studies of this century were directed to the understanding of humans and culture as opposed to nature. Further, with the advent of industries, the age witnessed a steady decline in the quality of human life and the ecology. This ecological crisis was realised by few intellectuals like Comte de Buffon, Rousseau, Alexander Pope, Wolfgang

von Goethe who through their literary writings wanted to spread ecological awareness amongst the readers. In fact, one of the influential writing from this period about nature was Comte de Buffon's *Historie Naturelle,* which was very close to the modern understandings of ecological theories. It makes an attempt to study nature for its own sake rather than as "a key to any divine schema or clue to theological truth". In fact for Buffon, the natural world enjoys "perfect equality: they are neither slaves nor the tyrants to each other. The individual has no occasion, like man, to dread the rest of species". Rousseau in his *The Social Contract* says that the early man lived in a pure and benevolent state of nature whose existence was threatened not only by science, technology and industries but also by the 'single will' enforced by the state. For Rousseau, the wild and pristine was always held superior to the cultured and civilized which he called the concept of 'Noble Savage'.

For Alexander Pope, in his work *Essays on Man* following the philosophy of Kant shows the superiority of man over animals with the understanding that "An animal is not yet a complete being, because it is not conscious of itself" because animals cannot reason nor act autonomously. However, no being is capable of laying claim to the distinctions of being the final end of creation. In the natural world, every being were seen as equals. Pope reflected on the mounting interest in science of his days and also provided an ecological understanding that examines the place of man in the Great Chain of Being. The work extols the 'ample range' of God's creation, where animals were directed by sense and instinct while humans are governed by Reason. Animals, for Pope, "yearns to have humans' higher consciousness, but nature will not allow it". Few writings from this period also deals with the binary relationship of nature and culture wherein nature was regarded as wild, real, innocent, uncontrollable, natural and permanent while culture was regarded as polished, artificial, corrupt, progressive and sophisticated. This idea has been captured in the poem of Pope's "An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot", where nature was seen as an outside entity which has been pushed to the background in the narrative. Another important writer of this period was Wolfgang von Goethe who states that the study of nature should not be limited to man but should be done in its holistic totality.

Romanticism in literature was a definite reaction to industrialization. The Romantic period witnessed an increasing use of personifications and apostrophising the earth and all its components in literature that added literal as well as symbolic meaning to the literary texts. The main purpose of such a treatment of the natural world was in an attempt to create a homogeneous environment. However, it would be misleading to say that such efforts were 'ecocentric', as English poetry of the later eighteenth century "falls short of an authentically ecological understanding of the natural world" in fact, "it reflects an essentially touristic and hierarchical awareness centred on the most spectacular or 'sublime' aspects of nature". Nature was not only seen as a scientific object but also as an inspirational object for most writers who saw nature as a living organism with a 'spirit' that enlarged their imaginative, creative and intellectual capacities and also encouraged humans for the 'return to nature' with the need to preserve the natural world as well as discovery of the self . Nature was seen as an escape route from the corrupt, materialistic, competitive and industrialized society.

According to 1882's statement by Edmund Goose, Thomas Gray was the first romantic lover of nature but he was preceded by Thomas Burnett's poetic love for nature as shown in his *The Theory of the Earth* (1690). In fact, much claim of the romantic treatment of nature was given to James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730), which was regarded as an influential work that opened the world of romanticism that was later popularised by William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats and P. B. Shelley. In this age, nature was viewed as an aesthetic object that is also sublime, spiritual, picturesque, beautiful, primitive, and romantic. This opened the possibility of the ecological perspective in romantic poetry, which foregrounded nature in narratives.

The various thinkers of this age treated nature differently, each adding something new to the understanding of ecology, thereby making it an ever expanding concept. William Blake held an ambivalent attitude; in fact a divine hostility towards nature as he believed that nature had no hints or suggestions of God but was implanted by the mind on nature. For Blake,

"Nature is there for us to transform; it is neither a separate creation of God nor an objective counterpart of ourselves". Blake regarded nature as the work of the devil, stating, "The devil is in us, as far as we are Nature". Blake through his sincere attempts in the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* reveals the devastating condition of nature brought about by industrial revolution that exploited natural world with hostility in pursuit of man's lust for a "developing commercial- industrial- capitalist society".

The practice of personification and anthropomorphism has been generally regarded as an unjustified representation of the non-human world. However, this age witnessed the popularisation of the trend of personification, which was used extensively by several romantic poets. This was no accident but an outcome to reduce the drift between humans and the natural world that had intensified due to the Industrial Revolution. The assigning of human sentiments and attributes to the non-human world was very unlike the previous ages that were based on abstract ideas. This encouraged humans to again see the neglected nature as a part of them.

For Wordsworth, Nature is sublime, beautiful, picturesque and spiritual. In fact, most of Wordsworth's writings celebrate the magnificence, beauty and bounty of nature. Although he used the literary technique of personification but he never did so regularly as his aim was never to 'humanize the natural world'. Like most of the Romantics, Wordsworth too responded to the Industrial Revolution by rejecting the scientific view of the mechanical universe. In fact, for Wordsworth, humans and nature are essentially adapted to each other. Nature, according to Wordsworth is spirited and living and is a teacher that is ready to impart 'spontaneous wisdom'. While on the one hand, Coleridge in his poems like "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" shows us his deep passion and reverence for nature, which has been untouched by humans and his machine. Keats glorified the simplistic beauty of nature that was permanent and eternal against the mundane and transcendental life of man. Though the English Romantics like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats were opposed to the Newtonian scientific materialism, many of these poets balanced this opposition with a deep interest in natural science.

The nineteenth century witnessed the crisis in the social structure with the scientific discoveries of Newton and Darwin namely, the origin of species, natural selection and the survival of the fittest mentioned in Darwin's most seminal work, *On the Origin of Species* (1859). According to Darwin, man and all other vertebrate animals have been constructed on the same general model and in this regard, he viewed all beings as important and equal as the extinction of any beings can drastically effect the survival and sustenance of the other beings in the ecology. These theoretical considerations of the scientific knowledge stood in complete opposition with the traditional truths upheld by Christianity for years. This tensional relationship between the scientific world and the religious world led to an utter confusion and chaos without any central force of unity and belief. Humans were not ready to give away the traditional beliefs nor were they ready to reject the modern scientific truths. In the absence of unity, humans turned to nature for balance and solace, which was 'greying' as a consequence of the corrupt and exploitative aspirations of the capitalistic and industrial man. Nature was given a pessimistic treatment, which has been aptly shown in several of Matthew Arnold's poems like 'Dover Beach' and *In Memoriam* (1850) as well as Dickens' novels like *Great Expectation* (1861) and *David Copperfield* (1850).

Other significant writers of this period treated the natural world in different ways, like Thomas Hardy, George Eliot and Jane Austen celebrated the countryside and its refreshing nature untouched by industries and cosmopolitanism. Ann Radcliffe added the elements of mystery, gothic and supernatural to nature and Mary Shelley through her novel, *Frankenstein* (1818) opened the way for scientific fiction that glorified the non-human world. The Bronte sisters brought nature to the foreground in their narrative making it take an important role of a character in their novels through which readers could easily trace the semi autobiographical elements in their works. The works of the Bronte sisters was not only in praise of the green lush nature but also a celebration of the wilderness and the moors.

The modern twentieth century has witnessed several anthropocentric actions like unplanned developments, population boom,

pollution, exploitation of natural resources, the horrific world wars, decolonialisation and Depression that has not only changed the social structure but also the political and economic structures of the period. This selfish anthropocentric approach towards the ecology has challenged the replenishing rate of nature. In this century, science was viewed not only as an agency of development but also a means of dominance and power politics, which can be seen with the advent of nuclear wars that nations are engaging to maintain their individual supremacy and sovereignty. The modern age is an age of digital advancement and technology where man has been spiritually dead and alienated living without any purpose and direction. The idea of nation and Constitution which lays great emphasis on individualism has drifted humans away from the natural world, while on the other hand, the policies and laws mentioned in the Constitutions has made man equal citizens of the natural world, thereby making humans socially responsible towards nature.

The radical developments and comforts of the twenty first century has drastically changed the lifestyle of the modern man who no longer see nature, red in tooth and claw; for a man is much less likely now to perish from the heat or cold, to starve for want of food; his formerly intolerable dependency on the caprices of Nature is no longer so Gross; his relation to the other animals and to the vegetable creations appears thickly veiled- by air conditioning, frozen foods, washing machines, detergents, automobiles, electric blankets and power lawnmowers".

The increasing consumption of frozen and canned foods, living a 'in-door' culture, controlled by digital gadgets which has become an addiction in the human life has led to the minimal contact of humans with nature. This has changed the nature- centric approach to an anthropocentric way of living where humans have failed to protect and acknowledge the importance of the natural world. In fact, the modern man enters nature for adventures and ecotourism. The modern man shows himself as ecologically conscious who hesitates to act for the benefits of nature by sacrificing the needs, comforts and luxurious of the self, which makes the modern man, a shallow and an artificial individual for whom the importance of the self is the

most central. Most writings of this age situate nature to the background in their narratives. The period has witnessed several writings like *Silent Spring, The Country and the City* and *The Machine in the Garden* that have successfully voiced the sensitive ecological crisis as well as highlight the concerns of a modern man who is alienated, transcendental and disaporic, trying to seek an identity in an ambivalent and hybrid world of globalisation, digitalisation and neo-colonialism.

The growing concern and increasing awareness of the importance of ecological concerns led to the Western Literature Association meeting held in the year 1992, to become a remarkable event in the field of ecocriticism. This resulted in the eventual birth of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) with Scott Slovic as the first elected President. The mission of ASLE was "to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world and to encourage new nature writings, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature and interdisciplinary environmental research". Within a year, the size of the members of ASLE grew to more than three hundred, which doubled in the second year. This increase reflected not only the spread of awareness of the environmental crisis, but also an earnest attempt to do something to save the ecology and humankind. In the year 1993, ASLE published its own journal under the esteemed leadership of Patrick Murphy named *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment,* which became an important forum for critical and scholarly studies of literature and other disciplines addressing environmental considerations. It provided encouragement for the development of new ideas and strategies concerning ecology across the globe. It also played a significant role in channelizing the spirit and concerns of ecocriticism towards a progressive direction.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Trace the treatment of Nature during the age of antiquity.

Q 4: **'**Christianity has been regarded as the most anthropocentric religion.' Comment.

Q 5: Highlight the role played by the Western Literature Association of 1992 in the founding of ecocriticism.

14.5 MAJOR THINKERS

In this section, we shall acquaint ourselves with the most influential eco critical thinkers over the years who have not only contributed to the emergence of ecocriticism as a critical discipline but has also made the contemporary generations ecologically conscious.

The most significant eco critical thinker is **John Meeker** who brought the concept of ecology under the lens of theoretical study with the first introduction of the term 'literary ecology' in his influential work, *The Comedy of Survival: The Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) which attempts to discover the roles played by literature and the environment. It is a founding works of ecocriticism that spans across many centuries and analyzes the "comedy of survival" as a core to the ecological concept through the study of the two literary forms- tragedy and comedy. With this effort of Meeker, we see ecology enter into the world of literary and critical understanding as a significant area of study, which for a long time with the advent of the age of Renaissance was considered to be an area of study for the natural and physical sciences.

The term 'Ecocriticism' was coined by **William Rueckert** in his seminal essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978), which deals with ecology and its various concepts to the study of literature. He was not just interested in transferring ecological concepts to the study of literature but seeks to see literature inside the context of an ecological vision. In this essay, Rueckert deals with everything associated to the ecological vision including literary and non-literary aspects and narrations, as he believes that without an ecological vision, people will perish. He therefore states that this ecological vision must penetrate the economic, political, social and technological visions of our times and radicalise them, as the ecological problem is not national but global and planetary.

In the significant essay "Some Principles of Ecocriticism", **William Howarth** implies ecocriticism to be more ecologically literary. The essay is the study of the basic ideas associated to ecocriticism. According to the essay, the terms 'Eco' and 'Critic' are derived from Greek words 'oikos' and 'krits' meaning "house judge". For Howarth, an eco critic is "a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view towards celebrating Nature, berating its despoilers and reversing their harm through political actions". He further states that ecocriticism is a concept derived from four disciplines- ecology, an interdisciplinary science that describes the relationship between nature and culture; ethics, which attempts to offer ways to mediate historic social conflicts; language, which examines how words represent human and non-human life; and criticism, which judges the quality and integrity of works and promotes their dissemation. Each discipline stresses on the relationship between nature and literature as a shifting and changing space, which is standing in progress, unfinished. The essay contains a mini and basic library consisting on the wide issues associated with ecocriticism as well as its relationship with other disciplines like natural sciences, geography, social sciences, literature and media, history and American studies.

Greg Garrad has written the most ambitious and foundational works of Ecocriticism, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* which contains thirty four chapters giving us a wide range of areas to consider like Renaissance, children's literature, modernism, postmodernism, music, film, religion, medicine, new materialism and queer theory to name a few. Although the work is pre dominantly, Western in its perspective but it also focuses on what ecocriticism looks like in India, China, Japan and Africa. It shows the diverse vision of ecocriticism by stating that if environment is everything, than there is no bound to the domain of this ambitious project. Another significant work of Garrad is *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* which explores a wide range of ideas like pollution, pastoral, wilderness, nature, dwelling, apocalyptic narratives and animal studies covering their treatments from the ancient period to the contemporary world of digitalisation where cyborg culture is taking an significant hold in the world of theory. It's a basic

guide that deal with important concepts associated to ecocriticism like Environmentalism, Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, Eco Marxism and Social Ecology along with a chapter devoted to the future prospects of Ecocriticism.

Cheryll Glotfelty along with his co editor Harold Fromm published the most important anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* with the most classic eco writings that has touched all possible aspects of ecocriticism. It introduces readers to the emerging world of ecocriticism, which is ever exploring and ever expanding. While Lawrence Coupe in his work, *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism,* a comprehensive collection of essays attempts to draw a connection between ecology, culture and literature; Graham Huggan in his work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism:Literature, Animals*, *Environment* co edited by Helen Tiffin deals with the close relationship shared between colonialism and the ecology by mentioning the play of politics of development, entitlement, myth, religion, animals, representation and space. Further Timothy Clark in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment,* provides an introductory overview of literary and cultural criticism that concerns the environmental crisis. The work is a thought provoking book that challenges our conventional thinking. It deals with several core as well as untouched issues of Ecocriticism. It can be broadly divided into the four sections, namely romantic and anti romantic, the boundaries of politics, science and the struggle for intellectual authority and the animal mirror.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the contributions made by William Rueckert to Ecocriticism?

Q 7: "Most eco critics share the same ecological dilemma although their approaches may vary." Comment.

14.6 IMPLICATIONS IN LITERARY STUDIES

This section will lay emphasis on the increasing influence of ecocriticism in the academic and theoretical world. Ecocriticism has touched upon most major theoretical approaches and has thereafter

modified their boundaries a well as redefined its own boundaries. This flexible tendency of ecocriticism that deals with important global concerns has greened up other disciplines as the presence of ecology is found in most critical disciplines. The drawing of 'green' to other theoretical approaches helps us to understand the complex concerns and problems of ecocriticism better so as to bring all relevant changes to help man reverse the destructive and exploitative actions of man to nature. It adds significance to the different disciplines that ecocriticism draws from, thereby expanding the limits of knowledge and theories of the theoretical world.

The world has always been viewed in binary relationship so as to make meaning possible which is why the concept of 'Othering' should not be only limited to postcolonial studies which was given a proper shape under the hands of Edward Said in his famous work, *Orientalism* (1978). Othering is a concept that plays an important role in several relevant theories like feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, Poststructuralism and ecocriticism. The colonial project for political and economical gains that started during the Age of Renaissance was also the beginning of exploitation of the ecology by man endlessly and selfishly which has intensified over the years. This tendency of man further distanced him from the natural world. The relationship of humans and the nature is very similar to that of the orient and occident where nature and orient are regarded as dark, marginalised, unknown, uncontrollable, wild, ignorant, inferior, silent, exotic other and the relative whereas man and occident was regarded as light, known, controlled, mainstream, civilised, developed, sophisticated, knowledgeable, superior, language and the absolute self. Further, the postcolonial concept of Eurocentric can be seen in the attitude of anthropocentricism. The centrality of humans will always be present even in dealing with the world beyond humans, either from a positive or a negative point but his presence is destined. Like the postcolonial idea of ambivalence, culture needs the presence of nature to acknowledge itself as superior while at the same time, resisting the presence of nature which culture regards to be inferior, unwanted, uncontrollable, unpredictable and marginal which has been fixed and frequently repeated in literary as well as critical

writings. This stereotyping of nature and culture is the result of the play of social ideologies, language, education and the politics of representation.

The most important concept of ecocriticism has been the study of dualism of nature and culture wherein nature was wild, uncontrollable, unpredictable, unknown, silent and the exotic other while culture was sophistication, developments, predictable, known, controlled, speaking and the absolute occident, under the "common logic of domination" which is reflective of the binary between man and women, wherein women was seen as unpredictable, uncontrollable, ignorant, indecisive, unknown, marginal, exotic other, inferior, and silent, while man was seen as knowledge, decisive, predictable, controlled, decisive, absolute and superior. Both nature and women are social constructs that have been marginalised and made voiceless by social forces.

Ecofeminism is an important part of ecocriticism that primarily studies this sensitive issue of nature and woman as opposed to man and culture which has been emphasised in the works of several famous ecocritics like Isabella Bird, Mary Austin, Rachel Carson and Anne Dillard that have been aptly capture in the Vera L. Norwood's essay "Heroines of Nature". This essay is a study that attempts to draw a parallelism to understand the (mis)representation of both nature and women through the images constructed by society and language. Ecofeminism is a blended study of ecological and gender issues that attempts to provide a platform to witness the similar struggles, experiences, oppression, exploitation, abuses and representation politics that has made both nature and women a subaltern who apparently has no voice and therefore 'needs to be represented'. It attempts to break the binary of woman and nature in opposition to man and culture. Ecofeminism wants to make the readers conscious of the importance of the unlearning the established order of knowledge and power. Most ecofeminists supports the ideals of Woolf's 'androgyny' that was formulated in her significant work, *A Room of One's Own (*1929*)* that will help individuals to explore their own true self and all their potentials. Androgyny is the blend of feminine and masculine attributes in a single individual that will better equip individuals to face the dilemma and complex realities of the modern world.

Another important branch of Ecocriticism is Eco Marxism and Social Ecology. The main consideration of this branch of study is that there is a hierarchical play of power and dominance in the natural world. According to the Great Chain of Being, which places man, above all the other natural beings is reflective to the class system of society which explains the exploitation of the lower class by the upper class. Likewise, in a similar manner, the endless exploitation of the natural world by the humans has been explained. Further, we see in the capitalistic world, everything is seen as a commodity with its own value and utility. This has lead to limiting the perspective of the natural world to a space of raw materials and resources. Nature has been commodified and branded in the conscious modern world that purchases 'organic and healthy' food items for which a high price is demanded. However, this is an advertising approach to sell commodities for monetary profit. Another concept that should be taken into consideration by this branch is ecotourism. It is a type of tourism, wherein business and ecology are blended together for the purpose of conservation, recreation, escape, pleasure, aesthetics capitalistic and monetary benefits. It takes man closer to nature but only on a superficial level. It doesn't consider in developing a deep intimate bond of man with nature.

Ethics is a philosophical study of morality and virtues, which are believed to be essential for the holistic growth of an individual and harmony in society. Ethics plays an integral part of ecocriticism. Ethics has always emphasised on the attempts to dissolve the human ego so as to enter the private worlds of different entities in the landscape which will enables readers to understand and appreciate the magnificence and diversity of the natural world.

In the ecologically conscious age, attempts have been made to maintain and improve the quality of the ecology but without any efforts for radical social changes that can hamper the comfort and luxury of humans. This highlights the shallow intentions of a capitalistic society founded on a system of ethics that is always shifting its boundaries to redefine itself so as to suit the purposes of a generation. This category of individuals are labelled as Environmentalism who uphold the ideals of science, technology,

human rights, liberal democracy and economic progress even at the cost of environmental crisis. As against this category, we have the Deep Ecologists who whose poet laureate was Greg Snyder and its philosophical guru was Arne Naess who has set out eight pointers of deep ecology in George Session's anthology, *Deep Ecology for the Twenty First Century* (1995) The shallow approaches for the preservation of nature by the environmentalist was limited only for the sake of man while deep ecology includes the intrinsic value of nature. Deep Ecology makes the shift of tendency from human centric to a nature centric system of values. According to Michael J. Mcdowell, in his essay, "The Bakhtinan Road to Ecological Insight", "every literary attempt to listen to voices in the landscape or to "read the book of nature" is necessarily anthropocentric. It's our language, after all, that we are using and we inevitably put our values into the representation" with our varying degrees of egoism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 8: What are the main tenants of Ecofeminism?

Q 9: 'Ecocriticism is closely associated to ethics'. Compare the critical approaches of Environmentalism and Deep Ecology.

Q 10 : What is Eco Marxism?



14.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Ecocriticism has been a fast expanding discipline that has been raising sensitive ecological concerns in parallel to other major theoretical approaches that has furthered the scope of intensive study for ecocriticism. It is not only an area of study of humans and the ecology but also includes the non-human world that has opened the way for anti-anthropocentric studies. Ecocriticism highlights the ecological concerns as a global issue and not limited to a local and situational context, thereby politely urging people to join forces to uproot the

environmental crisis. It calls for a stronger commitment, unification and preservation of the ecology. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary approach that attempts not only to study ecology but the world beyond ecology including the study of cyborgs, new materialism and object oriented studies. Ecocriticism is therefore, not limited to a theoretical study but is a greater social responsibility that everyone should make their contribution for, so as to expand the boundaries of this discipline as the concerns of this discipline is urgent, global and ethical. Ecocriticism is a new journey which seeks to chart out a more defined and unique approach that is more in tune with the ecology and which will to a more truer and real representation of the natural world. It is an all-encompassing study of reality, life and living. It is moralising yet intellectual, emotional yet critical, and ethical yet scientific.



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14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Trace the word 'ecology' as a concept of the natural sciences and how and why it was introduced to literature (and by whom) and to the eventual coining of the term Ecocriticism (and by whom).

Ans to Q 2: Trace the events through the 1960s till the 1990s and the role played by the Western Literature Association in 1992 leading to the birth of ASLE and its journal ISLE.

Ans to Q 3: The main objectives of ecocriticism has been an attempt to understand the construct of 'ecology' as a cultural discourse despite being a physical existence which has been outcome of politics of narratives, language, representation and ideologies.

Ans to Q 4: The concerns of ecocriticism are not local and personal but global and planetary and thereafter the only battle worth fighting for as without the ecology, man will perish.

Ans to Q 5: Trace the spiritual conception associated with nature making it a nature centric world driven by the dominant ideologies of animism and paganism that ruled the social structure of this period.

Ans to Q 6: How it turned man away from nature. Also talk about natural theology and how it reduced the ecology as only a link to the creator. As a consequence, nature lost its own original essence and identity.

Ans to Q 7: The Western Literature Association of 1992 contributed to ecocriticism through the efforts of ASLE and ISLE that played a significant role in the foundation of ecocriticism as a theoretical approach.

Ans to Q 8: Rueckert coined the term ecocriticism as well as proposed several fundamental definitions for the understanding of the theory which aims at studying the relationship between ecology and literature.

Ans to Q 9: Most eco critics are sensitive to the ecological crisis and therefore aim to make the readers ecologically conscious beings in the hope for productive and progressive changes for a better eco future.

Ans to Q 10: Ecofeminsim is a concept of ecocriticism that blend the concerns of gender, nature and culture to understand the (mis)representations constructed by society and language.

Ans to Q 11: The aim of ecocriticism is to make their readers social responsible and ecologically conscious. Ethics and ecocriticism go hand in hand but the frame of ethics has been constantly changing leading to the sub school of thoughts like environmentalism and deep ecology (emphasis on the main objectives and functioning ideologies of both the school of thoughts).

Ans to Q 11: It attempts to study the idea of power and division between the human and natural world and the endless exploitation done by humans for economical gains as well as humans attempt to reduce the natural world in relation to commodity and monetary gains.



14.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Ecocrititcism is an interdisciplinary approach which has also recently taken the shape of a social movement. Discuss.

Q 2: Discuss how 'Nature' is treated in Ecocriticism.

Q 3: Discuss the politics of language and representation in Ecocriticism.

Q 4: Ecology and ethics play a dominant role in Ecocriticism. Elaborate.

Q 5: What are the future prospects of Ecocriticism? Explain.

Q 6: Discuss how nature was treated during the Romantic Period.

Q 7: Name of few major thinkers associated to Ecocriticism and their contribution to the foundation and growth of the critical discipline.

Q 8: The contemporary society has adopted an 'in-indoor' lifestyle with minimal contact with Nature. Justify your views.

Q 9: 'Ecocriticism is not only a theoretical concept but also a social responsibility with global and planetary concerns.' Comment.

Q 10: What are the main objectives of Ecocriticism? Discuss.

Q 11: Why is Ecocriticism important as an area of study and research in contemporary times?

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UNIT 15: POST THEORY

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Introducing the Concept of Post Theory

15.4 Let us Sum up

15.5 Further Reading

15.6 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the concept of post theory
- explain the various contours of Post Theory and why did it emerge
- explore the different implications of Post Theory in contemporary literary studies

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the course Literary and Critical Theory I. In this unit, we shall discuss the concept of post theory and the way it has been used as part of an intellectual and academic movement. The concept of Post theory emerged as a number of scholars across the globe began to wonder whether the intellectual movement often know under the term, 'Theory' might have finally run out of fuel. Although theory has a white, patriarchal and western cultural origin, following 1980s, a perennial concern among the contemporary Theorists displayed in a number of publications has begun to pose this issue in a different way. In its more contemporary manifestation, post theory offers seemingly perennial doubts about the status and scope of the realm of the 'the Theoretical'. For this unit, in order to discuss the various offshoots of the concept of Post Theory, we shall adapt from the chapter "Conclusion: Post-theory" in Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker edited book *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*

15.3 INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF POST THEORY [Adapted from Raman Seldon et al]

While theory–sustained by its attendant Introductions, Guides, Readers and Glossaries–has since taken deep and pervasive root in Departments of English across the world and related areas of study, the anxieties it has engendered have persisted. David Carroll and Jonathan Culler, for example, rehearsed such complaints during the 1990s as follows: if the status of the literary canon is in doubt; if the formal integrity of literature, of art and of textual evidence in general is ousted by ideas of inner contradiction, marginality and indeterminacy; if objective fact is replaced by an idea of narrative construction; if the normative unity of the reading subject is questioned – then 'it must be the fault of "theory", which seems anyway not to be about literature at all…

Other studies, however, appearing on the cusp of and into the new millennium, have taken on a new tone. For it seems now that the days of theory, which gave rise to these anxieties, are over. As a flurry of titles have told us, the present age has opened upon the 'End of Theory' or, more ambiguously, the moment of 'after-' or 'post-' Theory. Thus, we are presented with Valentine Cunningham's *Reading After Theory* (2002), Jean-Michel Rabaté's *The Future of Theory* (2002) and Terry Eagleton's *After Theory* (2003), as well as the collections, *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism* (1999), *What's Left of Theory*? (2000) and *Life After Theory* (2003). Leaving aside any argument about whether we can ever meaningfully be 'post-theory', in the end we discover that what this portends is less a dramatic apocalypse than a reorientation. For what, by common consent, is thought to be over is the age of 'Theory', with its commanding capital letter and associated star names–especially that cast of (mostly) French intellectuals associated with varieties of Structuralism, Poststructuralism and Postmodernism: Barthes, Althusser, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Kristeva, Cixous, Spivak, Bhabha and Jameson, who dominated thinking in the 1970s and 1980s.

Now there seems to be no single orthodoxy; no new movement one must catch up with; no difficult, philosophically inclined, theory text one

must read. Some newer figures might be nominated for the role of leading theorist–Slavoj Z¡iz¡ek or Judith Butler, for example–but Butler herself, at least, would reject such a role: 'I do not understand the notion of "theory", she says, 'and am hardly interested in being cast as its defender, much less in being signified as part of an elite gay / lesbian theory crowd' (Rabaté, 2002: 1). From one perspective, this is a situation to be regretted. Where, in British or Western culture…is the public intellectual of the stature of Raymond Williams or Edward Said who will give a lead on major political issues? But then, this concern too is a long-standing one, centred over the last two centuries – curiously enough, surely – upon the special place of literature and a literary education in the general culture.

The recourse to 'Theory' in the heyday of the 1980s (which appeared to mean not *literary* theory, but 'philosophy', 'psychoanalysis', 'feminism' or 'cultural theory') seemed to some to facilitate this broader role. To others, though, this was the heart of the problem. For the injunction to consult the theoretical canon or 'latest thing', could be felt as an intimidating, modish or frustrating distraction from the proper business of literary study. The difference now, once more, is that these questions–including questions on the specific nature and role of literature or art–are being asked, not in the spirit of 'anti-theory', but of 'post-Theory' with its capital letter. For invariably the works on this theme tell us there can be no return to the days of pre-theory in lower case. Rather, it is felt that the high 'Theory' of the 1970s and 1980s is now superseded or thoroughly absorbed into theory or 'theories', understood less as a body of texts or positions than an activity: one which brings a critical scepticism to taken for granted assumptions about institutions, social, sexual, economic relations, and conceptions of subjective, cultural and transcultural identities.

Thus theory is 'a pugnacious critique of common sense notions', says Jonathan Culler (1997), which 'offers not a set of solutions but the prospect of further thought'; David Carroll (1990) concurs: theory confronts 'the unexamined aspects of the dominant critical strategies and analytical methods…the contradictions and complexities inherent in traditional questions'; it seeks 'to ask different kinds of questions or to ask questions

in a different way'; is committed to 'keeping the critical process open'. For Michael Payne (2003), 'theory is about how we self-reflectively see things'; for Terry Eagleton (2003), similarly: 'If theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever.' And Valentine Cunningham (2002) – dispensing with the consolations of innocent reading – confirms that 'We all – all of us readers – come after theory'. In this sense theory is here to stay; it is, as Culler says, 'endless'.

…For Culler, in an essay in the volume *What's Left of Theory*? (2000), it is explicitly literature and the literary which have been neglected. In particular, what has been sidelined is the self-reflexiveness of the literary text, the 'poetic function' famously described by the linguist Roman Jackobson as 'the focus on the message for its own sake'. This distinctive mark of the literary has been overlaid by the imperatives of race, sexuality, gender. And where this occurs, Culler says in his 1997 book, literary studies and its modes of textual analysis defer to the 'symptomatic interpretation' of a sociologically inclined cultural studies. …The volume in which Culler's essay of 2000 appears contains two essays directly on issues of race, sexuality identity politics and the law which make no mention of literature. This does not mean they are not valuable essays, but it does help make Culler's point that 'the question of literature', once 'at the heart of the theoretical project' (most evidently in structuralism), no longer occupies this place. Despite this, Culler means to keep 'the literary in theory', because from this position, the complexities and indeterminacies which comprise the 'thick description' of literary texts can complicate or challenge standard assumptions or reductive propositions on questions, for example, of identity, agency or kinship which also interest cultural studies. The difficulty, however, would seem to be in maintaining this textual emphasis. If theory, as above, is understood as an attitude of permanent critique, open to alterity and the other, then it is close cousin to the literary, and the signs, Culler says, are indeed that 'the literary has migrated into theory'. For some, on the contrary, the literary has spread even further – in fact, too far – to become the common idiom of a self-consciously fictionalizing postmodern culture. The price of this extension, for Culler, is the loss of distinctiveness and critical edge:

'perhaps it is time', he reasons therefore, 'to reground the literary in literature'. What beckons, then, is a return to 'poetics', the concerted study of the operation and reception of poetry and narrative developed in Culler's own earlier work.

Valentine Cunningham's *Reading After Theory* (2002) would also return us to literature. The 'Theory' first introduced in the 1960s has had an undoubted impact, he says, upon the teaching of English and other disciplines. But where do we go from here? Should we embark on a re-reading of the canon? Should we pick and mix, text by text, much as we select items from the supermarket shelves or from the 'gumbo' (the full and varied plate) of an exotic postmodernism? Cunningham's answer calls for a return to the traditional close reading of texts, which he believes theory has 'cast into outer . . . darkness'. We might wonder in passing to what extent this has been true of feminist or postcolonial criticism; and isn't deconstruction committed to a close engagement with texts? Terry Eagleton (2003), for one, states clearly that 'It is not true that cultural theory avoids close reading'. Cunningham remains unconvinced, while allowing that a number of critics and some theorists have kept to the path of close reading and that others have returned from the outer darkness of Theory, having seen the error of their ways. His exemplary case is Frank Kermode who holds firm to what Cunningham calls 'the old, and British, tradition of interest in truth and value and reference'. These virtues he contrasts with a postmodern scepticism towards truth, avoidance of value, and substitution of difference for reference. The ideal relation of a reader with a text depends in all this, says Cunningham, on 'tact': the 'gentle' 'caring', 'loving touch' of an 'unmanipulative reading' in 'close-up, hands-on-textual encounters', and showing 'a rational, proper, moral even, respect for the primacy of text over all theorizing about text'.

All reading and all readers come 'after theory'. So Cunningham reiterates, and so much is generally agreed. But when we go back to read the text, what theory do we take with us? The practice of close reading has had its own associated schools and exemplars from early in the 1920s and its own implied theoretical suppositions about literary form, meaning and

value. However, Cunningham is not advocating a return to the supposed objectivity of Practical or New Criticism, though he shares the major assumption with these movements that the text has primacy – for if theory comes first, it should know its place, he says, as the 'lesser partner' and handmaiden to criticism. Beyond this, Cunningham's guiding terms and criteria – truth, reference, 'good sense', 'humanism and moralism'–evoke an older tradition whose core principles, he contends, were ignored or displaced by Theory.

His response to the sceptical and pluralist ethos marking the aftermath of Theory raises a number of important and contentious issues. Of these, one of the most important – most obviously in debates on the literary canon – is the question of 'literary value'. Frank Kermode, in fact, provides an interesting example here. Though he was one of the first to introduce and encourage discussion of the new theory in the late 1960s and 1970s, Kermode has remained more a literary critic than a theorist. While alert to theory's insights and supportive of the need, as he puts it in a recent discussion (2003), 'to think about what thinking about literature means', he is aware that this activity could not satisfy the desire 'to come into intimate contact with literary texts'. 'Since the aesthetic is out of fashion', he says, we have a self-reflexive theoretical discourse and some shaky classical and romantic ideas concerning literary value, coherence, wholeness and 'organic unity'. We remain confused, therefore, about what makes art or literature good for us. Cunningham has no such doubts, at least about how to approach literature: it comes down to 'what all tactful readers have known all along, namely that all good and true reading is close reading; that no reading can claim the name which is not like that'.

One value Kermode does allude to strongly is that of 'general civility', something he finds in intellectual discussion, in Shakespeare, and in a style of criticism which seeks to address academic and general readers alike. Perhaps Cunningham, too, has such a double readership in mind, both as readers of literature and of his own study – hence its loosely conversational, openly combative tone. The result connects, or seeks to connect, good literature, good reading and an idea of good society: a humanist scenario

whose sources (in an 'old, and British, tradition') lie as deep in 'pre-Theory' as in the moment of 'after Theory'. Cunningham's call for a return to a traditional 'tactful' reading of literary texts finds at once a companion and contestant in another, reinvigorated older practice. Close reading, claims Jonathan Bate (2003), looked down on an interest in the 'facts' of an author's life or the scholarly editing of texts. 'We weren't very scientific in those days', he says – until 'Theory', that is, which as Structuralism (he mentions Culler admiringly) appeared to offer a 'new rigour and objectivity'. This was disturbed by Deconstruction, which seemed to endorse saying 'whatever we liked' as long as it now illustrated a text's self-deconstruction rather than its unity. 'Facts' were again ruled out of court. Even so, through this period and the turn to ideology, thinks Bate, 'literary scholarship – biographical, historical, bibliographic and textual' continued quietly on while theory made all the running and all the noise. Now, he proposes, critics, teachers and students need the 'basics' first, not of theoretical '-isms', but of literary biography and textual bibliography.

Textual bibliography examines the transition of a text from manuscript to book, in this way seeking the factual textual evidence of an author's intentions, forms of censorship, collaboration and revision. Often this procedure, which emerged strongly in the 1980s, is called 'genetic criticism'. The versions and revisions comprising the genesis of James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, for example, have received this kind of diligent treatment. 'Genetic Criticism', as Jean-Michel Rabaté (2002) suggests, is the key remaining example of literary study's relation to science. It has some affinities, too, with historical method – though much depends then on what we mean by 'history'. For although, on the one hand, 'genetic criticism' owes something to New Historicism or Cultural Materialism and to Deconstruction (displacing a reverential notion of the 'original' with the material evidence of textual difference), it can also sound like a reassertion of undisputed 'fact' anchored in the physical evidence of the textual archive. Bate encourages the latter view: fact has been branded, he recalls – evoking Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* and the character of its disciplinarian school-teacher, Thomas Gradgrind – as the sign of an oppressive

industrialism. But in our own postmodern age of image and simulation, the coin is flipped over, says Bate, with the result that the subject of English now needs the Gradgrindery of sheer fact to critique the 'free for all' the discipline and society have become. The implication, too, is that with so much patient, textual deciphering to do, theoretical questions can be left on the shelf. We might be forgiven for thinking that, for some of these authors, 'after Theory' in effect means a return either to the formalist or traditional reading of literary texts or to a reinvigorated literary scholarship which is in fact bored with or indifferent to Theory. John Brenkman (2000) implies that any invocation of the 'literary' will be nostalgic – and there is a degree of nostalgia surely in Culler's, Cunningham's and Bate's arguments. Brenkman adds usefully, however, that there can be 'formalist and nonformalist approaches to form'. But if he himself sides with the latter, it is with some aversion to the routine non-formalist analysis of the themes of race, class, gender and sexuality associated with a reductive version of cultural studies. Current criticism of this type ignores the dynamic of inner form, he says, and so weakens the connection of literature and politics where it should be strongest. Brenkman therefore calls for attention to be paid to inner form *and* to worldliness (the 'historical life world' comprising the content of an artwork). Both the social practice of writing and aesthetic experience, he adds, belong to the public realm – the second in the sense that an experience of beauty depends upon the assent of others to that beauty. This public realm Brenkman sees as sustained by the liberal and republican traditions of Western thought, which – damaged though they are – 'cannot be superseded'. Broad consequences would thus follow from a new emphasis upon form: a revitalized linkage of literature and politics and a reaffirmation of the public realm and Western Enlightenment traditions upon which, for Brenkman, such a linkage depends.

We see how, advancing on the distinction made earlier by Rabaté between theory on one side and the 'something' which is missing on the other, that it matters what is meant not only by 'theory' but by these second terms ('the literary', 'reading', 'culture', 'politics') and how then the relations between these terms are understood. Some new criticism has also

introduced other more specific domains, themes and issues having to do with the law, ecology, space and location (Garrard, 2004; Brooker, 2002). This work is also often linked with new interdisciplinary initiatives, between literary and legal studies or literature and social and cultural geography, for example, whose agenda is neither narrowly textual nor overwhelmingly theoretical, but is committed none the less to the subtleties of inner form and to present-day social and political issues. Much Feminist and Postcolonial criticism has also maintained what Brenkman describes as 'non-formalist approaches to form'. At this point, however, we want to look at two approaches – perhaps manifestos would be a better term – which urge us to look afresh to either end of this spectrum of form and worldliness, or, to put it differently again: art and politics.

One self-proclaimed new direction has been the 'New Aestheticism', announced under this title in the collection of essays by Joughlin and Malpas (2003). 'The rise of critical theory', the editors say on their first page, 'has all but swept aesthetics off the map.' What in this case has been lost, they claim, is 'the sense of art's specificity as an object of analysis . . . its specificity as an aesthetic phenomenon'. An initial problem with this proposal is that ideas of 'the aesthetic' and 'aestheticism' suggest a rearguard action rather than a new beginning: a return to a belief in artistic autonomy, individual genius, and transcendent universal values, or to the provocative formalism of the 'art for art's sake' movement of the late nineteenth century. Harold Bloom, too, it is worth noting, founds his Western Canon (1995) on aesthetic criteria rather than on moral values or cultural politics – for which he has only disdain. And Bloom also laments 'the flight from the aesthetic among so many of my profession'. However, there is a significant difference in intention between these authors. For Bloom, the aesthetic is 'an individual rather than a social concern' and a measure of art's autonomy – of which he tends to feel himself the lone defender. The editors, contributors and associated authors of the 'New Aestheticism' argue, in a quite different direction, that theirs is a social, indeed political, concern: that a 'turn' to the aesthetic implies a radical reorientation, vital, in Isobel Armstrong's account (2000), to a democratic founding of literary education.

The case made by Joughlin and Malpas is first that the 'New Aestheticism' inaugurates a conversation with philosophy which theory avoided. What theory in fact tended to pillory and reject, they argue, was an outmoded view of the aesthetic. This attitude assumed that the aesthetic stood for the idea of artistic autonomy and a universalizing humanist ideology, falsely derived, says Isobel Armstrong, from Immanuel Kant. Instead, the proponents of 'New Aestheticism' are advocating a new 'post-theoretical' phase, even a 'post-aestheticism', when theory becomes more reflective, but in ways which will have wide implications for art and culture. Above all this entails maintaining a dialectical view of works of art which recognizes that while 'Art is inexplicably tied to the politics of contemporary culture . . . the singularity of the work's "art-ness" ' is not determined by surrounding political, historical or ideological discourses. As such, the 'new' or 'post-aesthetic' is strongly indebted to Theodor Adorno's ' "defence of autonomous art as socially critical" ' and his belief that ' "art works bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world" '.

…Both textual bibliography or 'Genetic Criticism' and the 'New Aestheticism' present themselves as responses to the contemporary world, which is seen as standing in need either of more facts or of more play and transgressive openness. They show, once more, how diverse the positions taken up 'after theory' can be, but also how these differences depend on the way in which the wider world is perceived. That both Bate and Docherty use an example from literary fiction is itself interesting; that they use the same example to quite different ends is also clearly revealing. We might ask, however, how relevant the symbolic figure and philosophy of Dickens's Thomas Gradgrind is. Is the present age a utilitarian age? Don't we hear more about 'spin' than 'facts', and hasn't market capitalism and globalization taken us a long way from the English industrial revolution?

In this connection, the editors of *The New Aestheticism* refer at one point to the significantly titled volume, *The Anti-Aesthetic* (1983). The introduction to this collection by Hal Foster, and the key essays it contained by Jürgen Habermas, Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, helped launch a decade of debate on postmodernism. For Joughlin and Malpas, this

introduction of the postmodern spelt the simultaneous and premature rejection of the aesthetic. In the passage they quote, Foster himself recognizes the force of Adorno's conception of the aesthetic as a negative, subversive category: 'a critical interstice in an otherwise instrumental world'. This, he says, 'is hard to relinquish'. Foster's point, however, is that, 'Now [in postmodern times] we have to consider that this aesthetic space too is eclipsed'. It follows that 'New Aestheticism', in so far as it is '*new*', must show how its arguments connect with the details of this changed world–or how literature can be reconnected to society and politics, to echo Brenkman's theme. To put this differently, the evident debt to Adorno in these arguments suggests how much the resources for a 'new aesthetic' lie in the modernist tradition and an associated aesthetic of 'estrangement'– that is, of art's own 'alienation', critical distance and potential. In hailing the 'new' and 'modern', Docherty refers, for example, to 'the defamilarising contact with the unknown'. Elsewhere, Joughlin reflects on the process of 'adaptation' as evidence of the potential and openness to otherness of exemplary art-works. To what purpose, we might ask, does this New Aestheticism 'adapt' an earlier modernist, *avant-garde* impulse to a world where art is enmeshed in contemporary commodity culture? Does a 'new aesthetic' of play and transgressive internal critique stand as a credible opponent to what in many accounts of the postmodern is described as an already thoroughly aestheticized world of simulation and the 'free play' of signs – or what Joughlin and Malpas call 'the rootless aesthetic contingencies of cultural studies or lit. crit. postmodernism'?

In his volume *After Theory* (2003), Terry Eagleton means to respond at the outset to the present world situation. For him, the 'other half' missing from theory is not literature or reading, culture or aesthetics, but politics. The theory Eagleton has in mind, however, is not so much the 'high theory' of Foucault, Derrida, Cixous and others, but 'postmodernism', which he generally also identifies with recent cultural theory. The problem confronting the present age, Eagleton argues, is fundamentalism: the West's 'implacable political enemy'. In the face of this challenge, a 'postmodern' theoretical and critical agenda focusing on gender, race and sexuality, along with its characteristic attitudes of scepticism and pluralism, is found

seriously wanting. The latter's wariness of concepts of absolute truth and the universal – of fundamentals, in short – means that it lacks depth and ambition: 'where the political right acts globally', as Eagleton puts it, 'the postmodern left thinks locally', confined to the pragmatic and particular while the 'grand narrative' of capitalist globalization sweeps up everything in its path, including postmodern cultural theory itself, which emerges less as critique than accomplice of late capitalism, attached as it is – and as is capitalism – to the transgressive, hybrid and pluralistic. In the realm of value, Eagleton comments, a deconstruction of fixed hierarchies has 'merged effortlessly with the revolutionary levelling of all values known as the marketplace'.

Eagleton's alternative is an ambitious 'political criticism' (to borrow a description from his earlier *Literary Theory: An Introduction*) within a revitalized Marxist and socialist tradition. 'After theory' therefore means *more* theory, on a grander and more responsible scale, open to the large questions postmodernism has shied away from: of morality and metaphysics, love, biology, religion and revolution, evil, death and suffering, essences, universals, truth, objectivity and disinterestedness. This new project embraces, that is to say, both an expanded Marxism and a revaluation of some of the keystones of liberalism. Thus the concept of 'disinterestedness' Eagleton wants to understand not as 'impassivity' but as the opposite of 'self-interest'; similarly, 'objectivity' he interprets not as a spurious impartiality but as ensuring a recognition of the independent existence of 'the other'. It includes, too, a willingness to reflect on the legitimacy of Western values in the face of the fundamentalisms which reject this model…



15.4 LET US SUM UP

From our reading of the excerpt on Post Theory, we have learnt how Post Theory has enabled the intellectuals to ponder upon the utility of theory in interpreting literature. As Valentine Cunningham in *Reading After Theory* (2002) stated, the theory first introduced in the 1960s has had an undoubted impact upon the teaching of English and other disciplines.

However, other thinkers like David Carroll and Jonathan Culler expressed their views that if the status of the literary canon is in doubt; if the formal integrity of literature is ousted by ideas of inner contradiction, marginality and indeterminacy; if objective fact is replaced by an idea of narrative construction; if the normative unity of the reading subject is questioned – then 'it must be the fault of "theory". However, due to Post Theory, we are also in a privileged situation. As opined by Terry Eagleton, 'After theory' means *more* theory, on a grander and more responsible scale, open to the large questions postmodernism has shied away from: of morality and metaphysics, love, biology, religion and revolution, evil, death and suffering, essences, universals, truth, objectivity and disinterestedness. This new project, according to Eagleton embraces both an expanded Marxism and a revaluation of some of the keystones of liberalism. This has undoubtedly rendered a more enriched engagement with literary studies.



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15.6 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the basic premises of the concept of Post Theory? Discuss with reference to some of the thinkers who contributed to the concept.

Q 2: Name some of the important critical works which popularised the term Post Theory or After Theory and discuss their influence on theoretical discussions.

Q 3: Do you think that 'Post Theory' also liberates the interpretations of texts from the shackles of the rigidity in theory? Elaborate.

Q 4: Why did 'Post Theory' emerge? Discuss with reference to the important arguments provided by critics like David Carroll, Jonathan Culler and Terry Eagleton.

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

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Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati- 781006
(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

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2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

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