PG EG S4-02 (DSC)

TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER-IV

LITERARY AND CRITICAL THEORY II

ENGLISH

Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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DSC 2: Literary and Critical Theory II

CONTENTS : **Pages**

Unit 1 : Ferdinand de Saussure:"The Object of Study" **11-30**

Saussure: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important Theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Saussure

Unit 2 : Roman Jakobsson: "Linguistics and poetics" **31- 50**

Roman Jakobson: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Jakobson

Unit 3 : Roland Barthes: "The Death of the Author" **51-68**

Barthes: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Barthes

Unit 4 : Stanley Fish: "Interpreting the Variorum" **69-84**

Fish: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Fish

Unit 5 : Mikhail Bakhtin: "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" **85-107**

Mikhail Bakhtin: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Bakhtin

Unit 6 : Jacques Lacan: Seminar on "*The Purloined Letter*" **108-123**

Lacan: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Lacan

Unit 7 : Jacques Derrida: "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" **124- 141**

Derrida: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Derrida

Unit 8 : Michel Foucault: "What is an Author?" **142-165**

Foucault: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Foucault

Unit 9 : Hayden White: "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact" **166-184**

White: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of White

Unit 10 : Walter Benjamin: "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Production" **185-208**

Benjamin: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Benjamin

Unit 11 : Toril Moi: "Female, Feminine, Feminist" from *Sexual Textual Politics* **209-221**

Toril Moi: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Moi

Unit 12 : Elaine Shwoalter: "Towards a Feminist Poetics" **222- 237**

Shwoalter: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Shwoalter

Unit 13 : Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" **238-255**

Spivak: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Spivak

Unit 14 : Hom Bhabha: "Nation and Narration" from *The Location of Culture* **256-272**

Bhabha: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Bhabha

Unit 15 : Edward Said: "Introduction" from *Orientalism* **273-291**

Edward Said: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Said

References **292-294**

COURSE INTRODUCTION

In the previous Course i.e. **DSC 1—Literary and Critical Theory II**, we have discussed many of the important theoretical approaches and concepts. Although Literary and Critical Theory contain various concepts, which are of course not so easy to comprehend, they are also quite fashionable, interesting, exciting and liberating in many ways. We, as students of literature must realise that literary and critical theory usually help us to discuss different kinds of writing as well as literary texts in newer ways. Besides, we must also note that such theories propose unexpected questions to be answered. In many ways, literary and critical theories have become one of those disciplines making English literary studies a part of fresh interdisciplinary area. We should therefore, 'apply' these theories if at all we want to understand them.

In this course, i.e. **Discipline Specific Core (DSC) Course** Literary and Critical Theory II, we have tried to bring to you some of the very basic theoretical essays written at various time periods of the 20th century. The important fact is that the spread of 'theory' has led to a lot of new critical and theoretical works. Many of the major theorists, whose essays we have prescribed in this course, may not be living now. But, the applications of their respective theorists have continued. However, due to the lack of space, we have not been able to include some other theoretical texts. We shall find that the prescribed essays and texts include areas like history of ideas, Linguistics and Poetics, Reader Response Theory, Psychoanalysis, Structuralism and Post structuralism, Gender-studies, Anthropology, Postcolonialism and Postcolonial historiography and so on. The attempt has been to examine how 'theory' shows itself to be the case of the 'literary' world responding to the changes in the larger environment of the 20th century

We shall however note that the units of this course cannot be read as the substitutes for the actual texts of theory. Therefore, despite the difficulties, we should try to read the original texts of the prescribed essays and follow up with the further reading submitted at the end of each unit. For instance, we can read the units on Barthes and Lacan with reference to their entries in different anthologies cited. However, we do believe that the different units of this course shall make necessary connections between us and the theories we shall read. To that extent, we should find these SLMs useful as we have adapted from important books about literary and critical theory.

This course is divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** shall deal with five literary texts written by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Stanley Fish and Mikhail Bakhtin. **Block 2** shall deal with five literary texts written by Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Hayden White and Walter

Benjamin. **Block 3** shall deal with five other theoretical texts written by Toril Moi, Elaine Showalter, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said.

Block 1 of the course **Literary and Critical Theory II** contains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 1: Ferdinand de Saussure: "The Object of Study"introduces us to Ferdinand de Saussure and his essay "The Object of Study", taken from his famous book *The Courses in General Linguistics.* Saussure is one of the most prominent modern linguists and a founder of the Structuralist approach in the human sciences. The prescribed essay "The Object of Study" offers certain vital points regarding the study of languages. Before Saussure, the language study or 'philology' was dominated by a historical approach, where the chief concern was to trace the change and development in phonology and semantics within and between languages or groups of languages. Saussure pointed out that a scientific study of any language is not possible through such historical or 'diachronic' study.

Unit 2: Roman Jakobsson: "Linguistics and poetics"introduces us to Roman Jakobson, another most powerful mind in the 20th century and a founding member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the founder of Prague Linguistic Circle. The prescribed essay "Linguistics and Poetics" discusses the relationship between linguistics and poetics, and in this unit, we shall try to examine how this essay has inspired a generation of thinkers of different human sciences. Besides, it will be also relevant to relate the ideas of Jakobson to his predecessors like Saussure and Baudouin de Courtenay as well as to his contemporaries such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin etc.

Unit 3: Roland Barthes: "The Death of the Author"shall discuss the essay "The Death of the Author" by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes. Roland Barthes is often considered one of the leading names in French structuralism. In the essay "The Death of the Author", Barthes argues against traditional literary criticism and its practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in the interpretation of a text. Barthes boldly argues that the work and creator are not related.

Unit 4: Stanley Fish: "Interpreting the Variorum" discusses the essay "Interpretive Community" which is a part of his longer essay "Interpreting the *Variorum*" by Stanley Fish. One of the most controversial figures in contemporary literary theory, Stanley Fish has been pivotal to the development of literary theory in America. A leading critic and an inventor of reader-response theory, Fish is perhaps best known for his intellectual style and eruditeness. Debunking standard notions of interpretation, Fish's essay "Interpreting the Variorum"(1976; rev. 1980) introduces his seminal concept, "Interpretive Communities", which radically revises interpretive theory by locating meaning not in texts but in readers, not in individual response but in the communities.

Unit 5: Mikhail Bakhtin: "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" reads Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" which is taken from his book *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Bakhtin, who is hailed as one of the greatest 20th century theorists of literature, not only discusses in this essay the origin and nature of the novel but also sensitises the readers regarding the elements that distinguishes the novel from other genres.

Block 2 of the course **Literary and Critical Theory II** contains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 6:Jacques Lacan: "Seminar on "*The PurloinedLetter*"deals with the life and works of the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan with particular reference to his essay "Seminar on *The Purloined Letter.*" Critics assume that Lacan has been the most controversial psychoanalyst since Freud. In his Seminar on Poe's story, Lacan is commenting on Freud's concept of the "repetition compulsion," which he translates as "repetition automatism".

Unit 7:Jacques Derrida: "Structure, Sign and Playin the Discourse of the Human Sciences"deals with the French Post Structuralist critic Jacques Derrida and his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences". This essay was a lecture presented at Johns Hopkins University on 21st October 1966 by Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play" inaugurated the term deconstruction in the context of contemporary literary theory.

Unit 8: Michel Foucault: "What is an Author?" is based on Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" Michel Foucault was a philosopher, social scientist, and historian of ideas. However, he was undoubtedly one of the most powerful and influential figures who shone in Paris in the 1960s and 70s. The essay "What is an Author?"is typical of Foucault's historicizing approach. Here, Foucault shows that the idea of the author, which we tend to take for granted as a timeless, irreducible category, is, rather, a 'function' of discourse which has changed in the course of history.

Unit 9: Hayden White: "The Historical Text as LiteraryArtefact"discusses the essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact" by Hayden White. White has been an American historian whose elaboration on the concept of metahistory is an important contribution to the questioning of the traditional forms of historical thinking that often characterises Post modernism. His claim in the prescribed essay is that the manifest historical text is marked by strategies of explanation, which include explanation by argument, explanation by emplotment and explanation by ideological implication.

Unit 10: Walter Benjamin: "The Work of Art in anAge of Mechanical Production"shall discuss the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" written by Walter Benjamin. This essay

is an essay of cultural criticism, which proposes that the *aura* of a work of art is devalued by mechanical reproduction. The subject and themes of the essay have substantially influenced the fields like art history, architectural theory, cultural studies and media theory

Block 3 of the course **Literary and Critical Theory II** contains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 11: Toril Moi: "Female, Feminine, Feminist" from *Sexual Textual Politics* shall discuss the ideas or concepts like Female, Feminine, Feminist as conceived by Toril Moi. Toril Moi's essay "Female, Feminine and Feminist" not only problematises the textual and apolitical focus of the literary feminism but also interrogates the homogeneity of experience that is attributed to women. As we finish reading the unit, we shall see how Toril Moi also discusses the contributions of French feminism in understanding some of the important political and theoretical issues of feminist criticism.

Unit 12: Elaine Shwoalter: "Towards a Feminist Poetics" shall discuss Elaine Showalter's essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" which is yet another important Feminism. We shall note that the women's suffrage movement of the nineteenth century was also a women's rights movement where women fought for the right to vote. In her essay *Towards A Feminist Poetics* (1979), Showalter analyses feminist criticism from varied perspectives. She mostly concentrates on five dominant areas; namely, woman as reader, woman as writer, feminist critique and its problems, aims of gynocritics, and finally the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into, the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage.

Unit 13: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: "Can the Subaltern Speak?"should be studied particularly with reference to postcolonial and subaltern studies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is also an award-winning critic with an international repute for her scholarly contributions worldwide, has been an important name in theory and the essay, which we shall study in this unit, established Spivak among the ranks of feminists who consider history, geography and class when thinking about women.

Unit 14: Hom Bhabha: "Nation and Narration" from *The Location of Culture* discusses Homi Bhabha's essay "Narrating the Nation" which is also the Introduction to his book *Nation and Narration* (1990). This book is primarily an intervention into "essentialist" readings of nationality that attempt to define and naturalize Third World "nations" by means of the supposedly homogenous, innate, and historically continuous traditions that falsely define and ensure their subordinate status. Nations, in Bhabha's views, are "narrative" constructions that arise from the "hybrid" interaction of contending cultural constituencies.

Unit 15: Edward Said: "Introduction" from *Orientalism* shall make an attempt to examine the concept of orientalism through a reading of the "Introduction" to Edward Said's *Orientalism.* Said's *Orientalism* is regarded as one of the major contributions in this area as it brought to focus the ways in which non- Western cultures had been subjected to the hegemonic construction of the West.

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 READING" 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: FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE: "THE OBJECT OF STUDY"

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Saussure: Life and Works

1.4 Reading the Text: "The Object of Study"

1.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

1.6 Reception of Saussure and His Ideas

1.7 Let us Sum up

1.8 Further Reading

1.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.10 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- know what the object of studies in Linguistics should be
- identify the key ideas about language that Saussure brought into the arena of linguistic studies
- discuss linguistics as a branch of Semiology
- analyse the similarities and differences between language and other social institutions
- situate Ferdinand de Saussure in the history of linguistic studies as well as literary and cultural studies

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces us to Ferdinand de Saussure—one of the most important thinkers of modern linguistic studies and a founder of the structuralist approach to literary and cultural studies as well as other human sciences. The famous book *The Courses in General Linguistics,* which goes under Saussure's name, but is in fact a compilation of his lectures documented by his students and colleagues, is a pioneering text in the

structuralist approach to the studies of language as well as other disciplines in humanities. The essay "The Object of Study" is taken from this book and it offers us certain vital points to take care of while studying languages. Before Saussure, the study of languages or 'philology' was dominated by a historical approach, where the chief concern was to trace the change and development in phonology and semantics within and between languages or groups of languages. Saussure pointed out that a scientific study of any language is not possible through such historical or 'diachronic' study; he suggested that language should be approached as a 'synchronic' system where all the elements and rules are simultaneously available to the users of the language. Another important aspect of the essay is that Saussure has clearly defined language as a system of signs. As such, language can be studied as any other discipline, studied under the purview of Semiology. As we read through this unit on "The Object of Study", we must keep in mind the fact that this seminal text has inspired a generation of thinkers of different human sciences. As students of literature, we must take care of how Saussure, and particularly this essay, has influenced the scenario of literary criticism in the early 20th century Europe.

1.3 SAUSSURE: LIFE AND WORKS

Ferdinand de Saussure was born to the noble Calvinist family of Henri de Saussure and Countess Louise de Pourtalès in Geneva on November 26, 1857. He was the first of the nine children. The Saussures were well-known for their expertise in modern science and education. Henri, in due course, sent his first two sons, Ferdinand and Horace, to the same school. Here Ferdinand had got an initial grounding in the classical languages, German and English. At the age of twelve, he was brought back to École Martine in Geneva in 1870 and then he went to the public Collège de Genève in 1872. Then, he further went to the Gymnase de Genève and finally to the Université de Genève and started his formal study of linguistics under the guidance of Louis Morel, a researcher at the University of Leipzig. Ferdinand soon headed to Leipzig in 1876. With teachers like Hermann Osthoff and Karl Brugmann, studies in linguistics at Leipzig were at a great height at the time.

Saussure took membership of the Société de Linguistique de Paris and published his first articles in *Mémoires* published by this society in 1877–1878. In some of these articles, he made certain radical observations on the vowel systems of the Indo-European languages, which brought him considerable reputation just at the age of 20. He left for Berlin during 1878–1879 in order to study Celtic and Sanskrit. He was awarded PhD by Leipzig University in 1880 for his doctoral thesis analysing the genitive absolute construction in Sanskrit. In 1880, he went to Paris with the purpose of doing a second doctorate. He, already being well known there because of his publications in the *Mémoires*, was hired within months to give lectures on the historical linguistics of Gothic and Old High German at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Soon, he had to take up the position of the Adjunct Secretary of the Société de Linguistique. Saussure taught at the École Pratique des Hautes Études till 1889.

Then, he returned to Geneva on leave for a year. This leave at Geneva was academically not fruitful and he had to meet with some personal crises too. He returned to Paris for the academic year 1890–1891 but decided to go back permanently to the Université de Genève to teach Sanskrit and the history and comparison of the Indo-European languages. In 1894, Saussure was one of the main organisers of the Tenth International Congress of Orientalists in Geneva, where he gave a paper, which would later be known as Saussure's Law. His other important works include his articles on Lithuanian language.

Saussure married Marie Faesch in 1892 and by 1895, they had three sons: Jacques, Raymond and André of which André died of cholera at infancy. Saussure was suffering from chronic arteriosclerosis and on February 22, 1913, he breathed his last.

Now let us discuss some of his key works.

The *Mémoire*:

The *Mémoire,* published in December 1878, offers a path breaking discussion on the vowel system of the indo-European languages. Here, Saussure proposes that there was just one vowel in stressed syllables in

the original Indo-European mother language, an *a* which raised to be pronounced as /e/. He symbolised it as a_1. Subsequently, in some linguistic environments, a_1 shifted phonetically to /o/. He symbolised this variant as a_2. At first, the raising and backing were not noticed by speakers, they were perceived as what Saussure called colourings, or what would later be called allophonic variants. Over time, however, they came to signal nuances in meaning, such as different tenses of the same verb. Saussure argued that the primitive Indo-European syllable could have had one of four possible nuclei: a_1 or a_2 on their own, or forming a diphthong with another sound, which he termed the *coefficient sonantique* 'sonant coefficient' because of its co-effect with the vowel on later developments of the sound system. It had to be a sonant, capable of functioning as either a semi-consonant or a vowel because one eventual development was for the a_1 or a_2 to disappear, leaving the sonant coefficient as the lone vowel of the syllable. Alternatively, the sonant coefficient might disappear, leaving a trace on the preceding vowel such as lengthening or a change in quality or stress.

Soon after the *Mémoire* was published, the Danish linguist Herman Möller proposed that these three sounds might correspond to the laryngeal consonants which he had recently posited for Proto-Indo-European. Saussure neither accepted nor rejected this possibility, and he would later accept Brugmann's (1886) identification with the Hebrew *schwa*. Both Möller's and Brugmann's suggestions provided evidence for the earlier unity of the Indo-European and Hamito-Semitic language families, which Möller was so keen to prove.

***The Courses in General Linguistics*:**

Saussure became most famous with the book *The Courses in General Linguistics,* or *Cours de linguistique générale*. This work was put together by his colleagues Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye mainly using the notes of students along with some manuscript notes from Saussure from the general linguistics courses he gave in Geneva. Saussure had to accidentally take up the responsibility of giving the course in general linguistics at the University of Geneva in 1907. He, being a person interested in Sanskrit and Latin, had to struggle hard with the course he had little

interest in. However, in course of his classes, he could develop his ideas clearly. He had to start from questioning the meaning of such basic terms like *langue*, *language*, *parole*, which are used more or less interchangeably in colloquial French to indicate language in general, a particular language, a text, an utterance, a word etc. Towards the end of his third and final course, he could finally describe language as a system whose every element is attached to every other element, and where the content of an element is purely a value generated by its difference vis-à-vis every other element. The book offers explanations of the key concepts like langue and parole, nature of linguistic signs, language as a system of signs, signifier and signified, diachrony and synchrony etc. that Saussure discussed and developed in his lectures.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention the significance of *The Courses in General Linguistics.*

1.4 READING THE TEXT: "THE OBJECT OF STUDY"

Saussure divides the essay "The Object of Study" into three sections. The first section tries to define language while the second section tries to address different facts of language in terms of linguistic structure and the third section tries to explore the scope of languages in human affairs.

The first section starts with a few questions that seek to problematise the question of knowing what exactly the object of linguistic studies is. There is a sharp difference between linguistics and other sciences: in case of other sciences, the object of study is already given, defined properly while, in the case of linguistics, the object is not properly defined. In linguistic studies, there may be multiple objects depending on the viewpoint adopted. Again, whatever viewpoint may be adopted, there is always a series of dualities accompanying each viewpoint. For example,

a. The ear perceives articulated syllables as auditory impressions. But, these auditory impressions cannot exist without the presence of vocal

organs. As such, one cannot divorce what is heard from the oral articulation. Both the oral and the auditory aspect of language are interdependent.

b. Language is not simply reducible to phonetic facts. The speech sounds are only instruments of thought and they have no independent existence. A sound is a complex auditory-articulatory unit that, in turn, combines with an idea to form another complex unit, both psychologically and physiologically.

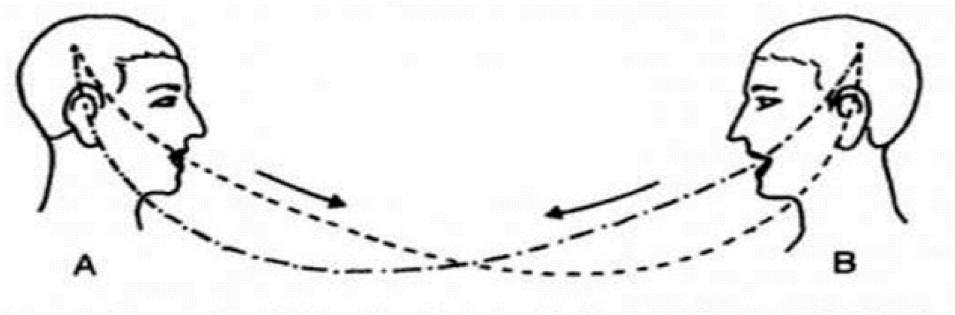
c. Language has both social and individual aspects; neither is conceivable without the other.

d. Language, at any point of time, involves an established system as well as an evolution. It is always an institution at the present and a product of the past. As such the state of language at any particular point is not fixed but in a constant process of evolution.

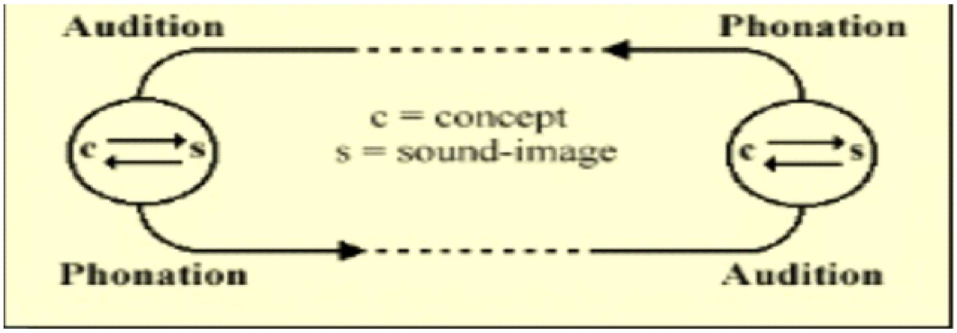
So the linguist is confronted with these multiple series of dualities from which there is no way out. Now the linguist is left with two options: either to take one aspect separately and risk failing to address the dualities or to study language in several ways simultaneously. In the second choice, the object of study will become a muddle of disparate, unconnected things that open up the doors to various sciences – psychology, anthropology, grammar, philology and so on. These sciences may claim language as part of their study but the methodologies applied in these sciences are not applicable in linguistic studies. At last, Saussure concludes that the linguistic must take the study of 'linguistic structure' as his primary concern, and relate all other manifestations of language to it. In fact, Saussure claims that amid so many dualities, it is only the linguistic structure that seems to be completely and independently definable.

Here comes the next question – what linguistic structure is? Saussure clarifies that linguistic structure is one essential part of language. The structure of a language is a social product of our language faculty. At the same time, it is a body of conventions adopted by the society to enable the members to exercise their language faculty.

Hereafter Saussure moves to the second section of the essay that evaluates the place of linguistic structure among the facts of language. In order to identify what role the linguistic structure plays within the totality of language, Saussure first takes the example of the individual act of speech. The act of speech requires a minimum of two persons: one who speaks and the other who listens. Suppose two persons A and B are talking to one another.



The starting point of the circuit of speech is at the brain of the first speaker, say A, where facts of consciousness or concepts are associated with representations of linguistic signs or sound patters through which expressions are made. The moment the brain associates the concepts with the linguistic signs, the process becomes a psychological one. The next step is physiological process where the brain signals the vocal organs to produce the necessary sound. The sounds are then transmitted from A's mouth to B's ear through a physical process. When B speaks, the same processes repeat from B's side.



This is how the circuit of speech becomes complete. However, this circuit can further be divided into different types:

a. External (the sound waves travelling from mouth to ear) and Internal (rest of the phenomenon).
b. Psychological (the brain associating concepts with sounds) and non-psychological (the physiological facts of the vocal organs and the external facts outside the speaker)
c. Active part (everything that goes from the associative center of the speaker to the ear of the listener) and passive part (everything that goes from the listener's ear to the associative center).

In the psychological part, which is localised in the brain, everything that is active can be called 'executive' (c'!s) and everything that is passive can be called 'receptive' (s'!c). Apart from this, there must be taken care of the faculty of association and co-ordination as soon as one goes beyond the individual signs in isolation. This faculty plays a vital role in the organisation of language as a system. This is where one must start considering the social dimension of language. All individuals linguistically linked with the sharing of same signs will form within themselves a kind of mean and all of them will reproduce the same signs, approximately if not exactly, to link them to the same concepts. It is important to note that the external part of the circuit shown above, the process of the sound travelling from the mouth to the ear, does not have any significant role in this process. When we hear an unknown language being spoken, we hear only the sounds but we fail to enter into the social reality of what is happening because of our failure to comprehend. It is the internal part of the circuit (s'!c) where actually the process of comprehension takes place. The psychological part of the circuit is not fully involved here; the executive side plays no part as execution is never carried out by the collective but by the individual only. The individual is always the master of it; Saussure designates this by the term 'speech'. The individual's receptive and coordinating faculties build up a stock of imprints, which turn out to be for all practical purpose the same as the next person's. If we can collect all word patterns, association and coordination methods, stored in all individuals, what we shall in our hand will be the

social bond that constitutes their language. It is an accumulation of signs and rules that associate and coordinate signs–the grammatical system, founded by the practice of 'speech' by all individuals or, more precisely, groups of individuals. Though this grammatical system is produced by every individual, the language is never complete in any individual. Language exists only in collectivity.

Here, with the distinction between language and 'speech', Saussure comes to distinguish between (i) what is social from what is individual, and (ii) what is essential from what is ancillary or more or less accidental.

Language is not the function of the individual speaker. It is 'speech', which an individual act. While language is passively registered by the individual, 'speech' is the individual act of the will and intelligence of the speaker. Within the process of speech, there are two distinctions: a. the combinations through the speaker uses the code provided by language to express himself/herself and b. the psycho-physical mechanism which enables the speaker to externalise these combinations of codes.

After this prolonged discussion on language as a structured system, Saussure comes to the following conclusion:

a. Despite having numerous disparate facts, language comes out to be a well-defined entity, which can be localised in the process where the brain associates the concepts with the sound patterns (c'!s, s'!c). The individual is powerless to modify or create the social part of the language, which is external to him. This social part of the language exists as a kind of contract agreed by the members of the community. The individual is required to get acquainted to these norms in order to use the language.
b. A language system, which is different from 'speech', can be studied independently. A scientific study of linguistic structure is possible only if the other connected elements are kept aside.
c. While language is heterogeneous in general, linguistic structure is homogenous in nature. This sign system is conditioned by an essential union of ideas and sound patterns. Here, both parts of the sign – the sound pattern and the idea – are psychological in nature.

d. Linguistic structure is as real as speech. Similarly, despite being essentially psychological, linguistic signs are not abstractions. The associations of sound patterns and ideas, which make up the language after being collectively agreed, are realities localised in the brain.

Thus, Saussure proves that language can be studied as scientifically as any other system of signs.

The third section of the essay tries to locate place of languages in the field of human affairs. First of all, Saussure declared that language is a social institution. However, it is distinct from other social, political, or judicial institutions because of the different facts involved with it. As language is a system of signs for expressing ideas, it can be compared to deaf and dumb alphabets, traffic signals, symbolic rites, military signals etc. however, the importance and scope of language is much wider.

This is where Saussure finds the importance of Semiology in the study of languages. Semiology studies the role of signs as part of the social life as well as the nature of signs and the laws governing them. As such, it is part of social psychology, and hence general psychology. Saussure claims that linguistics should be a branch of Semiology and should be governed by all laws that govern Semiology. Thus, Saussure believes that, linguistics will have an assured place in the field of human knowledge. If someone wishes to discover the true nature of language systems, one must first consider what they have in common with all other systems of the same kind. In order to make linguistics fit in the science of Semiology, all the other factors of languages that differentiate languages from other sign systems must simply be ignored. This will not only help linguistics being viewed through the lens of Semiology but even other human areas like rites, customs will also be brought under the same scanner. This will further the scope of semiotics to a higher extent.

1.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

Language as a System of Signs:

Saussure observes that language or *langue* is a system of signs in which each sign consists of two elements or values – a concept and an

acoustic image. It has to be clarified that here the images are not visual images, but acoustic or oral-auditory. While other linguists of his time generally conceived of languages as a way of denoting things and actions, Saussure argued that it is not things, but our conception of things, actions, and ideas, that are part of our language; not names, but certain psychological schemas being evoked in the brain by certain combinations of sounds.

Saussure later developed the ideas of these two components of the linguistic and explained *signifiant* or 'signifier' as the acoustic image and *signifié* or 'signified' as the concept. What happens here is that the association between the signifier (sound pattern) and the signified (concept) cannot be simply created by an individual; it has to be sanctioned by the community. In fact, all the signs in a language are part of a social contract to which the community agrees and an individual cannot tamper with it.

Language as a Social Phenomenon:

Language is the product of the community, which is external to the individual users. A language consists of numerous signs, which every user has to reproduce in order to create meaning. The association of the 'signifier' and the 'signified' within a sign has to be established in the social or external domain. Here, an individual has no authority to change the associations. As such, what an individual has to do is but to fit into an already existing system of signs in order to express himself. As such, language is a social institution, which is external to the individual who use it.

Psychological Nature of the Linguistic Sign:

Language is a system of signs where a sign consist of a signifier and a signified. What happens in language system is that certain sound patterns are associated with certain ideas or concepts. These associations can be localised in the brain of the individual speakers. When an individual starts a conversation, he has to convert his concept or ideas (c) into an acoustic or auditory image (s). This process of linking the idea with the acoustic image is a psychological process. Then that auditory image is reproduced through the vocal organs and the sound is created. The sound eventually travels through the external media and reaches the ear of the

listener. The sound (s) received by the ear then travels to the brain as the acoustic image which eventually gets translated into the idea or concept (c). This process of linking the sound to the concept (s'!c) is also a psychological process. Thus, the process of expressing meaning through language is a psychological phenomenon.

Langue and Parole:

Saussure claimed that a language, *langue*, is the virtual system possessed by all those who form part of the same speech community that makes it possible for them to understand and be understood by other members of that community. *Parole* is the utterances, the texts, that individuals produce and understand making use of the system, ie. *langue*. *Langue* pre-exists and is independent of individual users. On the other hand, *parole* is dependent on individual user's capacity and is the concrete instance of the use of the system of *langue.*

In order to explain the difference between *langue* and *parole*, Saussure takes the example of the game of chess. Here, *langue* consists of the rules of the game and *parole* consists of the moves an individual player makes while playing the game. Apart from it, Saussure also talks about *faculté de langage*—the language faculty that all people possess, as distinct from the particular *langues* they speak. However, he does not make a consistent three-way division of *langue-parole-langage*, particularly because he sometimes uses *langue* to mean language generally, as a pan-human attribute. So very often, *langue* and *langage* are often seen synonymous to one another in Saussure's writings.

Value:

Now we know that a linguistic sign consists of a signifier and a signified. Each signifier and each signified is a value produced by the difference between it and all the other signifiers and signifieds in the system. It is not the sound as such that signifies; there is, after all, much variation in the pronunciation of all speech sounds. The French /r/, for example, exhibits wide phonetic variation; indeed, analysis of speech sample recordings shows subtle differences in every utterance of the "same" sound. But if

when saying the word *roi* 'king' a speaker produces Standard French / wa/ , or /rwa/ with a rolled r, or /Rwa/ with the Parisian working-class guttural r (as on records by Édith Piaf), the same signifier is perceived, so long as it is distinct from *moi* 'me', *doigt* 'finger' or any other word.

Likewise, if an animal of a certain species comes into view a French speaker would exclaim *Un mouton!*, and an English speaker *A sheep!*. But, the linguistic values of *mouton* and *sheep* are different. The signified of *mouton* includes the whole animal or some of its meat, whereas the signified of *sheep* covers only the animal on the hoof. Its meat is *mutton*, an entirely different sign. This means that the signified belongs to a particular language just as much as does the signifier. The world we experience with its categories of animals, things, colours and so on—does not exist before language. The signifier and the signified are created together, with the particular segmentations that distinguish one language from another, one culture from another. Every word or term or unit within the system is connected to an entourage of other units, related to it either syntagmatically (i.e., the units that can come before or after it in an utterance) or associatively (i.e., the units with which it has something in common in form or meaning). The relationships of difference in these two domains generate the value of the unit. So, ultimately, is becomes clear that no linguistic sign exists in isolation.

The Arbitrariness of the Linguistic Sign

For Saussure, the first principle of the linguistic sign is that the link between a signifier and a signified is radically arbitrary. An ancient doctrine was that linguistic signifiers are mimetic in nature, given the existence of apparently mimetic signifiers such as French *fouet* and its English counterpart *whip*, in each of which can be heard the crack of a whip. However, it is a matter of interpretation: for someone who hears the sound, the mimetic link is real, despite the French word's etymological derivation from Latin *fagus* or 'beech'. The Saussurean principle of the arbitrariness of the sign maintains that, whether or not there is such a mimetic link, the sign operates in the same way: *fouet* and *whip* are no more "true" for those who hear the crack of a whip in the word than for those of us who do not

hear it. Nor are they more or less true than a word such as *livre* or *book*, in which a mimetic link between sound and idea seems far-fetched. However, this principle of arbitrariness does not necessarily apply in the relationships among signs; even if the linguistic sign is arbitrary, it is impossible for anyone to change it. However, a sign may get change over the course of time, specifically by bringing about a shift in the relationship between the signified and signifier.

Linearity of the Signifier and the Associative and Syntagmatic Axes:

In the linguistic system, the signs unfold in a single dimension, a linear one. This frame has a fundamental implication for a language: it has two axes. Each element of a language occupies an associative axis, which determines its value vis-à-vis other elements, and a syntagmatic axis, which specifies which elements can and cannot precede it and follow it in an utterance, sometimes inflecting its meaning. The associative axis is also known as the "paradigmatic" axis. Whereas the paradigmatic axis draws the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the syntagmatic axis is concerned with drawing the relationships between different signifiers in order to construct meaningful sentences.

Mutability and Immutability:

It is agreed by every scholar that every element of a language is subject to change, to evolution. No language is in the same state as it was one hundred years ago. Even then, paradoxically, a language is immutable in the sense that no speaker can change it on his or her own. One can introduce an innovation into *parole*, which is confined to the level of the individual utterance; but for this innovation to enter into the language requires it to be accepted by the entire speech community. Because, the value of each element derives from its relation to all the other elements, any change in the system affects the inter-relationships among the signs and, thus, produces a new system, a new *langue*. Here lies the immutability of *langue*: no individual can change it; the mass of speakers have to accept a change, for it to become part of the language. In so doing, they do not make a change *within* the language. Rather, they move the whole language forward into a new state of language.

This mutability and the immutability of language result from the arbitrariness of the sign. Were there some rational connection between signified and signifier, it would allow speakers of the language to intervene either to prevent inevitable change, or to initiate changes of their own. Saussure did not deny the validity of the usual explanation given in his day for immutability, namely the historical transmission of language. It excludes any possibility of sudden or general change because generations always overlap and because of the amount of imitative effort involved in mastering our mother tongue. However, Saussure insisted that the essential explanation lies with the arbitrary nature of the sign, which protects the language from any attempt at modifying it, because the general populace would be unable to discuss the matter, even if they were more conscious of language than they are. For something to be put into question, it must rest on a norm that is reasonable. Immutability has a social dimension as well. The fact that the language is an integral part of everyone's life creates a collective resistance to change initiated by any individual. In addition, it has a historical dimension: the language being situated in time, solidarity with the past checks the freedom to choose.

Synchrony and Diachrony:

A language has both its social and historical dimensions. The reality of a language cannot be fully comprehended without taking account of both these dimensions, in conjunction with the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. The state of a language at a particular point of time is the result of both social and historical forces working on it. Our attention to one dimension without attending the other will always restrict us from a complete understanding of the language system. A language develops with the passage of time i.e., in the course of history; at every point of history, different social forces are at work in affecting the language thereby asserting importance of the social dimension of the linguistic system. Therefore, a language is not free from these two dimensions.

Having considered the importance of these two dimensions, it has to be understood that the study of a language must be both synchronic and

diachronic. Synchronic analysis is aimed at identifying the elements of a system and their values at a given point in time. Diachronic analysis is the comparison of two or more states of a language, as they exist at different times. It has to mentioned here that the so-called 'historical' linguistics of Saussure's day was not diachronic; it claimed instead to trace the development of isolate elements, like a vowel, or an inflection, across the centuries as if this element had a history, a life, independent of the system of which it was a part at each particular moment. It was Saussure who invented diachronic linguistics and differentiated it from the so-called historical linguistics. However, it must be noted that his diachronic approach of language was inseparable from the synchronic approach.



LET US KNOW

It will be a fruitful exercise on your part to relate the ideas of Saussure with thinkers of later periods like Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin etc. For your greater understanding of the concepts in this unit, references have been drawn from other texts of Saussure too because Saussure developed most of his key concepts in some other essays compiled in the aforementioned book.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Discuss how Saussure establishes language as a system of signs.

Q 3: What do you mean by *Synchrony and Diachrony*? Why is it important to do synchronic and diachronic study of language?

Q 4: Explore the nature of the linguistic sign.

1.6 RECEPTION OF SAUSSURE AND HIS IDEAS

Ferdinand de Saussure's "The Object of Study" can be termed as the foundation stone of Structuralism, about which you have already studied in the previous course. The idea of Structuralist theory has achieved the

status largely on the account of Saussure's "Object of Study" which made it the major linguistic theme of the later years after his death. Every later linguist was some way or the other got influenced by the ideas of Saussure regarding the system of languages. The essay forms the basis of a concept of language as a vast network of structures and systems. Saussure's essay and specially his book *Course on General Linguistics* had diverse kinds of influence on Humanities scholarship in the last century.

Other thinkers have tried to establish correlations between linguistic structures and cultural structures because of the belief that it is language that determines our cultural and social experience. As such, every other social and cultural institution can be understood with the use of Structuralism. The principles and methods employed by Structuralism were later adapted in diverse fields like Literary studies, Philosophy, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Psychoanalysis etc by intellectuals like Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. These scholars took inspiration from Saussure's ideas on language; but extended them to diverse levels.



1.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt that Saussure has successfully defined language as a system of signs. Language consists of words and the words are nothing but certain signs. So apparently, there is not much difference between the linguistic system and any other system of signs like dumb and deaf alphabets or street signs or military signals. It is also mentioned that language is a social product. The signs in a language have to be sanctioned by the community and the individual has no power to change the associations within the signs. We have learnt that Linguistic structure involves both psychological and physiological process. The process of signification where a sound pattern is associated with an idea is a psychological process. On the other hand, the sound pattern being transformed into a real sound with the application of the vocal organs is a physiological process. We have learnt that Language is a social institution;

but it is different from political, judicial and other social institutions. Language, being a system of signs, can and should be studied as a branch of Semiology. Such a step would expand the scope of linguistic studies and transcend the barriers of cultural studies and other human sciences.



1.8 FURTHER READING

Barry, Peter. (2002). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bertens, Hans. (2003). *Literary Theory: The Basics*. London: Routledge.

Culler, Jonathan D. (1987). *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. London: Oxford.

Harris, R. (1987). *Reading Saussure*. London: Duckworth.

Holdcroft, D. (1991). *Saussure: Signs, System, and Arbitrariness*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds). (2005). *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. New Delhi: Pearson.

Sanders, Carol. (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure*. London: Cambridge University Press.



1.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: *The Courses in General Linguistics is* based on the class notes of Saussure… …in course of his classes, he developed his ideas clearly… …he had to start from questioning the meaning of such basic terms like *langue*, *language*, *parole*… …in the third and final course, he could finally describe language as a system whose every element is attached to every other element… …the book offers explanations of the key concepts like langue and parole, nature of linguistic signs, language as a system of signs, signifier and signified, diachrony and synchrony etc.

Ans to Q 2: language or *langue* is a system of… …sign consists of two elements… …a concept and an acoustic image… …the images are not visual but acoustic or oral-auditory… … our conception of things, actions, and ideas that are part of our language… …certain psychological schemas evoked in the brain by certain combinations of sounds… …two components of sign: 'signifier' and 'signified'… …the association between the signifier and the signified cannot be simply created by an individual… …it has to be sanctioned by the community.

Ans to Q 3: Language has both social and historical dimensions… …language at a particular point of time is the result of both social and historical forces… …language develops in the course of history… …at every point of history different social forces affect the language providing the social dimension… …Synchronic analysis identifies elements of a system and their values at a given point in time… …Diachronic analysis compares two or more states of a language at different times… …diachronic is not historical… …'historical' linguistics was not diachronic… …Saussure's diachronic approach of language was inseparable from synchronic approach.

Ans to Q 4: A language consists of numerous signs… …sign consists of 'signifier' and 'signified'… …certain sound patterns are associated with certain ideas or concepts… …these associations can be localised in the brain of the speakers… …converting concept (c) into an acoustic or auditory image (s)… …psychological process… …auditory image is reproduced through the vocal organs … …physiological… …sign is arbitrary… …the society must sanction the relations between signifier and signified.



1.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss, after Saussure, the problematics in the scientific study of any language.

Q 2: On what grounds, do you consider Saussure's "The Object of Study" a pioneering text of Structuralist literary studies and modern linguistics? Explain.

Q 3: Explain with illustrations how Saussure establishes the psychological and physiological nature of the process of language articulation and speech.

Q 4: How does Saussure claim a place for linguistics within the purview of Semiotics? Explain.

Q 5: How does Saussure establish the importance of society in the existence and functioning of a language? How does the scope and role of an individual differ from that of the society in relation to the use of a language? Discuss.

Q 6: In what way, did Saussure's ideas of language, inspire the future scholars of literary, cultural studies and other human sciences?

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UNIT 2: ROMAN JAKOBSON: "LINGUISTICS AND POETICS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Roman Jakobson: Life and Works

2.4 Reading the Text: "Linguistics and Poetics"

2.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

2.6 Reception of Jakobson and His Ideas

2.7 Let us Sum up

2.8 Further Reading

2.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.10 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the relationship linguistics and poetics
- locate "Linguistics and Poetics" in the history of modern linguistics and Structuralism
- realise the necessity of studying Poetics as part of Linguistics
- understand different factors affecting verbal communication and different functions of language
- explore the relationship between poetry and other verbal acts from a linguistic point of view

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces us to Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), one of the most powerful minds in the 20th century intellectual history. As a founding member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and, later, a founder of Prague Linguistic Circle, most of Jakobson's works comprise highly technical writings on grammar and phonology. However, his works often crossed the boundaries of linguistics and indulged in the domain of topics of universal

interest and importance. Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French structuralist, declared how the works of Jakobson had been instrumental in developing his own critical ideas on language and literature. Jakobson's works had immense contribution in defining modern linguistics and gaining its recognition as an independent science. He expanded the borders of linguistics to incorporate such areas as Phonetics, Semantics, Poetics, Slavic studies, Language Acquisition and Pathology and Mythology. He was influenced by the works of earlier linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure and Baudouin de Courtenay; but his concept of linguistics and his introduction of structural methods were original and influenced linguists all over the world. A prolific writer, his works include books and articles on linguistic subjects, mythology, and epic poetry and metrics. Often referred to as the father of modern structural linguistics, Jakobson developed sophisticated theories of language and communication that had significant effects on other disciplines like anthropology, art criticism, and brain research also. Among his ideas and theories on languages and communications, two ideas deserve special mention because of their influence over literary studies. The first is his identification of the metaphor and the metonymy as models for two fundamental ways of organising discourse that can be seen in any kind of cultural production. The other idea is connected to his attempt to understand 'literariness' or to define in linguistics terms what makes a verbal message a work of art. It is an attempt to establish a relationship between linguistics and poetics, which is later proven an immense contribution to modern linguistics and literary studies. The essay that we are going to read in this unit deals with this issue: the relationship between linguistics and poetics. As we read this unit on "Linguistics and Poetics", we should also try to examine how this essay has inspired a generation of thinkers of different human sciences. It will be a fruitful exercise on our part to relate the ideas of Jakobson to his predecessors like Saussure and Baudouin de Courtenay as well as to his contemporaries such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin etc.

2.3 ROMAN JAKOBSON: LIFE AND WORKS

Roman Osipovich Jakobson was born in Moscow to a prominent industrialist Osip Abramoviè Jakobson and chemist Anna Jakovlevna Jakobson on 11th October 1896. They were of Jewish descent. Showing keen interest in the study of languages at a tender age, Jakobson went to the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, Moscow to study languages. Thereafter he went to study at the Historical-Philological Faculty of University of Moscow. Among the students of languages, he soon became a leading figure and with the help of other students, he founded the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1914, and remained its president till 1920. This Circle took active part in avant-garde art and poetry in Moscow. He organised intensive fieldwork in Russian dialectology and folklore during the summer vacations of 1915 and 1916. He was awarded a Master's degree by Moscow University in 1918. During the period between 1918 and 1920, he worked as a Research Associate at Moscow University.

Jakobson was initially an ardent supporter of the Bolshevik revolution but soon became disillusioned with it because of the increasing of state conservatism and hostility that came on the way of poetic activities. He went to Prague in 1920 to work as a translator for the first Soviet Red Cross Mission to Czechoslovakia. He officially became a Czech citizen in 1937 and remained in Czechoslovakia until the Nazi occupation in 1939. Jakobson was the founding Vice-president of the Prague Linguistic Circle, which was founded on 6th October 1926. He attended the First International Congress of Linguists held in The Hague in April 1928. In October 1929, Jakobson attended the First International Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague and took the responsibility of the head of the East Slavic section (Ostslavisches Referat) of the journal *Slavische Rundschau*, edited by F. Spina and G. Gesemann and published by Walter de Gruyter and Co., Berlin, from 1929 until 1939.

In the year of 1930, Jakobson received his Ph.D from German University in Prague for his dissertation *Über den Versbau der Serbokroatischen Volksepen*. In December 1930, he attended the

International Phonological Conference held in Prague. He became a professor at Masaryk University in Brno in 1933. During these days, he developed a close relationship with the noted Czech linguists and literary figures like Nikolai Trubetzkoy, René Wellek and Jan Mukaøovský. At the same time, during this period, he made remarkable contribution to Czech academics with his studies of Czech verse.

Towards the end of 1931, Jakobson moved to Brno and in 1933, he took up a post of an Assistant Professor at Masaryk University, Brno. He remained a visiting professor at the same university during the period from 1934 to 1937. From 1937 to 1939, he worked as an Associate Professor of Russian Philology and Old Czech Literature at the same university. He attended the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences held in Amsterdam in July 1932. In September 1933, he attended the Third International Congress of Linguists held on Rome. During the months of July and August in 1935, he visited Bulgaria. In August-September 1936, he attended the Fourth International Congress of Linguists held in Copenhagen on 21 March 1938, and lectured on the fundamentals of phonological analysis at Prague Linguistic Circle.

In the month of July in 1938, he attended the Third International Congress of Phonetic Sciences held at the University of Ghent. After Czechoslovakia, was occupied by the Nazis, he left Brno 1939 and in the month of April fled to Denmark via Berlin. There he got associated with the University of Copenhagen as a visiting Professor. There he got the opportunity to work with the Copenhagen Linguistic Circle, and such intellectuals as Louis Hjelmslev. He left Denmark for Norway in early September and started working as a visiting professor at the University of Oslo. In 1940, following the Nazi invasion of Norway on April 9, he walked across the border to Sweden, where he continued his work at the Karolinska Hospital on topics like aphasia and language competence. Here he joined the University of Uppsala as a visiting professor.

Following the speculation of a Nazi invasion of Sweden, he left for the United States in 1941 and reached New York on June 4. In the year of 1942, he got appointed to the Faculté des Lettres, École Libre des Hautes

Études, New York, as Professor of General Linguistics, and to the Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientale et Slave as Professor of Slavic Philology. He continued these jobs during the period from 1942 to 1946. From 1943 to 1946, he served as a Visiting Professor of Linguistics at Columbia University. He became one of the founding members of the Linguistic Circle of New York and its journal *Word* in 1944. In the year of 1946, he got appointed to newly formed Thomas G. Masaryk Chair of Czechoslovak Studies at Columbia University He occupied this post until 1949. In 1949, he was appointed the Samuel Hazzard Cross Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and of General Linguistics at Harvard University where he remained until his retirement in 1967. In April 1957, he was concurrently appointed to Massachusetts Institute of Technology as visiting Professor. He continued in his role at MIT until becoming emeritus in 1970. He became emeritus at Harvard University in 1965.

Roman Jakobson died in Cambridge, Massachusetts on 18 July 1982.

2.4 READING THE TEXT : LINGUISTICS AND POETICS

Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics" is almost a kind of summery of what he had been developing through numerous research papers about language and linguistics. This essay deals with the relationship between linguistics and poetics. He begins the essay by explaining a chief characteristic of 'poetics' that poetics deals primarily with the question, *What makes a verbal message a work of art?* Because the main subject of poetics is the specific differences of verbal art in relation to other arts and in relation to other kinds of verbal behaviour, poetics is entitled to the leading place in literary studies. To explain it further, he takes the example of other forms of art. Poetics deals with the problems of verbal structure, just as the analysis of painting is concerned with pictorial structure. As linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, poetics can also be called as an integral part of linguistics.

However, there must be diverse types of arguments against this claim that poetics should be part of linguistics. It is evident that many devices

studied by poetics are not confined to verbal art. There is every possibility of transposing a novel like *Wuthering Heights* into a motion picture, or medieval legends into frescoes and miniatures, or any tale into music, ballet, and graphic art. Even epics like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* can also be represented through comics, by preserving certain structural features of their plot despite the disappearance of their verbal shape. Blake's illustrations to the *Divina Commedia* are proof that different arts are compatible and translatable to one another. Therefore, it is evident that many poetic features belong not just to the science of language but to the whole theory of signs, that is, to general semiotics. This observation can be applied not only to verbal art but also to all varieties of language because language shares many properties with some other systems of signs.

There can be a second objection, which is not specific to literature alone: the question of the relations between the word and the world concerns not only verbal art but actually all kinds of discourse. It is expected from linguistics to explore all possible problems of relation between discourse and the 'universe of discourse': what of this universe is verbalised by a given discourse and how is it verbalised. However, the truth-values are always found to be extra-linguistic entities that apparently go beyond the bounds of poetics and of linguistics in general.

Jakobson refers to a current conception that, in comparison to linguistics, poetics always is concerned with evaluation. Jakobson asserts that this differentiation between the two fields is based on a fallacious interpretation of the contrast between the structure of poetry and other types of verbal structure. The wrong conception is that verbal structures are 'casual', designless in nature compared to the 'noncasual', purposeful character of poetic language. Actually, as Jakobson argues, any verbal behaviour is goal-oriented, but the aims may be different. It is the conformity of the means used to the effect aimed at which remains the main problem that preoccupies inquirers into the diverse kinds of verbal communication. There is a close correspondence between the question of linguistic phenomena expanding in space and time and the spatial and temporal spread of literary models.

Jakobson, here, moves towards explaining another common yet fallacious trend of terminological confusion between 'literary studies' and 'criticism' which, as result, tempts the students of literature to replace the description of the intrinsic values of a literary work by a subjective, censorious verdict. The label 'literary critic' applied to an investigator of literature is as erroneous as 'grammatical (or lexical) critic' would be applied to a linguist. As syntactic and morphologic research cannot be supplanted by a normative grammar, in the similar manner, no writing expressing a critic's own tastes and opinions on literature can be treated as an objective scholarly analysis of verbal art. That is why; Jakobson asserts that, there must be a clear-cut distinction between literary studies and criticism.

Jakobson equates literary studies with linguistics on the basis that both consist of two sets of problems: synchrony and diachrony. Here, poetics remains the focal point of literary studies. The synchronic description envisages not only the literary production of any given stage but also that part of the literary tradition, which for the stage in question has remained vital or has been revived. The selection of classics and their reinterpretation by a novel trend is a substantial problem of synchronic literary studies. It has to be noted here that synchronic poetics, like synchronic linguistics, is not to be confused with statics; any stage discriminates between more conservative and more innovatory forms. Any contemporary stage is experienced in its temporal dynamics, and, on the other hand, the historical approach both in poetics and in linguistics is concerned not only with changes but also with continuous, enduring, static factors. A thoroughly comprehensive historical poetics or history of language is a superstructure to be built on a series of successive synchronic descriptions.

A separation of poetics from linguistics can be allowed only when the field of linguistics appears to be unnecessarily restricted, for example, when the sentence is viewed by some linguists as the highest analyzable construction or when the scope of linguistics is confined to grammar alone or uniquely to non-semantic questions of external form or to the inventory of denotative devices with no reference to free variations. It has clearly been pointed out by Voegelin that the two most important and related

problems which face structural linguistics, namely, a revision of 'the monolithic hypothesis of language' and a concern with 'the interdependence of diverse structures within one language'. For any speech community or for any speaker, there exists a unity of language, but this over-all code represents a system of interconnected sub-codes. Each language encompasses several concurrent patterns, which are each characterised by a different function. That is why, language must be examined taking into consideration all the variety of its functions.

Jakobson, thus, before discussing the poetic function of language, tries to define its place among the other functions of language. To draw an outline of these functions, a concise survey of the constitutive factors in any speech event, in any act of verbal communication is required. In a speech event, the ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative, the message requires a CONTEXT, which can be understood by the addressee and either verbal or capable of being verbalised. There has to be a CODE, which is fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (the encoder and decoder). Finally, there must be a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication. All these factors that constitute the verbal communication can be schematised as below:

CONTEXT

ADDRESSER MESSAGE ADDRESSEE

CONTACT

CODE

Now, of these six factors, each determines a function of language different from the others. Though these six basic aspects of language are easily distinguishable, Jakobson claims that there can hardly be any verbal message that fulfils only one function. This diversity is caused by a hierarchical order of functions. The verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function among all the six functions.

Messages with an orientation towards the CONTEXT are often called REFERENTIAL and they serve the denotative or cognitive function. All imperative sentences, political speeches and odes make use of conative function of language. Second person pronouns frequently occur in this function. Commands and prayers also employ this function.

The EMOTIVE or 'expressive' function is focused on the ADDRESSER, and it aims at the direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about. It tends to produce an impression of a certain emotion whether true or feigned. Therefore, the term 'emotive' is used to designate its function. The purely emotive stratum in language is presented by the interjections. They differ from the means of referential language both by their sound pattern (peculiar sound sequences or even sounds elsewhere unusual) and by their syntactic role (they are not components but equivalents of sentences). If we analyse language from the standpoint of the information it carries, we cannot restrict the notion of information to the cognitive aspect of language. A man, using expressive features to indicate his angry or ironic attitude, conveys ostensible information, and evidently, this verbal behaviour cannot be likened to such nonsemiotic, nutritive activities as 'eating grapefruit'. The difference between [big] and the emphatic prolongation of the vowel [bi:g] is a conventional, coded, linguistic feature like the difference between the short and long vowel in such Czech pairs as [vi] 'you' and [vi:] 'knows', but in the latter pair the differential information is phonemic and in the former emotive. As long as we are interested in phonemic invariants, the English /i/ and /I: / appear to be mere variants of one and the same phoneme, but if we are concerned with emotive units, the relation between the invariant and the variants is reversed: length and shortness are invariants implemented by variable phonemes. To explain this emotive function, Jakobson gives the example of how an actor of Stanislavsky's Moscow Theatre was asked to make forty different messages from the phrase *Segodnja vecerom* 'This evening,' by diversifying its expressive tint. He made a list of some forty emotional situations, and then emitted the given phrase in accordance with each of these situations, which his audience had to recognise only from the changes

in the sound shape of the same two words. Stanislavsky wrote down some fifty situations framing the same elliptic sentence and made of it fifty corresponding messages for a tape record. Most of the messages were correctly and circumstantially decoded by the listeners.

The third important function is the CONATIVE function, which is conditioned by the orientation toward the ADDRESSEE. It finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative, which syntactically, morphologically, and often even phonemically deviate from other nominal and verbal categories.

Jakobson here refers to the traditional model of language as elucidated particularly by Bühler. He claimed that language is confined to the three functions as we have discussed above — emotive, conative, and referential. The three apexes of this model are the first person of the addresser, the second person of the addressee, and the 'third person' or the–'someone or something' spoken of. However, Jakobson observes that there are three more constitutive factors of verbal communication and three corresponding functions of language in existence.

Thereafter, Jakobson comes to discuss the PHATIC function of language, which corresponds to CONTACT. There are messages that primarily serve to establish, to retain, or to discontinue communication, or to check whether the channel works ('Hello, do you hear me?'), to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm attention ('Are you listening?' or 'Lend me your ears!'). Words like 'well', 'bye', an infant's sounds to his mother and expressions like "Nice weather for this time of the year!", "How do you do?", "Hello, is that Bob?" belong to the phatic function of language. It is a very useful social function of language.

A distinction has been made in modem logic between two levels of language, 'object language' speaking of objects and 'metalanguage' speaking of language. However, metalanguage is not only a necessary scientific tool utilised by logicians and linguists; it plays also an important role in our everyday language. We practice metalanguage without realising the metalingual character of our operations. Whenever the addresser and/ or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech

is focused on the CODE: it performs a METALINGUAL function. It can be seen in case of children learning the meanings of words during the process of language learning. Meaning or message is conveyed when the addresser and the addressee share the same code. The lack of understanding the code results in expressions like "I did not understand" or "What do you mean?" Jakobson gives an interesting dialogue to convey the metalingual function of language. Any process of language learning, in particular, child acquisition of the mother tongue, makes wide use of such metalingual operations. Similarly, and aphasia may often be defined as a loss of ability for metalingual operations.

After all these factors, what is left is the message itself. The POETIC function of language focuses on the message for its own sake. A verbal act performs poetic function when it draws the attention of the reader to its own diction, sound patterns and syntax. The verbal acts, which perform poetic function, focus on the aesthetic features of language like metaphor, simile, paradox, irony, assonance, consonance etc. After listing the six compulsory elements in each utterance namely sender, receiver, context, message, contact, code and the six corresponding functions of each utterance namely emotive, conative, referential, poetic, phatic and metalingual, Jakobson asserts that all instances of language fulfil at least one of these six functions. It means that in each speech act, one function is predominant but others may be a little suppressed. Thus in a poetic utterance, the poetic function will be predominant but it will be accompanied by other functions at a lower level. Poetic function does not operate in literature exclusively. It is just predominant over other functions. Jakobson gives a beautiful example to prove that even ordinary conversation may contain the poetic function of language. Anyone who says, "She sells sea shells at the sea shore" is making a plain statement in poetic language. Jakobson refers to a girl who was always heard saying 'Horrible Harry'. She never said Dreadful Harry or Frightful Harry. Though horrible, dreadful, frightful mean the same thing. When asked why she said only horrible, she said, "Because horrible suits better." Here, she was unconsciously using a literary, poetic device called, paronomasia, similarly, one would always say Joan & Margery and not Margery & Joan because the first combination is smoother.

It is important to note that this Poetic function of language cannot be productively studied out of touch with the general problems of language. Again, on the other hand, the scrutiny of a language requires a thorough consideration of its poetic function. To reduce the sphere of poetic function only to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be an unwise oversimplification. In any kind of verbal art, Poetic function is not the sole function but only a dominant, determining function. On the other hand, in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, with the assertion on the playfulness of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. That is why; linguistics cannot simply limit poetic function to the field of poetry only. Jakobson further claims that the linguistic study of the poetic function must overstep the limits of poetry, and, on the other hand, the linguistic scrutiny of poetry cannot limit itself to the poetic function. The differences among the diverse poetic genres implicate participation of the other verbal functions at different levels along with the dominant poetic function. For example, in epic poetry, which is focused on the third person, there is strong involvement of the referential function of language. Similarly, lyric poetry, which is oriented toward the first person, is intimately linked with the emotive function of language.

Thus, after the cursory discussion of the basic functions of verbal communication, Jakobson draws a scheme of the function corresponding to the factors of verbal communication:

REFERENTIAL

EMOTIVE POETIC CONATIVE

PHATIC

METALINGUAL

Here, now, comes a series of important questions: what will be the empirical linguistic criterion of the poetic function? What is the indispensable feature inherent in any piece of poetry? To find an answer to these questions, Jakobson recalls the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behaviour: *selection* and *combination.* If 'child' is the topic of the message,

the speaker selects one among the extant, more or less similar, nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect, and then, to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs—sleeps, doses, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the base of equivalence: similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity. On the other hand, the combination, or the build up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. *The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.* In poetry one syllable is equalised with any other syllable of the same sequence; word stress is assumed to equal word stress, as unstress equals unstress. Similarly, prosodic long is matched with long, and short with short; word boundary equals word boundary, no boundary equals no boundary; syntactic pause equals syntactic pause, no pause equals no pause.

Jakobson clarifies that poetics may be defined as that part of linguistics, which treats the poetic function in its relationship to the other functions of language. Poetics in the wider sense of the word deals with the poetic function not only in poetry, where this function is superimposed upon the other functions of language, but also outside of poetry, when some other function is superimposed upon the poetic function.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does Jakobson prove the similarities between poetics and linguistics?

Q 2: What do you mean by the 'function' of language? On what basis are these functions categorised?

Q 3: What do you mean by 'literariness'? How is it formed?

2.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

Factors of Communication and the Corresponding Functions of Language:

Jakobson argues that any act of verbal communication comprises of six elements or factors: a. a context, b. an addresser, c. an addressee,

d. a contact between an addresser and addressee, e. a common code and f. a message. Each factor is the focal point of an oriented relation, or function that operates between the message and the factor. Thus, there are six functions corresponding to the six factors. These factors are: a. Referential, b. Emotive, c. Conative, d. Phatic, f. Metalingual and g. Poetic. The referential function is oriented toward the context while the emotive function is oriented toward the addresser. The conative function is oriented toward the addressee while the phatic function serves to establish, prolong or discontinue communication. The metalingual function is used to establish mutual agreement on the code and the poetic function puts the focus on the message for its own sake.

The Functions of Language – Hierarchy and Ranking:

In any verbal act, each factor of communication must be present and concordant to make the communication possible. Relations have to be established between all of the factors, particularly between the message and the other factors. The function of the verbal act depends on the factor to which it is oriented. Where more than one function is present, they may exist in a kind of relationship based on hierarchy of their importance. Various criteria can be used to establish the functional hierarchy. There can be an intention-based criterion where the dominant function is the one that answers the question, 'With what intention was this message transmitted?' and the secondary functions are there to support it. Since the intention can be hidden, the function that is dominant in terms of overt degree of presence may not be dominant in terms of intention. There can be distinction between direct and indirect manifestations of intention, which correlate to the opposition between actual and overt functions. In addition, we need to distinguish between cause and effect functions, as well as ends and means functions. For example, when the phatic function is overactivated, it can trigger the poetic function; over activation can be used for aesthetic ends, and in this case the poetic function is an end and the phatic function is a means.

Relationship between Function and Genres:

The presence or absence of the functions and their hierarchical positioning or structure can be used to describe the classes or types of

units of verbal act. Jakobson claims that, what characterises poetry and distinguishes it from other genres is not so much the presence of the poetic function as its dominance. By identifying the functional hierarchical configuration or by specifying the secondary dominant function, we can create a typology. Thus, Jakobson recognises that epic poetry focuses on the third person while lyric poetry focuses on the first-person. Similarly, poetry of the second person strongly involves the referential function of language.

The strength of a function in a particular configuration (the target configuration) may be interpreted dynamically as resulting from an upward or downward "thrust" applied to the function as it appeared in a configuration (the source configuration) considered as the source of this particular configuration. If we are going to analyse changes in the functional balance, this implies a comparison between two models, a source and a target. For example, in epic poetry (or narrative poetry) the referential function is intensified as compared to lyric poetry, while the emotive function is diminished. This dynamic model seems useful from a descriptive standpoint. Certain works and certain genres appear to be based on emphasising and/ or deemphasising one or more functions. For example, hyper-realism in painting is an exaggeration of the referential function.

Poetic Function and the Axes of Selection and Combination:

Jakobson asserts that in case of Poetic function, the intrinsic linguistic criterion can be the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behaviour: *selection* and *combination.* If someone has to speak on 'child' as the topic of the message, the speaker may select one among the extant, more or less similar, nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect. Then, in order to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs—sleeps, doses, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the base of equivalence: similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity. On the other hand, the combination, or the build-up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. Thus, the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How are different functions of language interrelated?

Q 5: What do you mean by the poetic function?

2.6 RECEPTION OF JAKOBSON AND HIS IDEAS

Despite being highly original and innovative in his formulation of linguistic ideas, Jakobson did not come into prominence in terms of popularity and recognition until the late period of his life. However, within Russia, Jakobson's influence can be seen far palpable in the development of Formalism. One of the early motives of Formalism was cantered on what Jakobson had been trying to develop by the term called 'literariness'. While the Russian Formalists tries to understand 'literariness' in terms of the 'defamiliarising' aspect of verbal art, the Prague school of Formalists adopted Jakobson's idea of 'function' of languages. His discussion of the poetic function of language in terms of the construction of the 'literariness' is further more influential in the history of literary and cultural criticism. He claimed that the formation of 'literariness' or the poetic function takes place on the basis of two axes: selection and combination. This idea of the two axes was later applied in the study of all forms of cultural structures. This process further paved the way for structuralism.

Structuralists like Claude Lévi-Strauss openly admitted the influence that Jakobson had on his formative periods. He met Jakobson in America in 1940 and this meeting had lot of influence on Lévi-Strauss. In his definition of the structure of primitive thinking of men as binary, with the involvement of a presence and an absence, Lévi-Strauss developed the concept from Jakobson's idea that the smallest sound elements in any language (the phonemes) are developed as binary opposites.

Three principal ideas put by Jakobson in the field of linguistics have remained highly influential even today. They are: linguistic typology, markedness, and linguistic universals. These three concepts are deeply interconnected to one another. Typology is the classification of

languages in terms of shared grammatical features. Markedness is a study of how certain forms of grammatical organisation are more "optimised" than others. 'Linguistic universals' is the study of the general features of languages in the world. Besides, he has also influenced Nicolas Ruwet's paradigmatic analysis of languages. Jakobson has also influenced Friedemann Schulz von Thun's 'four sides model', as well as Michael Silverstein's metapragmatics, Dell Hymes's ethnography of communication and ethnopoetics. Besides, the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan and philosophy of Giorgio Agamben also bear traces of influences from the works of Jakobson. Most of Jakobson's works were centered round the study of Slavic languages. As such, for researchers specialising in Slavics and Slavic linguistics in North America, the value of Jakobson's works is enormous.



2.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt that Jakobson's model of the functions of language distinguishes six elements, or factors of communication, that are necessary for communication to occur: context, addresser, addressee, contact, common code and message. Each factor is the focal point of a relation or function that operates between the message and the factor. The functions are: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual and poetic. A verbal message performs emotive function when it is directed towards or aimed at the speaker / addresser / sender. It indicates the sender's attitude towards what he is speaking / writing about. It expresses emotions. A verbal act, which is oriented towards the addressee/ listener/receiver, is said to perform the conative function. When verbal message is oriented towards the context, then the corresponding function of language is called referential or denotative. When messages are used to establish or prolong contact, the function they serve is called phatic function. When messages are oriented to the code itself, the function is called metalingual. A verbal act performs poetic function when it draws the attention

of the reader to its own diction, sound patterns and syntax. The poetic function constitutes the 'literariness' of verbal act and it takes place on the basis of two axes: selection and combination.



2.8 FURTHER READING

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Jakobson, Roman. (1985). *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time*. ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (2005). *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. New Delhi: Pearson.



2.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Both deal with verbal messages and their structure… …both literature and language are part of the theory of signs i.e. semiotics and semiology… …being sign-systems, both are concerned with meaning generation… …both deal with their data (literature and language) objectively and in a non judgmental way… …synchronic and diachronic approaches are equally applicable and used in linguistics and poetics.

Ans to Q 2: Factors of verbal communication… …Addresser, addressee, context, message, contact, code… …centrality of a particular factor

corresponds to a particular function… …emotive, conative, referential, poetic, Phatic, metalingual.

Ans to Q 3: 'literariness' makes verbal act a work of art… …poetics… …poetic function of language… …dominance of the factor of the message… …formed through the axes of selection and combination… …metaphorical and metonymical.

Ans to Q 4: All six functions may be present in a verbal act… …they remain in hierarchical structure… …dominance of a particular function decides the nature of the verbal act… …poetic function dominates 'literariness' or verbal art… …within verbal art, hierarchy of function decides the genre of the verbal artwork.

Ans to Q 5: Poetic function focuses on the message for its own sake… …draws the attention of the reader to its own diction, sound patterns and syntax… …metaphor, simile, paradox, irony, assonance, consonance… …in a poetic utterance, the poetic function is predominant… …it will be accompanied by other functions at a lower level.



2.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Roman Jakobson establish that 'literariness' should be studied within the scope of linguistic studies? Explain in detail.

Q 2: Discuss, after Roman Jakobson, the similarities and differences between linguistics and poetics.

Q 3: How does Jakobson analyse the relationship between literary studies and linguistic studies? Discuss with reference to the essay.

Q 4: On what basis does Jakobson categorise different factors of verbal communication? How are they connected to different functions of language? Discuss.

Q 5: What is the 'function' of language? How do the functions differ from one another? How do the interrelations among the functions decide the nature of a message?

Q 6: What is poetic function? How do different genres of verbal are or poetry differ from one another? Discuss.

Q 7: Contextualise Roman Jakobson in the history of the development of Russian Formalism.

Q 8: Estimate the contribution of Jakobson in the development of Structuralism.

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UNIT 3: ROLAND BARTHES: "THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR"

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Roland Barthes: Life and Works

3.4 Reading the Text: "The Death of the Author"

3.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

3.6 Reception of Barthes and His Ideas

3.7 Let us Sum up

3.8 Further Reading

3.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.10 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the structuralist critic Roland Barthes
- explain the important points raised by Barthes in the essay "The Death of the Author"
- state the role a reader plays in interpreting a text
- discuss the reception of Barthes as a critic/theorist

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the essay "The Death of the Author" by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes (1915–80). Roland Barthes is often considered one of the leading names in French structuralism. Critic Jonathan Culler calls him "famous for contradictory reasons." On the one hand, Barthes sought to develop a universal grammar of narrative in his essay "Introduction to the Structural Study of Narrative" (1966), by exploring Ferdinand De Saussure's notion of Semiology-a broad science of signs in human culture. On the other hand, Barthes also wrote playfully and allusively about pleasure in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973)

and in *A Lover's Discourse* (1977). Regarding his literary tastes, he promoted avant-garde writers such as Robbe-Grillet, Brecht, Sollers, but on the other, he also loved and wrote about the most traditional of French authors such as Racine, Chateaubriand, Balzac, and Proust. In "The Death of the Author" Barthes argues against traditional literary criticism and its practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in the interpretation of a text. Barthes was of the view that the work and creator are not related. The first English translation of the essay was in the American journal *Aspen*, no. 5–6 in 1967. The essay later appeared in an anthology of Barthes' essays *Image-Music-Text* (1977), which also included his other important essay "From Work To Text". The point Barthes raises in this essay is that the author has no control over his own words (or images, sounds, etc.) as they belong to the reader who interprets them. As we finish reading thus unit, we shall be able to discuss the significance of the essay in 20th century literary criticism.

3.3 ROLAND BARTHES: LIFE AND WORKS

Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg. His father was a naval officer who was killed within a year of his birth. Then, his mother moved to the paternal family home in Bayonne in Northern France. In 1924, along with his mother, Barthes moved to Paris, where he joined the Parisian schools and then began studying for entrance into the prestigious Ecole Normale. However, his promising academic journey was interrupted by the attacks of tuberculosis. From 1934 to 1950, Barthes' life alternated between tuberculosis sanitoria, academic institutions where he studied, and teaching jobs in Biarritz and abroad in Bucharest and Alexandria.

Despite all odds, he read avidly, founded a theatrical troupe, and began to write. From the very beginning, his writings reflect both his idiosyncratic creativity and his inclination towards the intellectual milieu in which he found himself. His first book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), initially published as articles in Albert Camus' journal *Combat,* analyzes the history of literary styles in terms derived from Marx and from Sartre. In this book, Barthes looks at the relations between Literature with a capital L and the

various modern forms of its demystification, from Stephane Mallarme to Albert Camus. Subsequently, Barthes undertook an extensive study of the imagery used by the 19th century historian Jules Michelet. His next project was a series of short occasional pieces later published as *Mythologies* (1957). In this work, Barthes does makes a study of mass culture and everyday life. His object was to show how mass culture is saturated with ideological propositions ("myths") presented as if they were natural and self-evident; the result in many ways anticipates what is today called "cultural studies."

As a researcher in Paris for ten years at the National Centre for Scientific Research, Barthes like many others in Paris during that time, such as Claude Levi Strauss in Anthropology, Jacques Lacan in Psychoanalysis, and Tzvetan Todorov and Gerard Genette in Literary Studies, continued his exploration of the possibilities of Saussure's synchronic linguistic analysis. In 1962, Barthes was appointed in a tenured post in "the sociology of signs, symbols, and representations" at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes (School for Advanced Study), where his seminar became legendary. His book *On Racine* (1963) raised animosity among the traditional academic community for its concentration on the structures of Racine's *textual* world rather than his biographical or historical world. Raymond Picard, a Racine scholar countered Barthes with *New Criticism* or *New Fraud?* (1965). Barthes responded to Picard by arguing that traditional critics' recourse to the values of clarity, nobility, and humanity, which they treat as neutral and self-evident, actually exerts a coercive, censoring force on other interpretive possibilities. The Picard affair is the backdrop for one of Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author."

The publication of *S/Z* marks a turning point in Barthes' 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. When critics and scholars look for a break between Structuralism and Poststructuralism, *S/Z* stands in between. Here, Barthes pursues not so much a *critique* of Structuralism. The hints of larger

structures at work are fragmentary and multiple, not sustained, and the theoretical comments are printed as digressions, numbering almost a hundred. Boredom with the structuralist project of reducing all narratives to a common grammar combines with delight in the foretaste of a multitude of grammars and rhetoric hinted at but not developed in *S/Z*. Barthes' other essay "From Work to Text" (1971), is one of the clearest available summaries of the Poststructuralist theory of the "text" as it was developed not only by Barthes but by all the writers associated with the vanguard journal *Tel Quell,* including Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and others. This description of "textuality" can be seen as one way of marking the transition between Structuralism and Poststructuralism.

LET US KNOW



Work vs Text

Both Structuralists and Poststructuralists would contrast their analyses to the classical study of literary and other cultural objects ("work"). The *text* is a process; the *work* is a product. *Works* can be found on library shelves; *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). The text deserves no vital "respect"-it is not alive and can thus be "broken" or "manhandled" in ways that would violate organic forms. The death of the author turns out to be based not on a murder but on an elimination of the metaphor of life in the first place. The work is "consumed"; the text is "produced" in *S/Z*, Barthes called these the *readerly* and the *Writerly* aspects of a text.

In later writings such as *The Empire of Signs* (1970); *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973); *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975); *Camera Lucida* (1980); and the posthumously published *Incidents* (1987), Roland Barthes seems to resurrect precisely the author he had killed off. However, the contradiction is more apparent than real. While the disembodied, abstract author of the network of signs does indeed become an embodied and

particular author, the body and biography are both seen as historical, and both are structured like a text. The author is still not an extra textual *identity* determining meaning. The body can be read like a text, just as the text can be read like a body. Gaps in meaning, like the gaps in a garment, are equivalent sites of pleasure. In 1976, this critic of academic criticism was elected to the Chair in Literary Semiology at France's most prestigious institution, the College de France. In his inaugural lecture, published as *Lefon* (1978), he explains why he is an unlikely choice for such a post and then goes on to recapitulate many of his thoughts about Semiology and Literature. Barthes thus ended up as one of the most anti establishment academics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the main points raised by Barthes in the essay "The Death of the Author"?

Q 2: State the significance of Barthes' works like *Writing Degree Zero* and *Mythologies*.

Q 3: How did Barthes respond to Picard's arguments?

Q 4: In what way, is the publication of *S/Z* is a turning point in Barthes' relation to Structuralism?

Q 5: How does Barthes differentiate between work and text?

3.4 READING THE TEXT: "THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR"

In his story *Sarrasine,* Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: "This *was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility."* Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity?

Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

No doubt, it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The sense of this phenomenon, however, has varied; in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance'-the mastery of the narrative code-may possibly be admired but never his 'genius'. The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. The *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.

Though the sway of the Author remains powerful (the new criticism has often done no more than consolidate it), it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it. In France, Mallarme

was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'. Mallarme's entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader). Valery, encumbered by a psychology of the Ego, considerably diluted Mallarme's theory but, his taste for classicism leading him to turn to the lessons of rhetoric, he never stopped calling into question and deriding the Author; he stressed the linguistic and, as it were, 'hazardous' nature of his activity, and throughout his prose works he militated in favour of the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which all recourse to the writer's interiority seemed to him pure superstition. Proust? himself, despite the apparently psychological character of what he called his *analyses,* was visibly concerned with the task of inexorably blurring, by an extreme subtilization, the relation between the writer and his characters; by making of the narrator not he who has seen and felt nor even he who is writing, but he who *is going* to *write* (the young man in the novel-but, in fact, how old is he and who is he'?-wants to write but cannot; the novel ends when writing at last becomes possible), Proust gave modern writing its epic. By a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained, he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model; so that it is clear to us that Charlus does not imitate Montesquiou but that Montesquiou-in his anecdotal, historical reality-is no more than a secondary fragment, derived from Charlus.

Lastly, to go no further than this prehistory of modernity, Surrealism, though unable to accord language a supreme place (language being system and the aim of the movement being, romantically, a direct subversion of codes itself moreover illusory: a code cannot be destroyed, only 'played off'), contributed to the desacralization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of

meaning (the famous surrealist 'jolt'), by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of several people writing, together. Leaving aside literature itself (such distinctions really becoming invalid), linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors, Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing. just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.

The removal of the Author (one could talk here with Brecht of a veritable 'distancing', the Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage) is not merely an historical fact or an act of writing; it utterly transforms the modern text (or-which is the same thing-the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent).

The temporality is different. The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after.* The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here* and *now.* The fact is (or, it follows) that *writing* can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy,' call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which

it is uttered-something like the I *declare* of kings or the I *sing* of very ancient poets. Having buried the Author, the modern scriptor can thus no longer believe, as according to the pathetic view of his predecessors, that this hand is too slow for his thought or passion and that consequently, making a law of necessity, he must emphasize this delay and indefinitely 'polish' his form. For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Jouvard and Pecuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings; to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on anyone of them.' Did he wish to *express himself,* he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he "thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely; something experienced in exemplary fashion by the young Thomas de Quincey, he who was so good at Greek that in order to translate absolutely, modern ideas and images into that dead language, he had, so Baudelaire tells· us (in *Paradis Artificiels),* 'created for himself an unfailing dictionary, vastly more extensive and complex than those resulting from the ordinary patience of purely literary themes'. Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred.

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases:' society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text ·is 'explained'-victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author. In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled,* nothing *deciphered;* the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing),* by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases-reason, science, law.

Let us come back to the Balzac sentence. No one, no 'person', lays it: its source, its voice, is not the true place of the writing, which is reading. Another-very precise-example will help to make this clear: recent research J. P. Vernant) has demonstrated the constitutively ambiguous nature of Greek tragedy, its texts being woven from words with double meanings that each character understands unilaterally (this perpetual misunderstanding is exactly the 'tragic'); there is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him-this someone being precisely the reader (or here; the listener). Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations

that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. Which is why it is derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of a humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's rights. Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.

LET US KNOW



It is important for us to note that Barthes acknowledges the presence of this idea of 'the death of the author' in the works of previous writers, such as the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who said—"it is language which speaks". He also recognized Marcel Proust as being "concerned with the task of inexorably blurring…the relation between the writer and his characters"; the Surrealist movement for employing the practice of "automatic writing" to express "what the head itself is unaware of"; and of linguistics as a discipline for "showing that the whole of enunciation is an empty process". Barthes' articulation of the death of the author is a radical and drastic recognition of this severing of authority and authorship.

3.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

The essay "The Death of the Author" 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 but a castrato. Barthes' focus here is on a sentence in the text in which a series of exclamations about femininity cannot be clearly attributed to the conscious

intentions of any one person, whether that be the author, the narrator, a character, or even "universal wisdom." 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, Barthes 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. According to Barthes, an author should not claim absolute authority over his or her text.

Thus, we can assume that "The Death of the Author" is a meditation on Barthes' ideas of the author and reader. His argument is that the author has no sovereignty over his own words (or images, sounds, etc.) as that belong to the reader who interprets them. According to Barthes when we encounter a literary text, we need not ask ourselves what the author intended in his words but what the words themselves actually say. A text employs symbols, which are deciphered by readers, and since the function of the text is to be read, the author and process of writing is irrelevant. Barthes also states that meaning is not something retrieved or discovered, but rather something spontaneously generated in the process of reading a text, which is an active rather than passive action. Although Barthes does not seem to have suggested that the death of the author lets any reader read any text the way he or she likes, he is perhaps suggesting that reading always involves continuous writing or rewriting of the text's meaning.

Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" is an attack on traditional literary criticism mostly focused on trying to retrace the author's intentions or the meaning in the author's mind. Instead, he asks the readers to adopt a more text-oriented approach that focuses on the interaction of the reader with it. This also means that the text is open to interpretation, its meaning more fluid than previously thought. Thus, Barthes views on the 'death of the author' proves emancipatory, because he feels that the author is not an

Author-god, but a 'scriptor,' or someone who produces the work, but is not more equipped to interpret it than anybody else. Practically speaking, authors may not be available or willing to talk about "what they meant." The information we have on the author's background may be inaccurate, and might be interpreted differently by another critic.



LET US KNOW

According to Barthes, the author is a "scriptor"—a word he uses expressively to disrupt the traditional continuity of power between the terms "author" and "authority." The scriptor exists to produce but not to explain the work and "is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, [and] is not the subject with the book as predicate". Every work is "eternally written here and now", with each re-reading, because the "origin" of meaning lies exclusively in "language itself" and its impressions on the reader.

Barthes notes that the traditional critical approach to literature raises a thorny problem: how can we detect precisely what the writer intended? The answer Barthes hints at is that we cannot. He introduces this notion of intention in the epigraph to the essay, taken from Honoré de Balzac's story *Sarrasine* in which a male protagonist mistakes a castrato for a woman and falls in love with him. When, in the passage, the character dotes over his perceived womanliness, Barthes challenges his readers to determine who is speaking and about what. "Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology?…We can never know." Writing, "the destruction of every voice," defies adherence to a single interpretation or perspective.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Why does Barthes state that the author has no sovereignty over his own words?

Q 7: Why is it that Barthes relates the author to scriptor?

Q 8: What are some of the sources of Barthes' ideas on 'the death of the author'?

3.6 RECEPTION OF BARTHES AND "THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR"

Ideas presented in the critical essay "The Death of the Author" were anticipated by the New Critics who emerged in the United States from the 1940s-1970s. New Criticism however differs from Barthes' theory of critical reading because it attempts to arrive at more authoritative interpretations of texts. Nevertheless, New Critical precept of the "intentional fallacy" declares that a poem does not belong to its author; rather, "it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it. The poem belongs to the public." Barthes himself stated that the difference between his theory and New Criticism comes in the practice of "disentangling." Barthes' work has much in common with the ideas of the "Yale school" of deconstructionist critics such as Paul de Man and Barbara Johnson in the 1970s, although they are not inclined to see meaning as the production of the reader. Barthes, like the deconstructionists, insists upon the disjointed nature of texts, their fissures of meaning and their incongruities, interruptions, and breaks.

Post-structuralist scepticism about the notion of the singular identity of the self has also been important for some academics working in Feminist and Queer theory about which we have already studied in the previous course. These writers find in Barthes' work an anti-patriarchal, anti-traditional strain sympathetic to their own critical work. They read "The Death of the Author" as a work that obliterates not only stable critical interpretation but also stable personal identity. Michel Foucault also addressed the question of the author in his 1969 essay "What is an Author?" where he developed the idea of "author function" to explain the author as a classifying principle within a particular discursive formation. Although Foucault does not directly mention Barthes in his essay, his analysis can be seen as a challenge to Barthes' liberating the reader from domination by the author. Jacques Derrida too paid ironic homage to Barthes's "The Death of the Author" in his essay "The Deaths of Roland Barthes".

Some scholars have objected Barthes' argument *in toto*. Camille Paglia, for example, wrote: "Most pernicious of French imports [into American academia] is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything *more* affected, aggressive, and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe." Another theorist Seán Burke dedicated an entire book entitled *The Death and Return of the Author* opposing "The Death of the Author". J. C. Carlier, in the essay "Roland Barthes' Resurrection of the Author and Redemption of Biography" argues that the essay "The Death of the Author" is the litmus test of critical competence. Those who take it literally automatically fail that test. Those who take it ironically and recognize a work of fine satiric fiction are those who pass the test. Barthes was satirizing the stale notion that the author should be disregarded. This interpretation cannot be logically faulted, as the essay, taken literally, says that the essay means what any reader chooses it to mean. To say that Barthes did not intend such a meaning betrays the literal meaning of the essay and invokes the traditional notion of authorial identity and continuity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: State the difference between New Critical views of the text and that of Roland Barthes.



3.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Barthes is a French Structuralist critic whose essay "Death of the Author" captures an important aspect of the aesthetic sensibility associated with Structuralism. Barthes argues that the traditional notion of an author is a product of the rationalist and empiricist thought that assigns a central importance to the individual human being. In literary studies, the author is often invoked as the origin and explanation of the text, or as its final signified. However, according to Barthes, the death of

the author signals the liberation of the reader who need not accept that the text has a single meaning enshrined in the biography of the author. Thus, the concluding line of the essay—"the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" is significant.



3.8 FURTHER READING

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

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

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Death_of_the_Author



3.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Barthes argues against traditional literary criticism and its practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in the interpretation of a text… …Barthes argues that the work and creator are not related.

Ans to Q 2: *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), analyzes the history of literary styles in terms derived from Marx and from Sartre… …here Barthes looks at the relations between Literature the various modern forms of its demystification, from Stephane Mallarme to Albert Camus… …in *Mythologies* (1957) makes a study of mass culture and everyday life… …he wanted to show how mass culture is saturated with ideological propositions presented as if they were natural and self-evident.

Ans to Q 3: In his book *On Racine* Barthes raised animosity among the traditional academic community for its concentration on the structures of Racine's *textual* world rather than his biographical or historical world… …Raymond Picard, countered Barthes with *New Criticism*

or *New Fraud?... …*Barthes responded by stating that traditional critics' recourse to the values of clarity, nobility, and humanity, which they treat as neutral and self-evident, actually exerts a coercive, censoring force on other interpretive possibilities… …this response remains as the backdrop for the essay "The Death of the Author."

Ans to Q 4: The publication of S/Z marks a turning point in Barthes' 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 and also by identifying five broad functions at work in the text… …when critics and scholars look for a break between Structuralism and Poststructuralism, S/Z stands in between.

Ans to Q 5: The *text* is a process; the *work* is a product… …*works* can be found on library shelves; *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).

Ans to Q 6: Because those words belong to the readers who would interpret them.

Ans to Q 7: Because Barthes feels that the author is not an Author-god, but a 'scriptor,' or someone who produces the work.

Ans to Q 8: Poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who said that "it is language which speaks"… …Marcel Proust's blurring the relation between the writer and his characters… …the Surrealist movement for employing the practice of "automatic writing" to express "what the head itself is unaware of"… …linguistics as a discipline for "showing that the whole of enunciation is an empty process".

Ans to Q 9: New Criticism differs from Barthes' theory of critical reading because it attempts to arrive at more authoritative interpretations of texts.



3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Roland Barthes express his structuralist views through the essay "The Death of the Author"?

Q 2: In what way, does Roland Barthes, explain the role of the author and the reader in the essay "The Death of the Author"?

Q 3: The very last line of the essay "The Death of the Author" is "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author. Justify your views on the basis of the text of the essay.

Q 4: Barthes' essay argues against traditional literary criticism and its practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in an interpretation of a text. Discuss.

Q 5: Innumerate the contributions of Roland Barthes to Literary criticism and theory.

Q 6: Barthes' articulation of the death of the author is a radical and drastic recognition of this severing of authority and authorship. Discuss with reference to the text.

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UNIT 4: STANLEY FISH: "INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES" FROM "INTERPRETING THE *VARIORUM*"

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Stanley Fish: Life and Works

4.4 Reading the Text: "Interpretive Communities"

4.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

4.6 Reception of Fish and His Ideas

4.7 Let us Sum up

4.8 Further Reading

4.9 Answer 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 the life and works of Stanley Fish who is a prominent critic of reader response
- explain the important points raised by Fish in the essay "Interpreting the Variorum"
- state the role a reader plays in the interpretation of a text
- discuss the reception of Fish and his ideas raised in the essay

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the essay "Interpretive Community" which is a part of his longer essay "Interpreting the *Variorum*" by Stanley Fish. One of the most controversial figures in contemporary literary theory, Stanley Fish has been pivotal to the development of literary theory in America. A leading critic and an inventor of reader-response theory, and through the 1990s, a spirited defender of the humanities amid public attacks over political correctness, Fish is perhaps best known for his intellectual

style and eruditeness. Debunking standard notions of interpretation, Fish's essay "Interpreting the Variorum" (1976; rev. 1980) introduces his seminal concept, "Interpretive Communities", which radically revises interpretive theory by locating meaning not in texts but in readers, not in individual response but in the communities. In the previous unit, we have discussed Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" where he boldly states that the birth of the reader is at the cost of the death of the author. Stanley Fish in this essay, on the other hand, locates the meaning not in the text but in the readers. While Barthes provides his structuralist views on the meaning of the text, Fish discusses the importance of the readers in creating the meaning of a given text. Thus, as we finish reading this unit, we shall understand the important points regarding Fish's Reader Response criticism.

4.3 STANLEY FISH: LIFE AND WORKS

Stanley Fish was born in Providence, Rhode Island, where his father was a plumbing contractor. The first in his family to go to college, he attended the University of Pennsylvania receiving his B.A. in 1959. He went on to do graduate work at Yale University, then the bastion of the American New Critics including Cleanth Brooks and William K Wimsatt Jr. Soon he completed his M. A. and PhD in 1960 and 1962 respectively. He taught at the University of California at Berkeley from 1962 to 1974 and published two books before he was thirty, a book on Milton criticism, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (1967) and *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (1972), which was nominated for a National Book Award. From 1974 to 1985, he was Kenan Professor of English at the Johns Hopkins University, publishing another pioneering reader-response work, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). Concerned with interpretation and its consequences, at Johns Hopkins he also began to teach in the law school, pursuing an interest in legal theory that became more central to his work through the next two decades.

In 1985, Fish moved to Duke University as Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of English and Law and as chair of the English department. As chair, he was instrumental in gathering scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and his spouse, Jane Tompkins, among others, who represented new theoretical approaches. After stepping down as chair in 1993, he became executive director of the Duke University Press, serving through 1998, when he took a position as dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

Through the 1990s, Fish was a public spokesperson for the humanities, frequently debating over political correctness; writing opinion pieces in the *New York Times;* and occasionally appearing on television. Meanwhile, he also published several notable books on theory, professionalism, law, and politics. A formative factor of Fish's work was his response to the New Criticism. Countering Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's declaration in "The Affective Fallacy" (1949) that the audience of a literary work is irrelevant, Fish declared that referring to affectiveness as a fallacy was a fallacy itself. An abiding concern throughout Fish's work is the rhetorical force of texts and their effects on readers. In *Surprised by Sin;* Fish focuses on the experience of the reader as he or she encounters Milton's *Paradise Lost.* He suspends conventional interpretations of Milton, arguing that the poem's meaning is located not in our final assessment but in the process of struggling through Milton's 'difficult grammar and rhetoric, which didactically makes readers repeat the Fall.

Through the late 1970s and 1980s, Fish engaged in broader theoretical speculations on interpretation and rhetoric, exemplified by *Is There a Text in This Class?.* He questions the existence of the freestanding literary text and argues for meaning as a process rather than a formal product. In his later work, Fish takes on the perennial problem of the relation of theory to practice. He persistently attacks the assumption that we generate our interpretations from the principles or theories we hold. Instead, in a trademark reversal, he argues that theory stems from our practices, occurs only after the fact, and has no consequences. Like "strategies," practices determine our interpretations. Extending this notion to law, Fish

makes a characteristically provocative claim that judges do not derive their decisions from legal principles, such as the doctrine of free speech, but accrue legal precedents to justify their practical judgments. This view is called antifoundationalism: the denial that practice derives from a predetermined foundation of theory or principle.

Probably because of his contrarian style as well as the nature of his claims, Stanley Fish has been one of the most cited literary critics of his generation, prompting both admiration and ire. Traditionalists have denounced him as a relativist who believes in nothing. Leftist critics have attacked him for espousing a circular position that makes principled political action impossible. Defenders of theory have countered that Fish's argument itself has consequences in delegitimizing the study of theory in the academy. Critics of his concept of interpretive communities note that it does not explain one's entrance into or departure from a particular community; there are social and political factors that influence what community one might enter. His work has indelibly marked contemporary literary theory, especially the 'concept of interpretation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some of the important works by the reader response critic Stanley Fish.

Q 2: What does Fish state countering Wimsatt and Beardsley's declaration in "The Affective Fallacy"?

4.4 READING THE TEXT: "INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES"

It seems then that the price one pays for denying the priority of either forms or intentions is an inability to say how it is that one ever begins. Yet we do begin, and we continue, and because we do there arises an immediate counter objection to the preceding pages. If interpretive acts are the source of forms rather than the other way around, why isn't it the case that readers are always performing the same acts or a sequence of random, acts, and therefore creating the same forms or a random succession of forms? How,

in short, does one explain these two "facts" of reading? (1) The same reader will perform differently when reading two "different" (the word is in quotation marks because its status is precisely what is at issue) texts; and (2) different readers will perform similarly when reading the "same" (in quotes for the same reason) text. That is to say, both the stability of interpretation among readers and the variety of interpretation in the career of a single reader would seem to argue for the 'existence; for something independent of and prior to interpretive acts, something which produces them; I will answer this challenge by asserting that both the stability and the variety are functions of interpretive strategies rather than of texts."

Let us suppose that I am reading *Lycidas*. What is it that I am doing? First of all, what I am not doing is "simply reading", an activity in which I do not believe because it implies the possibility of pure (that is, disinterested) perception. Rather, I am proceeding on ·the basis of (at least) two interpretive decisions: (I) that *Lycidas* is a pastoral and (2) that if was written by Milton. (I should add that the notions "pastoral" and "Milton" are also interpretations; that is, they do not stand for a set of indisputable, objective facts; if they did, a great many books would not now be getting written.) Once these decisions have been made (and if I had not made these; I would have made others, and they would be consequential in the same way), I am immediately predisposed to perform certain acts, to "find," by looking for themes (the relationship between natural processes and the careers of men, the efficacy of poetry or of any other action), to confer significances (on flowers, streams, shepherds, pagan deities), to mark out "formal" units (the lament, the consolation, the turn, the affirmation of faith, and so on). My disposition to perform these acts (and others; the list is riot meant to be exhaustive) constitutes a set of interpretive strategies, which, when they are put into execution, become the large act of reading. That is to say, interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading (the pure act of perception in which I do not believe); they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them. Several important things follow from this account:

(1) I did not have to execute this particular set of interpretive strategies because I did not have to make those particular interpretive (pre-reading) decisions. I could have decided, for example, that *Lycidas* was a text in which a set of fantasies and defenses find expression. These decisions would have entailed the assumption of another set of interpretive strategies (perhaps like that put forward by Norman Holland in *The Dynamics of Literary Response)* and the execution of that set would have made another text.

(2) I could execute this same set of strategies when presented with texts that did not bear the title (again a notion which is itself an interpretation) *Lycidas, a Pastoral Monody.* I could decide (it is a decision some have made) that *Adam Bede* is a pastoral written by an author who consciously modelled herself on Milton (still remembering that "pastoral" and "Milton" are interpretations, not facts in the public domain); or I could decide, as Empson did, that a great many things not usually considered pastoral were in fact to be so read; and either decision would give rise to a set of interpretive strategies, which, when put into action, would *write* the text I write when reading *Lycidas.* (Are you with me?).

(3) A reader other than myself who, when presented with *Lycidas,* proceeds to put into execution a set of interpretive strategies similar to mine (how he would do so is a question I will take up later), will perform the same (or at least a similar) succession of interpretive acts. He and I then might be tempted to say that we agree about the poem (thereby assuming that the poem exists independently of the acts either of us performs); but what we really would agree about is the way to write it.

(4) A reader other than myself who, when presented with *Lycidas* (please keep in mind that the status of *Lycidas* is what is at issue), puts into execution a different set of interpretive strategies will perform a different succession of interpretive acts. (I am assuming, it is the article of my faith, that a reader will always execute some set of interpretive strategies and therefore perform some succession of interpretive acts.) One of us might then be tempted to complain to the other that we could not

possibly be reading the same poem (literary criticism is full of such complaints) and he would be right; for each of us would be reading the poem he had made.

The large conclusion that follows from these four smaller ones is that the notions of the "same" or "different" texts are fictions. If I read *Lycidas as* and *The Waste Land* differently (in fact I do not), it will not be because the formal structures of the two poems (to term them such is also an interpretive decision) call forth different interpretive strategies but because my predisposition to execute different interpretive strategies will *produce* different formal structures. That is, the two poems are different because I have decided that they will be. The proof of this is the possibility of doing the reverse (that is why point 2 is so important). That is to say, the answer to the question "why do different texts give rise to different sequences of interpretive acts?" is that *they don't have* to, an answer which implies strongly that "they don't exist." Indeed, it has always been possible to put into action interpretive strategies designed to make all texts one, or to put it more accurately, to be forever making the same text. Augustine urges just such a strategy, for example, in *On Christian Doctrine* where he delivers the "rule of faith" which is of course a rule of interpretation, It is dazzlingly simple: everything in the Scriptures, and indeed in the world when it is properly read, points to (bears the meaning of) God's love for us and our answering responsibility to love our fellow creatures for His sake. If only you should come upon something, which does not at first seem to bear this meaning, that "does not literally pertain to virtuous behaviour or to the truth of faith," you are then to take it "to be figurative" and proceed to scrutinize it "until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced." This then is both a stipulation of what meaning there is and a set of directions for finding it, which is of course a set of directions-of interpretive strategies-for making it, that is, for the endless reproduction of the same text. Whatever one may think of this interpretive program, its success and ease of execution are attested to by centuries of Christian exegesis. It is my contention that any interpretive program, any set of interpretive strategies, can have a similar success, although few have been as spectacularly successful as this one.

(For some time now, for at least three hundred years. the most successful interpretive program has gone under the name "ordinary language.") In our own discipline programs with the same characteristic of always reproducing one text include psychoanalytic criticism, Robertsonianism (always threatening to extend its sway into later and later periods), numerology (a sameness based on the assumption of innumerable fixed differences).

The other challenging question-"why will different readers execute the same interpretive strategy when faced with the 'same' text?" can be handled in the same way. The answer is again that *they don't have to,* and my evidence is the entire history of literary criticism. And again this answer implies that the notion "same text" is the product of the possession by two or more readers of similar interpretive strategies.

However, why should this ever happen? Why should two or more readers ever agree and why should regular that is, habitual, differences in the career of a single reader ever occur? What is the explanation on the one hand of the stability of interpretation (at least among certain groups at certain times) and on the other of the orderly variety of interpretation if it is not the stability and variety of texts? The answer to all of these questions is to be found in notion that has been implicit in my argument, the notion of *interpretive communities.* Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. If it is an article of faith in a particular community that there is a variety of texts, its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them. In addition, if a community believes in the existence of only one text, then the single strategy its members employ will be forever writing it. The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text, (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being. This, then,

is the explanation both for the stability of interpretation among different readers (they belong to the same community) and for the regularity with which a single reader will employ different, interpretive strategies and, thus make different texts (he belongs to different communities). It also explains why there are disagreements and why they can be debated in a principled way: not because of a stability in texts, but because of a stability in the makeup of interpretive communities and therefore, in the opposing positions they make possible. Of course this stability is always temporary (unlike the longed for and timeless stability of the text). Interpretive communities grow larger and decline, and individuals move from, one to another; thus, while the 'alignments are not permanent, they are always there, providing just enough stability for the interpretive battles to go on, and just enough shift and slippage to assure that they will never be settled. The notion of interpretive communities thus stands between an impossible ideal and the fear, which leads, so many to maintain it. The ideal is of perfect agreement: and it would require texts to have a status independent of interpretation. The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realized if interpretation (text making) were completely random. It is the fragile but real consolidation of interpretive communities that allows us to talk to one another, but with hope or fear 'of ever being able to stop.

In other words, interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies, are net natural or universal, but learned. This does not mean that there is a point at which an individual has not yet learned any. The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human. What is acquired, are-the ways, of interpreting and those same ways can also be forgotten *or* supplanted, or, complicated or dropped from favour ("no one reads that way anymore"). When any of these things happens, there is a corresponding change in texts, not because they are being read differently, but because they are being written differently.

The only stability, then, inheres in the fact (at least in my model) that interpretive strategies are always being deployed, and this means that communication is a: much more chancy affair, than we are accustomed to think it. For if there are no fixed texts, but only interpretive strategies making

them, and if interpretive strategies are not natural, but learned (and are therefore unavailable to a finite description), what is it that utterers (speakers, authors, critics, me, you) do? In the old model, utterers are in the business of handing over ready-made or prefabricated meanings. These meanings are said to be encoded; and the code-is assumed to be in the world independently of the individuals who are obliged to attach themselves to it (if they do not they run the danger of being declared deviant). In my model, however, meanings are not extracted but made' and made not by encoded forms but by interpretive strategies that call forms into being. It follows then that what utterers do is to give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meanings (and texts) by inviting them to put into execution a set of strategies. It is presumed that the invitation will be recognized, and that presumption rests on a projection on the part of a speaker or author of the moves *he* would make if confronted by the sounds or marks he is uttering or setting down. It would seem at first that this account of things simply reintroduces the old objection; for isn't this an admission that there is after all a formal encoding, not perhaps of meanings, but of the directions for making them, for executing interpretive strategies? The answer is that they will only *be* directions to those who already have the interpretive strategies in the first place.

Rather than producing interpretive acts, they are the product of one. An author hazards his projection, not because of something "in" the marks, but because of something, he assumes to be in his reader. The very existence of the "marks" is a function of an interpretive community, for they will be recognized (that is, made) only by its members. Those outside that community will be deploying a different set of interpretive strategies (interpretation cannot be withheld) and will therefore be making different marks. So once again, I have made the text disappear, but unfortunately, the problems do not disappear with it. If everyone is continually executing interpretive strategies and in that act constituting texts, intentions, speakers, and authors, how can anyone of us know whether he is a member of the same interpretive community as any other of us? The answer is that he cannot, since any evidence brought forward to support the claim would

itself be an interpretation (especially if the "other" were an author long dead). The only "proof" of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: "we know." I say it to you now, knowing full well that you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me.

LET US KNOW



In yet another important text "Is There a Text in The Class?" (1980), Fish proposes that competent readers often form part of Interpretive communities, consisting of members who share interpretive strategies or set of community assumptions of reading a text. Therefore, the validity of any text depends on the assumptions and strategies the readers share with the other members in their community.

4.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

This is to note that Stanley Fish divides the essay into four sections for the convenience of reading. The first section is a short introduction, which clearly states that the essay was written in three stages, which allows for the different parts of the essay to better stand alone in their arguments. In the introduction, Fish directly addresses his readers and explain the process he went through while writing this particular essay. The second section is entitled 'The Case for Reader-Response Analysis', where he disputes the formalistic views of analyzing a piece of text and states the importance of the reader's views of a piece of text when it comes to analyzing that piece of text. In the third section entitled 'Undoing the case for reader-response analysis', Fish discusses and then disputes the idea that a piece of text has the author's intended meaning hidden throughout the piece of text. Thus, the reader interprets the text in their own way and it does not matter what the author's intention was while writing the text.

The final section of Fish's essay is entitled "Interpretive Communities" which is prescribed for your study. Here, Fish discusses the

different ways of interpreting a piece of text and how one reader may interpret two similar texts two completely different ways. The interpretation of a text depends on the reader's state of mind as it also depends on the reader's cultural background and upbringing to determine how they will interpret the text. Readers with similar cultural backgrounds and upbringings may interpret a text similarly, which then creates an 'Interpretive Community.' It is important to note here what Fish states, "The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human. What is acquired are the ways of interpreting and those same ways can also be forgotten or supplanted or complicated or dropped from favor."

The longer essay "Interpreting the *Variorum"* epitomizes Fish's stance and style as a literary theorist. It characteristically uses Milton as a test case, attacks accepted beliefs in authorial intention and textual autonomy, and proposes the provocative thesis that texts are empty in themselves and made only by the reader. However, in the second section, "Undoing the Case for Reader-Response Analysis," Fish critiques his earlier assumption of an individual, informed reader. In a sense, his own essay acts as a self-consuming artifact. Correcting his claims that certain lines "generate a pressure for judgment" and that their "speaker is struggling with his agitated thoughts," he asserts that no text can generate any pressure and that any speaker is a fiction constructed by the poem's reader. "I did what critics always do," Fish confesses, "I 'saw' what my interpretive principles permitted or directed me to see, and then I turned around and attributed what I had 'seen' to a text and an intention."

Those interpretive principles, strategies derive from the educational and professional communities in which we receive training and have membership. These communities, rather than texts, govern and generate interpretation. Emphasizing in the last section of the essay the generative power of "interpretive communities," Fish proposes that they "are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts." In seeing reading as a form of writing, he parallels Poststructuralist views of the "death of the author" and of the writerly text (as expressed by Roland Barthes, for example). As proof of the existence

of interpretive communities, Fish cites the history of Milton criticism, amassed in the *Variorum* edition of Milton's works, which demonstrates that consensus is the rule within the community of Milton scholars. While changes of consensus present a problem for Fish, his inventive concept of the interpretive community foregrounds the professional and institutional dimensions of literary criticism.

The significance of the essay "Interpretive community" lies in the Fish's view that a text does not have meaning outside of a set of cultural assumptions regarding both what the characters mean and how they should be interpreted. This cultural context often includes authorial intent, though it is not limited to it. Fish claims that we as individuals interpret texts because each of us is part of an interpretive community that gives us a particular way of reading a text. Furthermore, he claims, we cannot know whether someone is a part of our interpretive community or not, because any act of communication that we could engage in to tell whether we are part of the same interpretive community would have to be interpreted. That is, because we cannot escape our interpretive community, we can never really know its limits. The idea has been very influential in reader-response criticism, though it has also been very controversial. It is often interpreted as a relativistic standpoint that "words have no meaning," though this is not what Fish means. Quite the contrary, Fish is a staunch advocate of his own readings of various texts. Rather, he means to point out that readings of a text are culturally constructed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: On what does the interpretation of a text depend?

Q 4: What does Fish state about Interpretive Community?

4.6 RECEPTION OF FISH AND HIS IDEAS

As a frequent contributor to the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, Fish has been the target of wide-ranging criticism. Judith Shulevitz in *Slate Magazine* reported that not only does Fish openly proclaim himself,

"unprincipled" but also rejects wholesale the concepts of "fairness, impartiality, reasonableness." To Fish, "ideas have no consequences." For taking this stance, Shulevitz characterizes Fish as "not the unprincipled relativist he's accused of being. He's something worse. He's a fatalist." Likewise, among academics, Fish has endured vigorous criticism. The conservative R. V. Young writes, "Because his general understanding of human nature and of the human condition is false, Fish fails in the specific task of a university scholar, which requires that learning be placed in the service of truth. And this, finally, is the critical issue in the contemporary university of which Stanley Fish is a typical representative: sophistry renders truth itself equivocal and deprives scholarly learning of its reason for being...His brash disdain of principle and his embrace of sophistry reveal the hollowness hidden at the heart of the current academic enterprise."

The prominent British Marxist critic Terry Eagleton states, "Like almost all diatribes against universalism, Fish's critique of universalism has its own rigid universals: the priority at all times and places of sectoral interests, the permanence of conflict, the a priori status of belief systems, the rhetorical character of truth, the fact that all apparent openness is secretly closure, and the like." In her essay, *Sophistry about Conventions*, philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that Stanley Fish's theoretical views are based on "extreme relativism and even radical subjectivism." Discounting his work as nothing more than sophistry, Nussbaum claims that Fish "relies on the regulative principle of non-contradiction in order to adjudicate between competing principles", thereby relying on normative standards of argumentation even as he argues against them. Offering an alternative, Nussbaum cites John Rawls' work in *A Theory of Justice* to highlight "an example of a rational argument; it can be said to yield, in a perfectly recognizable sense, ethical truth." Nussbaum appropriates Rawls' critique of the insufficiencies of Utilitarianism, showing that a rational person will consistently prefer a system of justice that acknowledges boundaries between separate persons rather than relying on the aggregation of the sum total of desires. "This", she claims, "is altogether different from rhetorical manipulation."



4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have read about the idea of 'Interpretive community' as propounded by the famous reader response critic Stanley Fish. Fish suggests that the interpretation of a particular text is characterised not by the fixed meaning s in a linguistic system, but by practices and assumptions of an institution or a community, where meanings are derived from a context rather than from their position in the linguistic system. We have also understood that Interpretive Community is a central notion in the version of reader response theory developed by Stanley Fish (1980). We have learnt that an interpretive community is made up of readers who are agreed as to what constitutes literature and who have internalised the structures of understanding and practices deemed relevant to reading a literary text. Such readers display a literary competence comparable to the linguistic competence as described by Noam Chomsky. They are sufficiently experienced to have internalised the community's definition of the properties of literary discourse, and thus can respond appropriately to individual texts that they have not previously encountered.



4.8 FURTHER READING

Leitch, Vincent B. (Gen Ed.). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.*

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

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Fish



4.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (1967)…

…*Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century*

Literature (1972)… …*Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980).

Ans to Q 2: Countering Wimsatt and Beardsley's declaration in "The Affective Fallacy" (1949) that the audience of a literary work is irrelevant, Fish declared that referring to affectiveness as a fallacy was a fallacy itself.

Ans to Q 3: The interpretation of a text depends on the reader's state of mind as it also depends on the reader's cultural background and upbringing to determine how they will interpret the text.

Ans to Q 4: Fish claims that we interpret texts because each of us is part of an interpretive community that gives us a particular way of reading a text… …we cannot know whether someone is a part of our interpretive community or not, because any act of communication that we could engage in to tell whether we are part of the same interpretive community, would have to be interpreted… …that is, because we cannot escape our interpretive community, we can never really know its limits.



4.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Stanley Fish as a reader response theorist with reference to his essay "Interpretive Community".

Q 2: What does Fish state regarding the interpretation of a text by a reader in the essay "Interpretive Community"? Elaborate.

Q 3: Discuss the contribution of Stanley Fish to 20th century literary theory?

Q 4: Read the essay "Interpretive Community" and jot down the main points discussed by Fish in the essay.

Q 5: Write a note on Reader Response theory. Also, discuss the concept of "Interpretive Community" as viewed by Stanley Fish.

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UNIT 5: MIKHAIL BAKHTIN: "FROM THE PREHISTORY OF NOVELISTIC DISCOURSE"

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Mikhail Bakhtin: Life and Works

5.4 Reading the Text: "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"

5.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

5.6 Reception of Bakhtin and His Ideas

5.7 Let us Sum up

5.8 Further Reading

5.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.10 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin
- read the Text "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" in terms of its various aspects
- identify the important issues raised in the essay
- write about the critical reception of Mikhail Bakhtin as a theorist of literature

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of Block 1 of the course Literary and Critical Theory II. In this unit, we shall read Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" which is taken from his book *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Bakhtin is hailed as one of the greatest 20th century theorist of literature, and literary critics across a wide theoretical and political spectrum often acclaim his acumen as a theorist. He has been called a Formalist, a Marxist, a Christian humanist, a conservative, and a

radical; as his work intersects in eccentric ways with so many of the critical orthodoxies of 20th century literary criticism. As we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to understand the fact that in the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" Mikhail Bakhtin not only discusses the origin and nature of the novel but also sensitises the readers regarding the elements that distinguishes the novel from other genres.

5.3 MIKHAIL BAKHTIN: LIFE AND WORKS

Mikhail Bakhtin was born in the Russian town of Orel, and grew up in Vilnius and later Odessa. He earned a degree in classics and philology from the University of Petrograd in 1918. Working as a schoolteacher in Nevel in western Russia during the civil war between the Red Army and the anti-Bolshevist White armies, he met the group of intellectuals who would become part of his circle where he would formulate the critical concepts that were to dominate his thinking for the rest of his life. In 1920, Bakhtin settled in Vitebsk, where his circle, which by now included Voloshinov and Medvedev, continued to meet. In 1924, Bakhtin moved back to Petrograd (or St. Petersburg), now renamed Leningrad. However, in January 1929, he was arrested and imprisoned for alleged antigovernment activity and the Socratic crime of "corrupting the young." In prison, he suffered from health problems caused by chronic osteomyelitis, a painful inflammation of the bone marrow. He was sentenced to ten years in a labour camp, but on the intervention of friends, the sentence was commuted to six years internal exile in Kazakhstan. In 1936, as his exile was over, he taught at Mordovia Pedagogical Institute in Saransk until he resigned. He moved to a small town outside of Moscow where osteomyelitis led to the amputation of his right leg. After that surgery, Bakhtin had difficulty finding a permanent employment, though he occasionally delivered lectures at the Gorky Institute of World Literature.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Bakhtin started working on his dissertation on the French writer Francois Rabelais (1490-1553) as well as a book on novels that chronicle the main character's maturation and education (the Bildungsroman). World War II interrupted his work on the dissertation, and

only fragments of this book survive. After the war, Bakhtin was allowed to return to his university position in Saransk, and to his unfinished dissertation on Rabelais. Although he was finally granted the doctoral degree, he could not publish his dissertation; it remained unread until it was discovered in the Gorky Institute's archives by graduate students in the early 1960s. After Stalin's death in 1953, Bakhtin's scholarly fortunes began to rise even as his health began to deteriorate. In addition to osteomyelitis, he also suffered from emphysema caused by his heavy smoking. By the time of his death from complications of emphysema, he had become something of a cult figure in Russia. In the 1970s, his reputation spread to Paris through the work of Eastern European emigres such as Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov. From there in the 1980s, it reached North America and England, where his work had significant impact.

Bakhtin's earliest writings, in such essays as "Towards a Philosophy of the Act" and "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" are densely philosophical and heavily indebted to the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Although these lengthy essays exhibit a keen interest in phenomenology and the inter-subjective nature of language, the publications of the Bakhtin Circle from the late 1920s defined the problems of language that would occupy Bakhtin for the rest of his life. In 1926, Voloshinov published *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique,* and Medvedev followed in 1928 with *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship.* In 1929, Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* appeared and also Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* the only book to be published under his own name before Stalin's death.

Bakhtin's theory of the novel relies on three key concepts. The *Carnivalesque-an* idea first introduced in *Rabelais and His World* (written in the 1930s and 1940s, published 1965)-is Bakhtin's term for those forms of unofficial culture (the early novel among them) that resist official culture, political oppression, and totalitarian order through laughter, parody and "grotesque realism," In "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" (1937-38) he develops the influential term *chrnotope* to describe the intrinsic connectedness of time and space and their central role in constituting literary

genres. Finally, and most significantly, the *dialogism* of language, the "intense interanimation and struggle between one's own and another's word," would come to dominate Bakhtin's thinking about language after 1926. This concept of the multivoiced nature of discourse received its fullest treatment in "Discourse in the Novel" (I934-35), a key text for narrative, linguistic, and literary theory.

In this book, Bakhtin here addresses the limitations of the abstract and formal analyses of literary technique widespread among critics during the interwar period. Traditional linguistics, stylistics, and the theory of the Russian formalists, represented by critics like Boris Eichenbaum—as well as contemporary Marxist philosophy of language and the new structural linguistics indebted to Ferdinand De Saussure, all fail to articulate an adequate account of the novel because they have not pursued a properly "sociological stylistics." The philosophy of language on which these inadequate critical methods are based posits, on the one hand, a unitary system of language—a system of more or less absolute norms that govern speech-and, on the other hand, an Individual who is seen as the controlling "author" of discourse. Bakhtin calls such a view of language "monologic" and he argues that it is alien to the dynamics of the novel because it describes not real, living language but an abstraction created through self-conscious deliberation about language and cut off from the daily ideological activities of social life. Living language exhibits *heteroglossia,* the term Bakhtin famously uses to describe the "internal stratification" of language: the interplay among its social dialects, class dialects, professional jargons, and languages of generations and age groups and of passing fads, "languages that serve the specific socio-political purposes of the day, even of the hour." Heteroglossia, which Bakhtin hails as, the characteristic stylistic feature of the novel, celebrates not the systematic nature of language but the multiplicity, of all those. "centrifugal" forces at work in language, the variety of social speech types, and the diversity of voices interacting with one another.



LET US KNOW

Central to Bakhtin's theory of the novel is his belief that language is fundamentally dialogic. "Discourse in the Novel offers his most elaborate analysis of "dialogism" and its relationship to style in the novel. Bakhtin celebrates the dialogics of the novel while criticizing the monologism of poetry, which characteristically aims for a unified-and pure discourse. Although conflict, contradiction, and doubt may be present in the subject matter of poetry, they do not, according to Bakhtin; enter into the language of the poem itself, as they consistently do in. the novel.

Bakhtin's theories can sometimes appear confusing and vague because his critical terminology often seems at once evaluative and descriptive. He regularly establishes his critical vocabulary by defining certain terms positively against related terms given negative valences. Thus the novel is opposed to poetry; the carnivalesque to official discourse, the dialogic to the monologic. These judgments have posed problems for critics who value those genres that Bakhtin most frequently derogates as monologic, especially poetry, the epic, and drama. Other critics object that it is not clear to what degree Bakhtin espouses a mimetic theory of literature, insofar as language for him seems less to represent or reflect reality than to refract and rework it.

Nevertheless, Bakhtin's works have been much admired and extended by scholars in many fields. Those in cultural studies have found two major contributions particularly useful. First, Bakhtin focuses on "language" as the utterances of speaking subjects: that is, as spoken "discourse" and not the impersonal, prevocal signifiers or rhetorical tropes posited by the influential structuralist and poststructuralist traditions. Second, he insists that discourse unfolds in a heteroglot, dialogic force field of conflicting interests and ideologies; with literary language being only one of many discursive strata and itself divided by generic, stylistic professional, and other special features. These Bakhtinian views, widely advocated by cultural studies scholars, promote a complex socio-poetics

suited to a contemporary globalized world of diverse peoples, languages, and cultural forms.

As a literary theorist, Bakhtin is associated with the Russian Formalists, and in 1963, Roman Jakobson mentioned him as one of the few intelligent critics of Formalism. During the 1920s, Bakhtin's work tended to focus on ethics and aesthetics in general. Early pieces such as *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* and *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* are indebted to the philosophical trends of the time—particularly the Marburg school neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen, including Ernst Cassirer, Max Scheler and, to a lesser extent, Nicolai Hartmann. Bakhtin began to be discovered by scholars in 1963, but it was only after his death in 1975 that authors such as Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov brought Bakhtin to the attention of the Francophone world, and from there his popularity in the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other countries continued to grow. In the late 1980s, Bakhtin's work experienced a surge of popularity in the West.

In the 1920s, there was a "Bakhtin school" in Russia, in line with the discourse analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson.



LET US KNOW

Bakhtin's primary works include *Toward a Philosophy of the Art,* an unfinished portion of a philosophical essay; *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Art,* to which Bakhtin later added a chapter on the concept of carnival and published with the title *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*; *Rabelais and His World,* which explores the openness of the Rabelaisian novel; *The Dialogic Imagination,* whereby the four essays that comprise the work introduce the concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia, and chronotope; and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* a collection of essays in which Bakhtin concerns himself with method and culture.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who is Bakhtin? Name the important works of Bakhtin.

Q 2: What are the three key concepts in Bakhtin's Theory of the novel?

Q 3: State the meaning of the term Heteroglossia.

Q 4: What is at the centre of Bakhtin's theory of the novel?

Q 5: How did Kristeva and Todorov popularise Bakhtin's ideas?

5.4 READING THE TEXT "FROM THE PREHISTORY OF NOVELISTIC DISCOURSE"

The Excerpt of the text is taken from *David Lodge and Nigel Wood's Anthology.*

Section I

The stylistic study of the novel began only very recently. Classicism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not recognize the novel as an independent poetic genre and classified it with the mixed rhetorical genres. The first theoreticians of the novel—Abbé Huet (Essay [Traité] sur l'origine des romans, 1670), Wieland (in his celebrated preface to Agathon, 1766-67), Blankenburg (Versuch über den Roman, 1774, published anonymously) and the Romantics (Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis) barely touched upon questions of style. In the second half of the nineteenth century there was an intensification of interest in the theory of the novel, as it had become the leading European genre—but scholarship was concentrated almost exclusively on questions of composition and thematics. Questions of stylistics were touched upon only in passing and then in a manner that was completely unsystematic.

Beginning with the 1920s, this situation changed rather abruptly: there appeared a large number of works dealing with the stylistics of individual novelists and of individual novels. These works are often rich in valuable observations. But the distinctive features of novelistic discourse, the stylistic specificum of the novel as a genre, remained as before

unexplored. Moreover, the problem of this specificum itself, its full significance, has to this day not yet been posed. Five different stylistic approaches to novelistic discourse may be observed: (1) the author's portions alone in the novel are analyzed, that is, only direct words of the author more or less correctly isolated — an analysis constructed in terms of the usual, direct poetic methods of representation and expression (metaphors, comparisons, lexical register, etc.); (2) instead of a stylistic analysis of the novel as an artistic whole, there is a neutral linguistic description of the novelist's language; (3) in a given novelist's language, elements characteristic of his particular literary tendency are isolated (be it Romanticism, Naturalism, Impressionism, etc.); (4) what is sought in the language of the novel is examined as an expression of the individual personality, that is, language is analyzed as the individual style of the given novelist; (5) the novel is viewed as a rhetorical genre, and its devices are analyzed from the point of view of their effectiveness as rhetoric.

All these types of stylistic analysis to a greater or lesser degree are remote from those peculiarities that define the novel as a genre, and they are also remote from the specific conditions under which the word lives in the novel. They all take a novelist's language and style not as the language and style of a novel but merely as the expression of a specific individual artistic personality, or as the style of a particular literary school or finally as a phenomenon common to poetic language in general. The individual artistic personality of the author, the literary school, the general characteristics of poetic language or of the literary language of a particular era all serve to conceal from us the genre itself, with the specific demands it makes upon language and the specific possibilities it opens up for it. As a result, in the majority of these works on the novel, relatively minor stylistic variations — whether individual or characteristic of a particular school -- have the effect of completely covering up the major stylistic lines determined by the development of the novel as a unique genre. And all the while discourse in the novel has been living a life that is distinctly its own, a life that is impossible to understand from the point of view of stylistic categories formed on the basis of poetic genres in the narrow sense of that term.

The differences between the novel (and certain forms close to it) and all other genres — poetic genres in the narrow sense — are so fundamental, so categorical, that all attempts to impose on the novel the concepts and norms of poetic imagery are doomed to fail. Although the novel does contain poetic imagery in the narrow sense (primarily in the author's direct discourse), it is of secondary importance for the novel. What is more, this direct imagery often acquires in the -106- novel quite special functions that are not direct. Here, for example, is how Pushkin characterizes Lensky's poetry.

He sang love, he was obedient to love,
And his song was as clear
As the thoughts of a simple maid,
As an infant's dream, as the moon. . .
(a development of the final comparison follows).

The poetic images (specifically the metaphoric comparisons) representing Lensky's 'song' do not here have any direct poetic significance at all. They cannot be understood as the direct poetic images of Pushkin himself (although formally, of course, the characterization is that of the author). Here Lensky's 'song' is characterizing itself, in its own language, in its own poetic manner. Pushkin's direct characterization of Lensky's 'song' — which we find as well in the novel — sounds completely different [6. 23, 1]:

Thus he wrote gloomily and languidly. . . .

In the four lines cited by us above it is Lensky's song itself, his voice, his poetic style that sounds, but it is permeated with the parodic and ironic accents of the author; that is the reason why it need not be distinguished from authorial speech by compositional or grammatical means. What we have before us is in fact an image of Lensky's song, but not an image in the narrow sense; it is rather a novelistic image: the image of another's [èužoj] language, in the given instance the image of another's poetic style (sentimental and romantic). The poetic metaphors in these lines ('as an infant's dream,' 'as the moon' and others) in no way function here as the

primary means of representation (as they would function in a direct, 'serious' song written by Lensky himself); rather they themselves have here become the object of representation, or more precisely of a representation that is parodied and stylized. This novelistic image of another's style (with the direct metaphors that it incorporates) must be taken in intonational quotation marks within the system of direct authorial speech (postulated by us here), that is, taken as if the image were parodic and ironic. Were we to discard intonational question marks and take the use of metaphors here as the direct means by which the author represents himself, we would in so doing destroy the novelistic image [obraz] of another's style, that is, destroy precisely that image that Pushkin, as novelist, constructs here. Lensky's represented poetic speech is very distant from the direct word of the author himself as we have postulated it: Lensky's language functions merely as an object of representation (almost as a material thing); the author himself is almost completely outside Lensky's language (it is only his parodic and ironic accents that penetrate this 'language of another').

Another example from Onegin [1. 46, 1-7]:

He who has lived and thought can never
Look on mankind without disdain;
He who has felt is haunted ever
By days that will not come again;
No more for him enchantment's semblance,
On him the serpent of remembrance
Feeds, and remorse corrodes his heart.

One might think that we had before us a direct poetic maxim of the author himself. But these ensuing lines:

All this is likely to impart
An added charm to conversation

(spoken by the posited author to Onegin) already give an objective coloration to this maxim. Although it is part of authorial speech, it is structured in a realm where Onegin's voice and Onegin's style hold sway. We once

again have an example of the novelistic image of another's style. But it is structured somewhat differently. All the images in this excerpt become in turn the object of representation: they are represented as Onegin's style, Onegin's world view. In this respect they are similar to the images in Lensky's song. But unlike Lensky's song these images, being the object of representation, at the same time represent themselves, or more precisely they express the thought of the author, since the author agrees with this maxim to a certain extent, while nevertheless seeing the limitations and insufficiency of the Onegin — Byronic world view and style. Thus the author (that is, the direct authorial word we are postulating) is considerably closer to Onegin's 'language' than to the 'language' of Lensky: he is no longer merely outside it but in it as well; he not only represents this 'language' but to a considerable extent he himself speaks in this 'language.' The hero is located in a zone of potential conversation with the author, in a zone of dialogical contact. The author sees the limitations and insufficiency of the Oneginesque language and world view that was still fashionable in his (the author's) time; he sees its absurd, atomized and artificial face ('A Muscovite in the cloak of a Childe Harold', 'A lexicon full of fashionable words', 'Is he not really a parody?'); at the same time however the author can express some of his most basic ideas and observations only with the help of this 'language,' despite the fact that as a system it is a historical dead end. The image of another's language and outlook on the world [èužoe jazykmirovozzrenie], simultaneously represented and representing, is extremely typical of the novel; the greatest novelistic images (for example, the figure of Don Quixote) belong precisely to this type. These descriptive and expressive means that are direct and poetic (in the narrow sense) retain their direct significance when they are incorporated into such a figure, but at the same time they are 'qualified' and 'externalized,' shown as something historically relative, delimited and incomplete — in the novel they, so to speak, criticize themselves.

They both illuminate the world and are themselves illuminated. Just as all there is to know about a man is not exhausted by his situation in life, so all there -108- is to know about the world is not exhausted by a particular

discourse about it; every available style is restricted, there are protocols that must be observed.

The author represents Onegin's 'language' (a period-bound language associated with a particular world view) as an image that speaks, and that is therefore preconditioned [ogovorennij govorjašèij]. Therefore, the author is far from neutral in his relationship to this image: to a certain extent he even polemicizes with this language, argues with it, agrees with it (although with conditions), interrogates it, eavesdrops on it, but also ridicules it, parodically exaggerates it and so forth — in other words, the author is in a dialogical relationship with Onegin's language; the author is actually conversing with Onegin, and such a conversation is the fundamental constitutive element of all novelistic style as well as of the controlling image of Onegin's language. The author represents this language, carries on a conversation with it, and the conversation penetrates into the interior of this language-image and dialogizes it from within. And all essentially novelistic images share this quality: they are internally dialogized images — of the languages, styles, world views of another (all of which are inseparable from their concrete linguistic and stylistic embodiment). The reigning theories of poetic imagery are completely powerless to analyze these complex internally dialogized images of whole languages.

Analyzing Onegin, it is possible to establish without much trouble that in addition to the images of Onegin's language and Lensky's language there exists yet another complex language-image, a highly profound one, associated with Tatiana. At the heart of this image is a distinctive internally dialogized combination of the language of a 'provincial miss' — dreamy, sentimental, Richardsonian—with the folk language of fairy tales and stories from everyday life told to her by her nurse, together with peasant songs, fortune telling and so forth. What is limited, almost comical, old-fashioned in Tatiana's language is combined with the boundless, serious and direct truth of the language of the folk. The author not only represents this language but is also in fact speaking in it. Considerable sections of the novel are presented in Tatiana's voice-zone (this zone, as is the case with zones of all other characters, is not set off from authorial speech in any formally

compositional or syntactical way; it is a zone demarcated purely in terms of style).

In addition to the character-zones, which take up a considerable portion of authorial speech in the novel, we also find in Onegin individual parodic stylizations of the language associated with various literary schools and genres of the time (such as a parody on the neoclassical epic formulaic opening, parodic epitaphs, etc.). And the author's lyrical digressions themselves are by no means free of parodically stylized or parodically polemicizing elements, which to a certain degree enter into the zones of the characters as well. Thus, from a stylistic point of view, the lyrical digressions in the novel are categorically distinct from the direct lyrics of Pushkin. The former are not lyrics, they are the novelistic image of lyrics (and of the poet as lyricist). As a result, under careful analysis almost the entire novel breaks down into images of languages that are connected to one another and with the author via their own characteristic dialogical relationships. These languages are, in the main, the period-bound, generic and common everyday varieties of the epoch's literary language, a language that is in itself ever evolving and in process of renewal. All these languages, with all the direct expressive means at their disposal, themselves become the object of representation, are presented as images of whole languages, characteristically typical images, highly limited and sometimes almost comical. But at the same time these represented languages themselves do the work of representing to a significant degree. The author participates in the novel (he is omnipresent in it) with almost no direct language of his own. The language of the novel is a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language.

We pause on one more example. Here are four excerpts from different sections of Onegin:

(1) Thus a young [Molodoj] good-for-nothing muses. . . . [1. 2, 1]
(2) . . . Our youthful [mladoj] singer Has gone to his untimely end! . . . [6. 31, 10-11]

(3) I sing of a young [mladoj] friend, his checkered Career in fortune's cruel coil. [7. 55, 6-7]

(4) What if your pistol-shot has shattered

The temple of a dear young [molodoj] boy. . . . [6. 34, 1-2]

We see here in two instances the Church Slavonic form mladoj and in two instances the Russian metathesized form molodoj. Could it be said that both forms belong to a single authorial language and to a single authorial style, one or the other of them being chosen, say, 'for the meter'? Any assertion of the sort would be, of course, barbaric. Certainly it is the author speaking in all four instances. But analysis shows us that these forms belong to different stylistic systems of the novel.

The words 'mladoj pevec' [youthful singer] (the second excerpt) lie in Lensky's zone, are presented in his style, that is, in the somewhat archaicized style of Sentimental Romanticism. The words 'pet' [to sing] in the sense of pisat' stixi [to write verses] and 'pevec' [singer] and 'poet' [poet] are used by Pushkin in Lensky's zone or in other zones that are parodied and objectified (in his own language Pushkin himself says of Lensky: 'Thus he wrote. . . .'). The scene of the duel and the 'lament' for Lensky ('My friends, you mourn the poet. . . ' [6. 36, 1], etc.) are in large part constructed in Lensky's zone, in his poetic style, but the realistic and soberminded authorial voice is forever breaking in; the orchestration in this section of the novel is rather complex and highly interesting.

The words 'I sing of a young friend' (third excerpt) involve a parodic travesty on the formulaic opening of the neoclassical epic. The stylistically crude link-up of the archaic, high word mladoj with the low word 'prijatel' [acquaintance, friend] is justified by the requirements of parody and travesty.

The words molodoj povesa [young good-for-nothing] and molodoj prijate' [young friend] are located on the plane of direct authorial language, consistent with the spirit of the familiar, conversational style characteristic of the literary language of the era.

Different linguistic and stylistic forms may be said to belong to different systems of languages in the novel. If we were to abolish all the

intonational quotation marks, all the divisions into voices and styles, all the various gaps between the represented 'languages' and direct authorial discourse, then we would get a conglomeration of heterogeneous linguistic and stylistic forms lacking any real sense of style. It is impossible to lay out the languages of the novel on a single plane, to stretch them out along a single line. It is a system of intersecting planes. In Onegin, there is scarcely a word that appears as Pushkin's direct word, in the unconditional sense that would for instance be true of his lyrics or romantic poems. Therefore, there is no unitary language or style in the novel. But at the same time there does exist a center of language (a verbal-ideological center) for the novel. The author (as creator of the novelistic whole) cannot be found at any one of the novel's language levels: he is to be found at the center of organization where all levels intersect. The different levels are to varying degrees distant from this authorial center.

Belinsky called Pushkin's novel 'an encyclopedia of Russian life'. But this is no inert encyclopedia that merely catalogues the things of everyday life. Here Russian life speaks in all its voices, in all the languages and styles of the era. Literary language is not represented in the novel as a unitary, completely finishedoff and indisputable language — it is represented precisely as a living mix of varied and opposing voices [raznoreèivost'], developing and renewing itself. The language of the author strives to overcome the superficial 'literariness' of moribund, outmoded styles and fashionable period-bound languages; it strives to renew itself by drawing on the fundamental elements of folk language (which does not mean, however, exploiting the crudely obvious, vulgar contradictions between folk and other languages).

Pushkin's novel is a self-critique of the literary language of the era, a product of this language's various strata (generic, everyday, 'currently fashionable') mutually illuminating one another. But this interillumination is not of course accomplished at the level of linguistic abstraction: images of language are inseparable from images of various world views and from the living beings who are their agents — people who think, talk, and act in a setting that is social and historically concrete. From a stylistic point of view

we are faced with a complex system of languages of the era being appropriated into one unitary dialogical movement, while at the same time separate 'languages' within this system are located at different distances from the unifying artistic and ideological center of the novel.

The stylistic structure of Eugenij Onegin is typical of all authentic novels. To a greater or lesser extent, every novel is a dialogized system made up of the images of 'languages,' styles and consciousnesses that are concrete and inseparable from language. Language in the novel not only represents, but itself serves as the object of representation. Novelistic discourse is always criticizing itself.

In this consists the categorical distinction between the novel and all straightforward genres — the epic poem, the lyric and the drama (strictly conceived). All directly descriptive and expressive means at the disposal of these genres, as well as the genres themselves, become upon entering the novel an object of representation within it. Under conditions of the novel every direct word — epic, lyric, strictly dramatic — is to a greater or lesser degree made into an object, the word itself becomes a bounded [ogranièennij] image, one that quite often appears ridiculous in this framed condition.

The basic tasks for a stylistics in the novel are, therefore: the study of specific images of languages and styles; the organization of these images; their typology (for they are extremely diverse); the combination of images of languages within the novelistic whole; the transfers and switchings of languages and voices; their dialogical interrelationships.

The stylistics of direct genres, of the direct poetic word, offer us almost no help in resolving these problems.

We speak of a special novelistic discourse because it is only in the novel that discourse can reveal all its specific potential and achieve its true depth. But the novel is a comparatively recent genre. Indirect discourse, however, the representation of another's word, another's language in intonational quotation marks, was known in the most ancient times; we encounter it in the earliest stages of verbal culture. What is more, long before the appearance of the novel we find a rich world of diverse forms

that transmit, mimic and represent from various vantage points another's word, another's speech and language, including also the languages of the direct genres. These diverse forms prepared the ground for the novel long before its actual appearance. Novelistic discourse has a lengthy prehistory, going back centuries, even thousands of years. It was formed and matured in the genres of familiar speech found in conversational folk language (genres that are as yet little studied) and also in certain folkloric and low literary genres. During its germination and early development, the novelistic word reflected a primordial struggle between tribes, peoples, cultures and languages — it is still full of echoes of this ancient struggle. In essence this discourse always developed on the bound- ary line between cultures and languages. The prehistory of novelistic discourse is of great interest and not without its own special drama.

In the prehistory of novelistic discourse one may observe many extremely heterogeneous factors at work. From our point of view, however, two of these factors prove to be of decisive importance: one of these is laughter, the other polyglossia [mnogojazycie]. The most ancient forms for representing language were organized by laughter — these were originally nothing more than the ridiculing of another's language and another's direct discourse. Polyglossia and the interanimation of languages associated with it elevated these forms to a new artistic and ideological level, which made possible the genre of the novel.

These two factors in the prehistory of novelistic discourse are the subject of the present article.

5.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

Bakhtin in this essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse", discusses the relationship between the stylistic elements an author often makes use of in a novel. Then he posits that it is these relationships that define the sense of style of a novel, and of the genre as a whole. Another distinguishing characteristic of the language in the novel is that language not only represents something in the world, but also "serves as the object of representation." Bakhtin also discusses the idea of parody. He spends a

great deal of time going over the origin of parody and its varying roles, just to conclude that the novel allowed the author to examine language from "the point of view of a potentially different language and style." It is this "creating consciousness" that sets apart the novel from other genres. Parody within the novel is a parody about an object (like the use of parody in other genres) but this parody itself becomes an object. The final section of "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," is an exploration of the use of the quotation. Bakhtin also spends some time going over the origin and use of the quotation, ending in its use today in the novel. Through his discourse on quotation, Bakhtin determines that the quotation was one of the first elements responsible for parody. "Latin parody, is therefore, a bilingual phenomenon," concludes Bakhtin. Bakhtin ends the essay by reminding the reader that we cannot examine the prehistory of the novelistic word with "mere literary styles."

Thus, we can conclude that in his essay, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," Mikhail Bakhtin offers a study of novelistic discourse that emphasizes the history, culture, and construction of language used in modern novels. Bakhtin structures his essay into three sections, each of which outlines a specific aspect of his argument on the study of novelistic discourse. The first section outlines the history of the novel, as well as the history of and introduction to the study of novelistic discourse. Bakhtin mentions several other traditional approaches to the study, explaining the flaws associated with each. In the second section, he analyzes several different works of ancient Greece and argues that they should not be "contained within the narrow perimeters of a history confined to mere literary styles". The third and last section Bakhtin concludes his essay by reviewing the major points of his argument, and stating that novelistic discourse should not be narrowed by the study of linguistic tendencies, style, and abstract languages but it should be viewed, rather, as "a complex and centuries-long struggle of cultures and languages". In addition, Bakhtin states, novelistic discourse should be closely related to language and especially the changes that take place within language.

In this essay, Bakhtin also argues that instead of analyzing the style of a novel, one should instead analyze the intricacies of the language employed within the novel. He argues that in analyzing particular stylistic aspects of a novel, one emerges with a much limited view of a work. "…We wish only to emphasize that the novelistic word arose and developed not as the result of a narrowly literary struggle among tendencies, styles, abstract world views – but rather in a complex and centuries-long struggle of cultures and languages" (135). In stating this, Bakhtin seems to be saying that the history of different languages and cultures and the works they created contribute to the current form of the novel today. In addition, Bakhtin concludes his essay by stating, "The prehistory of the novelistic word is not to be contained within the narrow perimeters of a history confined to mere literary styles" (135).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What does the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," offer?

Q 7: How does Bakhtin structure the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"?

5.6 RECEPTION OF BAKHTIN AND HIS IDEAS

Mikhail Bakhtin is known today for his involvement in a wide variety of subjects, ideas, vocabularies and periods as well as his use of authorial disguises. He is also known for his influence on the growth of Western scholarship on the novel as a premiere literary genre. As a result of the breadth of topics with which he dealt, Bakhtin has influenced such Western schools of theory as Neo-Marxism, Structuralism and Semiotics. Bakhtin's works have also been useful in Anthropology, especially theories of ritual. As a literary critic, Bakhtin indicates that style is a developmental process, occurring within both the user of language and language itself. His work instils in the reader an awareness of tone and expression that arises from the careful formation of verbal phrasing. By means of his writing, Bakhtin has enriched the experience of verbal and written expression, which

ultimately aids the formal teaching of writing. Some even suggest that Bakhtin introduces a new meaning to rhetoric because of his tendency to reject the separation of language and ideology. As Leslie Baxter explains, for Bakhtin, "Because all language use is riddled with multiple voices (to be understood more generally as discourses, ideologies, perspectives, or themes), meaning-making in general can be understood as the interplay of those voices."

The essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" conveys some sense of two of Bakhtin's key ideas. The first is that a given utterance may be, not just the representation of something in the world, but also a representation of another speech act about that thing (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics contains and elaborate typology of such 'doubly-oriented discourse'.) The second is that prose fiction does greater justice to this aspect of language and human behaviour than the 'canonical' genres of epic, lyric and tragedy privileged by orthodox poetics —a capacity that it derives from the parodic-travestying genres of classical and medieval literature. This tradition is valued by Bakhtin because it offers permanent resistance to the tyranny of totalitarian 'monologic' ideologies, one of which he experienced at first hand. The essay was probably written in 1940, but first published in Russia in 1967. Later it was printed in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981), translated by Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What are the two key areas of Bakhtin as expressed in the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"?



5.7 LET US SUM UP

As we come to the end of this unit, we have learnt that in the essay, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," Bakhtin discusses the origin and nature of the novel arguing that "mere literary styles" are not enough to

analyze and define the novel. Instead, we should focus on the relationships between the distinct elements that distinguish the novel from other genres. Bakhtin begins by briefly charting the course of the attempt to analysis and define the novel, and the resulting failure, because of the failure to explore the "stylistic *specificum*, of the novel as a genre." Then, he provides a few examples of the use of imagery and metaphor within a novel, and how these elements differ from their use in poetics.



5.8 FURTHER READING

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Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (2003). *Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader. (2nd Edn).*Pearson Education.

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

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Bakhtin



5.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Bakhtin is a 20th century theorist of literature… …a formalist critic… …*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Rabelais and His World, Toward a Philosophy of the Art, The Dialogic Imagination, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* are some of his important critical works.

Ans to Q 2: Carnivalesque an idea for those forms of unofficial culture that resist official culture, political oppression, and totalitarian order through laughter, parody and "grotesque realism"… …chrnotope that describes the intrinsic connectedness of time and space and their central role in constituting literary genres… …dialogism-the "intense interanimation and struggle between one's own and another's word.

Ans to Q 3: Heteroglossia is the term Bakhtin famously uses to describe the "internal stratification" of language… …the interplay among its social dialects, class dialects, professional jargons, and languages of generations and age groups and of passing fads… …Bakhtin views Heteroglossia as the characteristic stylistic feature of the novel.

Ans to Q 4: Central to Bakhtin's theory of the novel is his belief that language is fundamentally dialogic… …in his "Discourse in the Novel" he offers his most elaborate analysis of "dialogism" and its relationship to style in the novel… …Bakhtin celebrates the dialogics of the novel while criticizing the monologism of poetry.

Ans to Q 5: They brought Bakhtin to the attention of the Francophone world, and from there his popularity in the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other countries continued to grow.

Ans to Q 6: The essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," offers a study of novelistic discourse that emphasizes the history, culture, and construction of language used in modern novels.

Ans to Q 7: Bakhtin structures his essay into three sections… …the first section outlines the history of the novel and provided an introduction to the study of novelistic discourse… … in the second section, he analyzes several different works of ancient Greece and argues that they should not be "contained within the narrow perimeters of a history confined to mere literary styles"… …the third section reviews his major arguments and states that novelistic discourse should not be narrowed by the study of linguistic tendencies, style, and abstract languages but it should be viewed, rather, as "a complex and centuries-long struggle of cultures and languages.

Ans to Q 8: The first idea is that a given utterance may be, not just the representation of something in the world, but also a representation of another speech act about that thing… …the second is that prose fiction does greater justice to this aspect of language and human behaviour than the 'canonical' genres of epic, lyric and tragedy privileged by orthodox poetics —a capacity that it derives from the parodic-travestying genres of classical and medieval literature.



5.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Assess the contributions of Mikhail Bakhtin as a literary critic.

Q 2: How does Mikhail Bakhtin engage himself with the issue of novelistic discourse? Discuss.

Q 3: What are the key concepts developed by Bakhtin while theorising the novel as a genre? Discuss.

Q 4: Provide a critical appreciation of Bakhtin's essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse."

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UNIT 6: JACQUES LACAN: "SEMINAR ON *THE PURLOINED LETTER*"

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Jacques Lacan: Life and Works

6.4 Reading the Text: "Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*"

6.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

6.6 Reception of Lacan and His Ideas

6.7 Let us Sum up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.10 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the post structuralist critic Jacques Lacan
- narrate the Allan Poe's story "The Purloined Letter" in your own words
- read Lacan's essay "Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*" in terms of its important aspects
- jot down the important points raised by Lacan in the essay
- appreciate the ideas of Jacques Lacan as the most prominent psychoanalyst after Sigmund Freud

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 2 of the course entitled Literary and Cultural Theory II. In this unit, we shall discuss the life and works of the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan with particular reference to his essay "Seminar on *The Purloined Letter.*" Critics assume that Lacan has been the most controversial psychoanalyst

since Freud. Giving yearly seminars in Paris from 1953 to 1981, he influenced many leading French intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s, especially those associated with Post-structuralism. Thus, Lacan's ideas significantly influenced post-structuralism, critical theory, linguistics, 20th century French philosophy, film theory and clinical psychoanalysis. By the time we finish reading the unit, we shall learn that in this Seminar on Poe's story, Lacan is commenting on Freud's concept of the "repetition compulsion," which he translates as "repetition automatism". For Lacan, the repetition is the *unconscious.*

6.3 JACQUES LACAN: LIFE AND WORKS

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) the French psychoanalyst was born to middle-class Parisian Catholic parents. In the 1920s, Lacan studied medicine in Paris, beginning clinical training in psychiatry in 1927. Interested in **paranoia** (delusions of persecution) and **erotomania** (delusions of love), he connected his work with Surrealism, particularly with that of the Spanish painter Salvador Dali, a contemporary whose theory of "paranoid criticism" resonated strongly with Lacan's own research. In 1932, Lacan published his doctoral dissertation *On Paranoiac Psychosis* in *Its Relations with the Personality,* and sent a copy to Freud. Although Freud lived another seven years and passed through Paris when escaping Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938, the two men never met. Freud acknowledged receipt of the thesis by postcard.

Lacan, entered the Freudian psychoanalytical movement in 1936. But, 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.



LET US KNOW

Influences on Lacan:

For more than thirty years, Lacan analyzed a single case: the writings of Sigmund Freud. Thus, what was revolutionary in his work was a 'reading' that, he claimed, returned to what was radical about "the Freudian discovery". Lacan read Freud through the theories of Ferdinand De Saussure and Roman Jakobson, and, in the process, they all were changed. Like Claude Levi-Strauss (by whose work he was also influenced), he found that the structuralist models opened up by Saussure made possible a sea change in theoretical thinking.

In 1938, Lacan became a member of the *Society Psychanalytique de Paris* (SPP), the official French branch of the International Psycho Analytical Society (IPA) founded by Freud in 1910. In 1953, Lacan became the president of the SPP. His practice of seeing patients for variable lengths of time (the so-called short sessions) rather than for the prescribed fifty minutes led the commission on instruction to demand that he regularize his practice. He never did so.

Lacan published only one book in his lifetime—*Ecrits* (*Writing*) published in 1966. As already mentioned above, it is a collection of assorted papers. However, he is also credited with the publication of many articles in numerous journals of the Freudian School and twenty-six of his annual book-length seminars. The most influential seminar from the literary point of view is his 1955 seminar on Edgar Allan Poe's story "Purloined Letter" (1845). In his "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'", Lacan shows how a text can be read even when a major piece of information is not disclosed; a lesson important for psychoanalysis. The *path* of the desired or feared letter

in Poe's story does not depend, on knowledge of its contents; and the behaviour of those who seek it creates a story around their presumptions about the contents, whether or not the letter is ever opened. In this seminar, Lacan is commenting on Freud's concept of the "repetition compulsion," which he translates as "repetition automatism." Despite its difficulty, the book was a sensation. In the same year, Lacan also spoke at Johns Hopkins University during the conference on the "Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" that launched Structuralism and Poststructuralism in the United States. Thus, together With Althusser, Derrida, Kristeva, and many others; Lacan became very closely associated with the intellectual ferment in Paris. In 1975, Lacan visited the United States again, lecturing at Yale University and MIT.

Real, Imaginary and Symbolic

For Lacan, there are three orders or dimensions in the psyche: the **Symbolic**, the **Imaginary**, and the **Real**. They are all equally important to the formation of subjectivity. The Real is the easiest to define and the hardest to talk about. The moment it becomes an object of discourse, it ceases to be the Real because it becomes 'real' for *someone* and becomes the truth. In his essay, "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" Lacan writes, "We are used to the real. The truth we repress", "The truth is always disturbing". The Real can thus only be studied in its effects on the other two dimensions, the "Imaginary" and the "Symbolic". The "Imaginary" originates in the human being's fascination with form. The relation between the self and its image constitutes the Imaginary dimension so named not because it is unreal, but because it involves an image. The Symbolic, in contrast, is the dimension of symbolization into which the body of human being, when he/she begins to *speak,* must translate itself. The Symbolic is the dimension of articulation, not equivalent to pointing or naming.

"The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" (I957), develops some aspects of the "symbolic" structure of the psyche. It is one of Lacan's most explicit structuralist attempts to bring Freud and Saussure together. The 'unconscious', for Lacan, is not a hidden reservoir of repressed desires but rather a form of rhetorical energy designed both to disguise and to express those desires, which exist for psychoanalysis only in their effects.

For him **"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. In the case of psychoanalytic symptoms, it is the body itself that provides the raw material that the 'unconscious' uses to express itself and that the analyst, like a literary critic, must "read" Saussure's influential model of the linguistic sign has two parts: the sign is composed of a *signifier* and a *signified.*



LET US KNOW

In "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" Lacan extends the theories of Saussure and Jakobson in the direction of Freud's implicit rhetoric of unconscious processes, while at the same time drawing on modern linguistics to precisely formulate that which, in Freud; remains largely intuitive. [Read the essay "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood]



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why was Lacan expelled from the International Psychoanalytical Association?

Q 2: Why is Lacan's *Ecrits* so important?

Q 3: What does Lacan show through his story "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'"?

Q 4: How does Lacan view the concept of the "Unconscious"?

6.4 READING THE TEXT: "SEMINAR ON *THE PURLOINED LETTER*"

The Storyline: (Taken from Wikimedia)

"The Purloined Letter" is a short story by American author Edgar Allan Poe. It is the third of his three detective stories featuring the fictional detective

Auguste Dupin, the other two being "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". In this story, an unnamed narrator is discussing with the famous Parisian detective Dupin some of his most celebrated cases when they are joined by the Prefect of the Police, a man known as G—. The Prefect has a case he would like to discuss with Dupin. A letter has been stolen from the boudoir of an unnamed woman by the unscrupulous Minister D—. It is said to contain compromising information. D— was in the room, saw the letter, and switched it for a letter of no importance. Subsequently, he has been blackmailing his victim. The Prefect makes two deductions with which Dupin does not disagree:

1. The contents of the letter have not been revealed, as this would have led to certain circumstances that have not arisen. Therefore, Minister D— still has the letter in his possession.
2. The ability to produce the letter at a moment's notice is almost as important as actual possession of the letter. Therefore, he must have the letter close at hand.

The Prefect says that he and his police detectives have searched the Ministerial hotel where D—stays and have found nothing. They checked behind the wallpaper and under the carpets. His men have examined the tables and chairs with magnifying glasses and then probed the cushions with needles but have found no sign of interference; the letter is not hidden in these places. Dupin asks the Prefect if he knows what he is seeking and the Prefect reads off a minute description of the letter, which Dupin memorizes. The Prefect then bids them good day.

A month later, the Prefect returns, still bewildered in his search for the missing letter. He is motivated to continue his fruitless search by the promise of a large reward, recently doubled, upon the letter's safe return, and he will pay 50,000 francs to anyone who can help him. Dupin asks him to write that check now and he will give him the letter. The Prefect is astonished, but knows that Dupin is not joking. He writes the check and Dupin produces the letter. The Prefect determines that it is genuine and races off to deliver it to the victim.

Alone together, the narrator asks Dupin how he found the letter. Dupin explains the Paris police are competent within their limitations, but have underestimated with whom they are dealing. The Prefect mistakes the Minister D— for a fool, because he is a poet. For example, Dupin explains how an eight-year-old boy made a small fortune from his friends at a game called "Odds and Evens". The boy was able to determine the intelligence of his opponents and play upon that to interpret their next move. He explains that D—knew the police detectives would have assumed that the blackmailer would have concealed the letter in an elaborate hiding place, and thus hid it in plain sight.

Dupin says he had visited the minister at his hotel. Complaining of weak eyes, he wore a pair of green spectacles, the true purpose of which was to disguise his eyes as he searched for the letter. In a cheap card rack hanging from a dirty ribbon, he saw a half-torn letter and recognized it as the letter of the story's title. Striking up a conversation with D— about a subject in which the minister is interested, Dupin examined the letter more closely. It did not resemble the letter the Prefect described so minutely; the writing was different and it was sealed not with the "ducal arms" of the S— family, but with D—'s monogram. Dupin noticed that the paper was chafed as if the stiff paper was first rolled one way and then another. Dupin concluded that D— wrote a new address on the reverse of the stolen one, re-folded it the opposite way and sealed it with his own seal.

Dupin left a snuffbox behind as an excuse to return the next day. Striking up the same conversation they had begun the previous day, D was startled by a gunshot in the street. While he went to investigate, Dupin switched D's letter for a duplicate.

Dupin explains that the gunshot distraction was arranged by him and that he left a duplicate letter to ensure his ability to leave the hotel without D suspecting his actions. If he had tried to seize it openly, Dupin surmises D might have had him killed. As both a political supporter of the Queen and old enemy of the Minister [who had done an evil deed to Dupin in Vienna years before], Dupin also hopes that D will try to use the power he no longer has, to his political downfall, and at the end be presented with an insulting note that implies Dupin was the thief.

This story by Poe, which was adopted by Lacan, provoked a debate among the literary theorists in the 1960s and 1970s. Lacan argued in *Ecrits* that the content of the Queen's letter is irrelevant to the story and that the proper "place" of the signifier (the letter itself) is determined by the symbolic structure in which it exists and is displaced, first by the Minister and then by Dupin.

Lacan's "Seminar on *the Purloined Letter*" analyzes the Edgar Allan Poe short story. Lacan's point is to investigate "repetition automatism," which was a puzzle for Freud: if all of our actions come from the libido (the pleasure principle), then why do we sometimes engage in repetitive, self-destructive behaviour. Lacan's explanation is that the unconscious is not just a bundle of drives, but is made up of symbolic strings, which participate in systems that have their own internal logic and thus motive force. In the story, the various characters take on certain roles in reaction to a letter being used to blackmail the Queen of France. The content of the letter is not divulged to the reader (is it evidence of an affair? a political plot? embarrassing fan fiction?), and so Lacan describes it as a "pure signifier" whose travel among the various characters constitutes a repetitive cycle: coming into possession of the letter pushes characters into a state of vulnerability, until at the end Lacan reveals that the supposed hero-genius of the story (who incidentally was a direct influence on the creation of Sherlock Holmes; this series of stories pretty much invented the modern detective story) has himself exposed his backside (figuratively) to the analyst, i.e. Lacan and his readers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What does Lacan state about the contents of the Queen's letter?

Q 6: In what way, did Lacan prove the letter to be a pure signifier?

6.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

[Adapted from Sean Homer's *Jacques Lacan*]

Lacan's seminar on *The Purloined Letter* was first delivered in 1954. It was written up the following year and formed the introductory essay to the

original French publication of the *Ecrits*, although it was removed from later editions. By placing the seminar at the beginning of the *Ecrits,* Poe served a dual function: it both represented what was to follow and, more importantly, it established a particular mode of reading. In order to read Lacan, the story seems to be saying, one must follow the path of the signifier, and the remainder of *Ecrits* is fundamentally concerned with the laws of the signifier'. The 1954–5 seminar series was given the overall title *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* and concerned Freud's late metapsychological text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1984b [1920]). Lacan was primarily concerned with Freud's idea of repetition compulsion, that is, the compulsive urge to repeat unpleasant experiences in apparent disregard of the pleasure principle. Lacan called this process 'repetition automatism' and associated it with his idea of the insistence of the signifying chain. Lacan's seminar on *The Purloined Letter* is an illustration of this thesis, that is, *the insistence of the signifying chain and the determination of the subject by the signifier*.

Edgar Allan Poe's (1809–49) short story *The Purloined Letter* was the final tale in a trilogy about the detective, M. Dupin. The story concerns the theft of a letter from the Queen by one of the King's Ministers and the search for this letter first, unsuccessfully, by the police and then, successfully, by Dupin. The twist in Poe's story is that the letter is in fact never hidden but always in full disclosure. According to Lacan, the tale can be divided into two scenes. In the first, a letter is delivered to the Queen in the presence of the King and the Minister and the Queen leaves the unopened letter on the table in front of everyone. The Minister immediately realizes the incriminating nature of the letter and picks it up off the table, leaving the Queen unable to ask for its return without alerting the King to its importance. The police secretly search for the letter but are unable to find it because they assume that the Minister has hidden it, whereas he has also left the letter on open display in a letter rack hanging from his mantelpiece. In the second scene, we have a repetition of the first, but now the Minister possesses the letter, the police are in the position of not being able to see what is directly under their noses and Dupin is able to see the significance of the now disguised letter openly hanging from the mantelpiece.

Lacan's interpretation of Poe's story focuses upon two main themes: first, the anonymous nature of the letter, which for Lacan serves as the 'true subject' of the story, and, second, the pattern of intersubjective relationships that are repeated in the tale. The reader knows nothing about the letter except that the original script was in a male hand and that it will compromise the Queen if the King knows of its contents. As the letter passes from hand to hand–from Queen to Minister, Minister to Dupin, Dupin to Prefect of Police, Prefect of Police back to Queen – it forms a 'symbolic pact', situating each person who possess it within a chain of symbolic relations. Furthermore, the tale duplicates the relationships between the Queen, King and Minister in the first half of the tale with the relationships between the Minister, Prefect of Police and Dupin in the second. These rotating positions, or intersubjective relationships, pivot around the shifting position of the letter itself. As the content remains unknown throughout this process of symbolic exchange, we can also say that the letter is a signifier without a signified.

According to Lacan, the various subject positions in the tale can be defined by three distinct forms of 'glance' or 'gaze'. The first glance is the glance that sees nothing, that is to say, the position of the King in the first scene and the police in the second. This, then, can also be seen as the position of the law – the law as blind. The second glance is the glance that 'sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides' (1988c [1956]: 32). This is the position of the Queen in the first scene and the Minister in the second. The third glance is the glance that 'sees that the first two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whoever would seize it' (1988c [1956]: 32). This is the position occupied formerly by the Minister and latterly Dupin. We have then a duplicate triangular structure:

King	**Police**
L	**L**
Queen Minister	**Minister Dupin**

For Lacan, *The Purloined Letter* is a precise illustration of his idea that it is the signifier (the letter) that determines the subject. What he is proposing,

in fact, is a correlation between the three subject positions he identifies in the story and his three orders or registers: the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, which we can represent thus:

Real

L

Imaginary Symbolic

Lacan observes that the King and 'the detectives have so immutable a notion of the real' (1988c [1956]: 39) that they fail to notice what is beneath their very noses. This is what Lacan calls the 'realist's imbecility' or a naive empiricism that thinks that the world is given and we have a direct, unmediated, relationship to it. The second position is that of the seer. In this position the subject sees both that the first position is blind and unaware of what is happening and that the third position is fully aware of what is unfolding and therefore holds the power. However, in this position the subject believes that what is hidden (the secrets of the letter) can remain hidden and therefore 'delude' him/herself that it is they who possess the signifier (the letter). In the second position, then, the subject occupies an essentially narcissistic relation to the letter and this corresponds to the imaginary phase we outlined in the previous chapter. The third position is symbolic and in this position the subject 'discerns the role of structure in the situation and acts accordingly' (Muller and Richardson 1988: 63). This is the position of the Minister in the first scene and Dupin in the second. Both figures can see what is taking place in front of them, they understand the implications of the letter, and moreover they know how to act. This is the position of the subject in the symbolic order; a subject who understands their situation within a larger structure and the function of that structure in determining their actions. First the Queen and then the Minister believe they can possess the letter and keep it hidden. Lacan, however, argues that it is the letter (the signifier) that possesses the subject; it is the signifier that inscribes the subject in the symbolic order. When the Minister takes and hides the letter he readdresses it to himself, but in doing so, he changes the masculine script of the original to a feminine one. Thus, suggests Lacan, he is caught up 'in the dynamics of repetition that drag him into the second position' (Muller and Richardson



The 1950s were a period of extraordinary innovation for Lacan. Through the influence of the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and linguists Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson, Lacan developed his central notion of the symbolic order and the subject as subject of the signifier. This facilitated Lacan's break with traditional psychoanalysis and paved the way for his major innovation – the idea that the unconscious is structured like a language. In the following chapter, we will see what Lacan means by this as well as what distinguishes the Lacanian from the Freudian unconscious and how the emphasis of his work changes from the mid-1960s onwards.

1988: 63). Similarly, Dupin cannot resist leaving his signature on his own replacement letter and in doing so he is immediately dragged into the second narcissistic position.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What was the dual function of Lacan when he included the essay in his book *Ecrits*?

Q 8: Which are the two main themes in Lacan's interpretation of the story of Poe?

6.6 RECEPTION OF LACAN AND HIS IDEAS

In 1966, Lacan published the collection of his essays and conference papers titled *Ecrits (Writings).* Despite its difficulty, the book was a sensation as crowds began filling his weekly seminar. Along With other French thinkers, Lacan spoke that same year at Johns Hopkins University at a conference "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" that launched structuralism and Post-structuralism in the United States. And together with Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, and many others; Lacan became very closely associated with the intellectual ferment that helped lead to the student demonstrations in May 1968 in Paris. Indeed, some of his students became so disruptive that the director of the Ecole Normale made it known to Lacan that he-would have to seek another venue. In 1969, he began holding his seminars at the: Faculte de Droit (Law School). Meanwhile, at the just-opened branch of the, University of Paris at Vincennes, the, first university department of psychoanalysis in France was created by people sympathetic to Lacan. Among them was Jacques-Alain Miller, a student of Althusser, who later became important as Lacan's editor and son-in-law. In 1975, Jacques Derrida published his response to Lacan's essay as "The Purveyor of Truth." In short, he criticized Lacan for not analyzing a text in such a way that makes use of Derrida's deconstruction and his related claims about metaphysics and language. Even though Lacan is suspicious of traditional philosophical claims about truth, Derrida claimed that the old

fashioned "metaphysics of presence" was still alive and well in Lacan's analysis, that Lacan depicted the act as speech as primary over writing, and that Lacan in analyzing the themes and content of the story and not the style of storytelling was missing the point of literary analysis.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Why is the conference "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" held at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore is significant for Lacan?



6.7 LET US SUM UP

As we finish reading the unit on Lacan's "Seminar on The Purloined Letter", we have seen how a text can be read even when a major piece of information is not disclosed—an important lesson for psychoanalysis. The *path* of the desired or feared letter in Poe's story does not depend, on knowledge of its contents; and the behaviour of those who seek it creates a story around their presumptions about the contents. The story is composed of two different scenes in which the same letter is stolen: the two scenes are repetitions of each other with the set roles being played by different characters. According to Lacan, the repetition is *unconscious.* For Lacan, in other words, Poe's story illustrates the fact that, the letter's position among the characters, and not the psychology of the individuals, determines what each will do. Although the story's reader never gains access to the text of the letter, the story's characters do read it; like the analyst, we the readers shall have to understand the functioning of the repetition without necessarily knowing its content.



6.8 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Purloined_Letter

6.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Lacan, entered the Freudian psychoanalytical movement in 1936. But, his radical critique of the orthodox psychoanalytical theory and practice led to his expulsion from the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1959.

Ans to Q 2: The publication of his research papers and articles 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.

Ans to Q 3: Lacan shows how a text can be read even when a major piece of information is not disclosed… …an important lesson for psychoanalysis… …The *path* of the letter in Poe's story does not depend, on knowledge of its contents… …the behaviour of those who seek it creates a story around their presumptions about the contents, whether or not the letter is ever opened.

Ans to Q 4: The 'unconscious', for Lacan, is not a hidden reservoir of repressed desires but rather a form of rhetorical energy designed both to disguise and to express those desires, which exist for

psychoanalysis only in their effects. For him "The unconscious is structured like a language."

Ans to Q 5: Lacan argued in *Ecrits* that the content of the Queen's letter is irrelevant to the story and that the proper "place" of the signifier (the letter itself) is determined by the symbolic structure in which it exists and is displaced, first by the Minister and then by Dupin.

Ans to Q 6: According to Lacan the unconscious is not just a bundle of drives, but made up of symbolic strings… …the various characters in the story take on certain roles in reaction to a letter being used to blackmail the Queen of France… …the content of the letter is not known—it might be an evidence of an affair, a political plot, or just fiction… …Lacan describes it as a "pure signifier" whose travel among the various characters constitutes a repetitive cycle.

Ans to Q 7: By including the seminar at the beginning of the *Ecrits,* Poe served a dual function: it both represented what was to follow and it established a particular mode of reading… …in order to read Lacan, the story seems to be saying, one must follow the path of the signifier, and the remainder of *Ecrits* is fundamentally concerned with the laws of the signifier'.

Ans to Q 8: Lacan's interpretation of Poe's story focuses upon two main themes: first, the anonymous nature of the letter, which for Lacan serves as the 'true subject' of the story, and, second, the pattern of intersubjective relationships that are repeated in the tale.

Ans to Q 9: "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" launched structuralism and Post-structuralism in the United States… …and together with critics and theorists such as Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, and many others; Lacan became very closely associated with the intellectual ferment that helped lead to the student demonstrations in May 1968 in Paris.



1.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Lacan's contributions to 20th century literary theory.

Q 2: What are the three orders or dimensions in the psyche according to Lacan? Elaborate.

Q 3: Lacan's "Seminar on *the Purloined Letter*" analyzes the Edgar Allan Poe short story. Lacan's point here is to investigate "repetition automatism." Discuss with reference to the storyline.

Q 4: Discuss Lacan's contributions to Psychoanalysis in the 20th century.

Q 5: Write a note on the reception of Jacques Lacan and his ideas.

Q 6: Provide an overview of the life and works of the important post structuralist Jacques Lacan with reference to his book *Ecrits*.

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UNIT 7: JACQUES DERRIDA: "STRUCTURE, SIGN AND PLAY IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Jacques Derrida: Life and Works

7.4 Reading the Text: "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"

7.5 Important Theoretical Concepts under Derrida's 'Deconstruction'

7.6 Reception of Derrida and His Ideas

7.7 Let us Sum up

7.8 Further Reading

7.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.10 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the Post structuralist critic Jacques Derrida
- read about the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" and understand its significance
- jot down the important concepts raised by Derrida in the text of the essay
- appreciate Jacques Derrida as the most prominent post structuralist theorist along with Lacan and Foucault

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall deal with the French Post Structuralist critic Jacques Derrida and his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences". This essay was a lecture presented at Johns Hopkins University on 21st October 1966 by Derrida. The lecture was then published

in 1967 as a chapter in his book *Writing and Difference.* "Structure, Sign, and Play" identifies a tendency for philosophers to denounce each other for relying on problematic discourse, and argues that this reliance is to some degree inevitable because we can only write in the language we inherit. Discussing the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Derrida argues that we are all *bricoleurs*, creative tinkerers who must use the tools we find around us. Although presented at a conference intended to popularize structuralism, the lecture is widely cited as the starting point for post-structuralism in the United States. Along with Derrida's longer text *Of Grammatology*, this essay is also inaugurated the process of deconstruction. By the end of the unit, we should be able to understand the different ideas and concepts developed by Derrida through this essay.

7.3 JACQUES DERRIDA: LIFE AND WORKS

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 Heidegger. 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.

Born in Algeria to French-speaking Jewish parents, Derrida began life in an environment that was both multilingual and culturally complex. Like other Algerian Jews, he experienced firsthand the shifting borderlines of Frenchness: he was excluded from school as non-French during the Vichy government's collaboration with the Nazis. The pull between Literature and philosophy, that characterizes Derrida's work, was there from the beginning. From an early stage, he was influenced by philosophers like Sorren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger. But after a difficult period during

which he suffered from health problems, examination failures, and depression, in 1952 he was admitted to the prestigious Ecole Normale Superieure.

In 1966, Derrida gave a landmark lecture at the conference "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" held at Johns Hopkins University. The other dignitaries present there included intellectuals like Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Georges Poulet, and Lucien Goldmann. That conference helped shape how Structuralism and Poststructuralism began to influence literary studies in the United States. Derrida's own lecture, an extension but also a critique of Structuralism titled "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.

In 1967, Derrida published his first three books in French: *La Voixet le'phtnomene (Speech and Phenomena), De la Grammatologie (Of Grammatology)* and *L'Ecriture 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 marginalized in France and increasingly active and important in the United States. Derrida died of cancer in Paris at the age of 74.



LET US KNOW

Derrida's book *Of Grammatology* is important for his investigation of the "science of writing." Derrida claims that that Western discussions of writing tend to make two claims presenting an **ethnocentric** argument that phonetic writing is the most advanced kind and a **logocentric** argument (a coinage from the Greek word *logos,* meaning, "reason, logic, word") that spoken language is

superior to written language. Thus, the form of writing that most closely approximates speech is best, and speech itself is considered primary. The consequences of these two assumptions constitute what Derrida calls "Western Metaphysics". To the extent that science itself is modelled on the logic (also from *logos)* of speech, grammatology or a *science of writing* is itself a contradiction in terms (combining *grammata,* "writing," and *logy,* "speech").



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the major intellectual deliberations of Jacques Derrida?

Q 2: Name the important critical works of Jacques Derrida.

7.4 READING THE TEXT "STRUCTURE, SIGN AND PLAY IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES" [Adapted from Wikipedia]

The essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" was a lecture presented by Derrida at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore during a conference at a conference titled "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" on 21 October 1966. The lecture was later published in 1967 as a chapter in Derrida's book *Writing and Difference* (French: *L'écriture et la différence*). Through this essay, Derrida identifies a tendency of philosophers to denounce each other for relying on problematic discourse, and argues that this reliance is to some degree inevitable because we can only write in the language we inherit. Discussing the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Derrida argues that we are all *bricoleurs* or creative tinkerers who must use the tools we find around us. Although presented at a conference intended to popularize structuralism, the lecture is widely cited as the starting point for Post-structuralism as well as deconstruction.

In the essay, Derrida discusses how philosophy and social science understand 'structures' abstractly. Derrida was dealing with structuralism,

which was a type of analysis that understands individual elements of language and culture as embedded in larger structures. The archetypal examples of Structuralism come from Ferdinand de Saussure, who showed how phonemes and words gain meaning only through relations with each other. (Derrida dealt directly with Saussure in a related book titled *Of Grammatology*). The main object of this text is Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose structuralist anthropology analyzed the relationships between elements of cultural systems such as mythology. Derrida admires the reflexivity and abstract analyses of structuralism, but argues that these discourses have still not gone far enough in treating structures as free-floating (or 'playing') sets of relationships. In particular, he accuses structuralist discourses of holding on to a "center": a privileged term that anchors the structure and does not play. Whether this center is "God", "being", "presence", or "man", its function is the same, and the history of structures is a history of substitutions, one center after another, for this constant position. Derrida suggests that this model of structure will end—is ending—and that a newer and freer (though still unknown) thinking about structures will emerge.



The Conference on "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" was organized by Richard A. Macksey for the newly founded Humanities Centre, at Johns Hopkins University, and the conference was sponsored by the Ford Foundation. The organisers brought a host of notable French thinkers, including Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, Jean Hyppolite and Jacques Lacan (about Lacan we have read in the previous unit). Derrida reportedly wrote his essay rather quickly within the ten to fifteen days preceding the Conference.

Occurrence of the 'event'

The essay begins by speculating, "Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an 'event', if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural—structuralist—thought to reduce or suspect." The 'event' involves changes in structuralism, structure, and in particular "the structurality of structure", which has hitherto been limited, writes Derrida, through the process of being assigned a stabilizing "center". The "center" is that element of a structure which appears given or fixed, thereby anchoring the rest of the structure and allowing it to play. In the history of metaphysics specifically, this function is fulfilled by different terms (which Derrida says are always associated with presence): "*eidos, archè, telos, energia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth." Whichever term is at the center of the structure, argues Derrida, the overall pattern remains

similar. This central term ironically escapes *structurality*, the key feature of structuralism according to which all meaning is defined relationally, through other terms in the structure. From this perspective, the center is the most alien or estranged element in a structure: it comes from somewhere outside and remains absolute until a new center is substituted in a seemingly arbitrary fashion. "The center", therefore, "is not the center."

The 'event' under discussion is the opening of the structure, which became inevitable "when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought" and the contradictory role of the center exposed. The result of the event, according to Derrida, must be the full version of structural "*freeplay*", a mode in which all terms are truly subject to the openness and mutability promised by structuralism. Derrida locates the beginning of this process in the writings of earlier philosophers, who continued to use the pattern of metaphysics even as they denounced it in others.

Derrida in this essay depicts Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger—three of his greatest influences, as ultimately trapped within a destructive spiral of denunciation. Nietzsche questioned the power of representation and concepts to really convey truth; Freud challenged the idea that mind was limited to consciousness; and Heidegger criticized the idea of "being as presence". Derrida argues that these theoretical moves share a common form. However, all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a sort of circle. This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relationship between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. [...] there are many ways of being caught in this circle. They are all more or less naïve, more or less empirical, more or less systematic, more or less close to the formulation or even to the formalization of this circle. It is these differences, which explain the multiplicity of destructive discourses and the disagreement between those who make them. It was within concepts inherited from metaphysics that Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger worked, for example. Since these concepts are not elements or atoms and since they are taken from a syntax and a system, every particular borrowing drags along with it the whole of metaphysics. This is what allows these destroyers to destroy each other reciprocally—

for example, Heidegger, considering Nietzsche, with as much lucidity and rigor as bad faith and misconstruction, as the last metaphysician, the last "Platonist." One could do the same for Heidegger himself, for Freud, or for a number of others. And, today no exercise is more widespread.

Derrida does not assert the possibility of thinking outside such terms; any attempt to undo a particular concept is likely to become caught up in the terms, which the concept depends on. For instance: if we try to undo the centering concept of 'consciousness' by asserting the disruptive counterforce of the 'unconscious', we are in danger of introducing a new center. All we can do is refuse to allow either pole in a system to become the center and guarantor of presence.

Having described a pattern—denouncing metaphysics while relying on it—in discourses about metaphysics, Derrida suggests consideration of the same pattern within the "human sciences", whose subjection to the "critique of ethnocentrism" parallels the "destruction of the history of metaphysics" in philosophy. Derrida argues that, just as philosophers use metaphysical terms and concepts to critique metaphysics (and criticize the use of these concepts by others); the ethnologist "accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he is employed in denouncing them." He examines the work of *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, particularly as it concerns "the opposition between nature and culture", as his case study and primary focus for the essay.

Idea of Bricolage

Derrida highlights Lévi-Strauss's use of the term *bricolage*, the activity of a *bricoleur*. "The *bricoleur*, says Lévi-Strauss, is someone who uses 'the means at hand,' that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary." *Bricolage* becomes a metaphor for philosophical and literary critiques, exemplifying Derrida's previous argument about the necessity of using the language available. The *bricoleur'*s foil is the engineer, who creates out of whole cloth without the need for *bricolage*—

however, the engineer is merely a myth since all physical and intellectual production is really *bricolage*.

Structure and myth

Derrida praises Lévi-Strauss for his insights into the complexities, limitations, and circularities of examining 'a culture' from the outside in order to classify its mythological system. In particular, he praises Lévi-Strauss's recognition that a mythological system cannot be studied as though it was some finite portion of physical reality to be scientifically divided and conquered. Derrida quotes Lévi-Strauss's *The Raw and the Cooked*: In effect the study of myths poses a mythological problem by the fact that it cannot conform to the Cartesian principle of dividing the difficulty into as many parts as are necessary to resolve it. There exists no veritable end or term to mythical analysis, no secret unity which could be grasped at the end of the work in decomposition. The themes duplicate themselves to infinity. When we think we have disentangled them from each other and can hold them separate, it is only to realize that they are joining again, in response to the attraction of unforeseen affinities.

In Derrida's words, "structural discourse on myths—mythological discourse—must itself be *mythopomorphic*". Lévi-Strauss explicitly describes a limit to totalization (and at the same time the endlessness of 'supplementarity'). Thus Lévi-Strauss, for Derrida, recognizes the structurality of mythical structure and gestures towards its freeplay. But Derrida criticizes Lévi-Strauss for an inability to explain historical changes—for describing structural transformation as the consequence of mysterious outside forces (paralleling the substitute "centers" that make up the history of metaphysics). Ultimately, Derrida perceives in Lévi-Strauss "a sort of ethic of presence, an ethic of nostalgia for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech", arguing that "this structuralist thematic of broken immediateness is thus the sad, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay of which the Nietzschean *affirmation*—the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active

interpretation—would be the other side." True free play, argues Derrida, actually undoes this certainty about presence: Free play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Free play is always interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be radically conceived, free play must be conceived before the alternative of presence and absence; being must be conceived of as presence or absence beginning with the possibility of free play and not the other way around. Derrida concludes by reaffirming the existence of a transformation within structuralism, suggesting that it espouses this affirmative view of unlimited freeplay and presenting it as unpredictable yet inevitable.

Criticism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Why is the conference held in Johns Hopkins University is significant?

Q 4: What is the 'event' the emergence of which Derrida celebrates in the essay?

Q 5: State what Derrida mentions about Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger in the essay.

Q 6: Derrida highlights Lévi-Strauss's use of the term *bricolage*, the activity of a *bricoleur*. Who is a *briccoleur*?

Q 7: Give the idea of the 'center' as discussed by Derrida.

7.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL CONCEPTS UNDER DERRIDA'S 'DECONSTRUCTION'

The name of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida is synonymous with Deconstruction a word he revived but did not invent. Often described as a 'method of analysis', 'a type of critique', an 'act of reading' or a 'way of writing', Deconstruction is a broad phenomenon. However, we cannot understand the word Deconstruction without refereeing to the various other concepts attached to it. Besides, you will notice that Derrida deliberately introduces new terms, displacing the old because old terms cannot explain

the new concepts of the present. The following are some of the important concepts under Derrida's Deconstruction.

Structure, Sign and Play: In his famous essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" through his discussion on Claude Levi-Strauss, Freud and Saussure, Derrida provided the readers with examples of deconstructive method in practice. And Derrida has done it firstly with a critique and inversion of the hierarchical binary opposition that has structured Western philosophies and by making them examples of 'Logocentrism', and secondly, by dispersing the meanings in accordance with the principles of 'difference'. So, Derrida's 'Deconstruction' starts out as a critique of the **theory of language** first propounded by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who had emphasized on the system-bound nature of language which was supposed to be self-contained with its own internal rules or 'grammar'. However, the reference to language was taken only as a model, which was later to be appropriated to other analysis of cultural phenomena. 'Deconstruction' actually argues against this notion of deep structure determining meaning within a system or of 'signs. For Derrida, meaning formation is an evolutionary process as what we consider to be a 'sign' is a 'signifier' signifying not the 'signified' but another 'signifier'. Hence, the 'sign' always fails to achieve full meaning. Language is a chaotic phenomenon and any attempt at structural ordering limits its possibilities. This radicalism can be further seen as destabilizing the Structuralist notion of binary relationships.

Derrida is known for his neologisms. For example, the word *Supplement* in French means both "substitute" and "addition". Thus, **Supplementarity** is another term coined and used by Derrida to describe a unique function of any signifying structures. Focusing on the contradictions inherent in the concept of the Supplement, Derrida says that the word itself is illusive. It may either mean something added to complete a thing or something added to an already 'complete in itself' thing.

Remembering Levi Strauss's notion of a 'floating signifier' in a signifying structure, Derrida shows how that same 'signifier', having an access of symbolic value, fills the lack on the part of the 'signified', but

which can do so only because it exceeds the total signification of that structure and thus representing the overabundance of the 'signifier' in relation to the 'signified'.

[Read the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" from Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood]

Logocentrism: It is the term coined and used by Derrida in his book *Of Grammatology.* It denotes the position that words, writings, ideas, systems of thought are 'fixed' and are governed by some authority and external forces whose meaning they tend to convey. These outside sources may consist of something like the objects of the real 'world out there', which is beyond language and referred to by words. Common assumption about Logocentrism is that 'signs' refer to referends and words make an ascertainable, decipherable meaning present to the reader or hearer as words contain and convey some 'presence' or 'presences' form the outside world. According to Derrida, this Logocentric assumption of how words and thinking operate, has been the foundation of the whole history of Western Metaphysics and has dominated Western thought and linguistics since the time of Plato.

Differance: A neological term used by Derrida to refer to the production of differences and the endless deferral of linguistic meaning or any signifying system understood as the system of differences. It is a central term in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. Derrida here accepts Saussurean ideas of language as a system of differences and then extends its principles to its ultimate consequence that meaning is produced only on the basis of the relation among the 'signifiers' not through the 'signified'. Consequently, the 'signified' is thus constantly deferred and delayed through a differential network. To mark the concept more clear Derrida juxtaposes two grammatical extensions of the verb *differer* (translated into English by two different verbs, "to differ" and "to defer"): *difference,* a noun that implies synchronic comparison, and *differance,* a noun of identical pronunciation that invokes a *process-the* temporal process of deferring or postponing.

Aporia: Aporia is a term found in Greek Rhetoric and has been traditionally being used as a figure of speech in which the speaker or character deliberates on an ambiguous question. One famous example is Hamlet's soliloquy 'To be or not to be, that is the question' which puts forward Hamlet's struggle to derive a conclusion about how he should act. This word came to signify various other connotations in the hands of the Deconstructive critics who tried to indicate certain points where we face not simply a choice of reading but a plurality of undecidable meanings. Consequently, the gap or lacuna opens up between what a text wishes to say and what it is constrained to say. The deconstructive critics start to find out aporias, or moments of self-contradictions where the text begins to undermine its own presuppositions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What does the term Deconstruction signify?

Q 9: Mention the significance of the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" by Jacques Derrida.

Q 10: What is meant by the term Logocentrism?

7.6 RECEPTION OF DERRIDA AND HIS IDEAS

(Adapted from *Norton Anthology*)

As has been stated above, Jacques Derrida's name is synonymous with deconstruction. However, we must note that Derrida is first and foremost an extraordinary critical reader. Whether he reads writings by philosophers or poets, autobiographers or anthropologists, linguists or psychoanalysts, he pulls out the threads that give the texts coherence and, at the same time, unravel them. His use of the figure of the *web* unpacks the appearance of unity presented by a book to reveal an articulation of conflicting messages woven together within it. Yet both forces-the unifying and unravelling, operate in what Derrida calls a "text." If Plato's written "dialogues" mark the beginning of the "age of writing," the writings of Derrida, perhaps, signal its end. Though Derrida is known

for his neologisms, the terms most closely associated with him are almost never his invention. He instead finds them already in the works he is reading, where they draw his attention by articulating the text in some way that has generally been overlooked. Take, for example, the word *Supplement.* In French means both "substitute" and "addition". As Derrida explains, "the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. The relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce."*

Derrida is famous for producing such critical readings, which have come to be called "deconstructions." His readings go beyond the mere accuracy if "doubling commentary", but they nevertheless remain "intrinsic" to the text. Instead of rushing to expound the text's presumed content, meaning, or referent, they try to remain at the point and within the logic that renders the leap to an outside so tempting. Instead of choosing *between* incompatible or contradictory readings, Derrida attempts to understand the double binds and tensions that are articulated in the text. Rousseau, standing between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, is a figure whose writings are symptomatic of the fissures in the logocentric system that he both reproduces and resists.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure, who split the 'sign' into 'signifier' and 'signified', revolutionized the understanding of language by seeing it as a system (internally as well as externally articulated) and not as a nomenclature (a simple aggregation of names). According to Saussure, language does not arise cumulatively from either things or ideas but instead produces things or ideas out of a structure of differences. "Language is a system of differences," he says in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), "without *positive terms."* Derrida takes this concept of difference from Saussure and adds to it the dimension of temporality that Saussure's static (or synchronic) structure does not allow. In doing so, Derrida uncovers a significant contradiction in Saussure: although Saussure *thinks* he can

eliminate writing as secondary and keep speech as essential, he treats language as fixed in time and thus as if it were a dead language-a language that we can only know *in writing.*



LET US KNOW

The essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" sowed the seeds of popularity for French post-structuralism at eastern universities in the United States, particularly Johns Hopkins, Cornell, and Yale. Derrida also returned several times to the Hopkins Humanities Centre, the faculty of which still credits his influence. The colloquium also created a demand for the French intellectuals on American campuses, which led notably to Derrida's 1986 recruitment by University of California, Irvine.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Can we say that Derrida is quite original in his use of new terms?

Q 12: What does Derrida borrow from the Swish linguist Ferdinand de Saussure?



7.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have understood the important aspects of the life and works of the important post structuralist theorist Jacques Derrida. We have also learnt that the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" besides inaugurating Post structuralism in literary theory also became instrumental in inaugurating deconstruction as a method for analysing a text. Besides, the various important concepts propounded by Derrida in this essay, also help us to acknowledge the fact that Derrida is a wilfully difficult writer.



7.8 FURTHER READING

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

Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (2005). *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. New Delhi: Pearson.

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

Makaryk, Arena. (Ed.). (1993). *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*. Canada: University of Toronto Press.

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

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structure,_Sign,_and_Play_ in_the_ Discourse_ of_the_Human_Sciences



7.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: 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… …concept of the 'sign' 'signifier' and 'signified'… … 'supplement', 'Diffarance' and so on.

Ans to Q 2: In 1967, Derrida published his first three books in French: La Voixet le'phtnomene (Speech and Phenomena), De la Grammatologie (Of Grammatology) and L'Ecriture 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.

Ans to Q 3: 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 4: The 'event' involves changes in structuralism, structure, and in particular "the structurality of structure", which has hitherto been limited, writes Derrida, through the process of being assigned a stabilizing "center". The "center" is that element of a structure which appears given or fixed, thereby anchoring the rest of the structure and allowing it to play.

Ans to Q 5: Derrida in this essay depicts Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger—three of his greatest influences, as trapped within a destructive spiral of denunciation. Nietzsche questioned the power of representation and concepts to really convey truth; Freud challenged the idea that mind was limited to consciousness; and Heidegger criticized the idea of "being as presence". Derrida argues that these theoretical moves share a common form. However, all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a sort of circle.

Ans to Q 6: The *bricoleur*, according to Lévi-Strauss, is someone who uses 'the means at hand,' that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary.

Ans to Q 7: Derrida accuses structuralist discourses of holding on to a "center": a privileged term that anchors the structure and does not play. Whether this center is "God", "being", "presence", or "man", its function is the same, and the history of structures is a history of substitutions, one center after another, for this constant position… …according to Derrida, this model of structure will end—is ending—and that a newer and freer thinking about structures will emerge.

Ans to Q 8: a 'method of analysis', 'a type of critique', an 'act of reading' or a 'way of writing'.

Ans to Q 9: Derrida in this essay, through his discussion on Claude Levi-Strauss, Freud and Saussure, provides the readers with examples of deconstructive method in practice… … Derrida has done it firstly with a critique and inversion of the hierarchical binary opposition that has structured Western philosophies and then by making them examples of 'Logocentrism'.

Ans to Q 10: It is a term coined and used by Derrida in his book *Of Grammatology.* It denotes the position that words, writings, ideas, systems of thought are 'fixed' and are governed by some authority and external forces whose meaning they tend to convey… …Derrida breaks this notion.

Ans to Q 11: No… …the terms most closely associated with him are almost never his invention… …for example, the word *Supplement* is borrowed from French, which means both "substitute" and "addition".

Ans to Q 12: Ferdinand De Saussure, who split the 'sign' into 'signifier' and 'signified', revolutionized the understanding of language by seeing it as a 'system'… …he reiterated that "Language is a system of differences"… …Derrida takes this concept of difference from Saussure and adds to it the dimension of temporality that Saussure's static (or synchronic) structure does not allow.



7.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the key concepts under 'Deconstruction' with particular reference to Derrida's essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."

Q 2: How does Derrida formulate the concept of the 'center' in the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"?

Q 3: What are the important concepts Derrida develops as part of his theory of Deconstruction? Give a detailed answer.

Q 4: What do you understand by the terms 'Logocentrism' and 'playfulness of the structure'? Discuss with reference to his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."

Q 5: Discuss what Derrida states about the idea of the 'center' in the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."

Q 5: What is the 'function' of language? How do the functions differ from one another? How do the interrelations among the functions decide the nature of a message?

Q 6: What is poetic function? How do different genres of verbal are or poetry differ from one another? Discuss.

Q 7: Contextualise Roman Jakobson in the history of the development of Russian Formalism.

Q 8: Estimate the contribution of Jakobson in the development of Structuralism.

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UNIT 8: MICHEL FOUCAULT (1926-1984): "WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?"

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Michel Foucault: Life and Works

8.4 Reading the text: "What is an Author?"

8.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

8.6 Reception of Michel Foucault and His Ideas

8.7 Let us Sum up

8.8 Further Reading

8.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.10 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Michel Foucault
- read the essay "What is an Author?" in terms of its various important aspects
- write about the idea of an author as projected by a post structuralist theorist like Foucault
- write a note on the reception of Foucault as a leading post tructuralist of his time

8.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is based on Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" Michel Foucault (1926-84) was, at the time of his death, Professor of the History of Systems of Thought at the *Collège de France* in Paris, a title that succeeds (or fails) as much as any other single phrase in the effort to encapsulate his unique, inter-disciplinary field of research. He has been variously described as philosopher, social scientist, and historian of ideas. However, he was undoubtedly one of the most powerful and influential figures

who shone in Paris in the 1960s and 70s. The essay "What is an Author?" is typical of Foucault's historicizing approach. Here, Foucault shows that the idea of the author, which we tend to take for granted as a timeless, irreducible category, is, rather, a 'function' of discourse which has changed in the course of history.

8.3 MICHEL FOUCAULT: LIFE AND WORKS

Foucault (1926-1984) was born in Poitiers France. He took his university degree at the Ecole Normale Superieure where he specialized in the philosophy of psychology. Later he became the professor of the History of Systems of Thought at the College de France in Paris. However, he 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.

Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* is an important book for scholars and readers. A major theme of this book and his next undertaking *The Birth of the Clinic* is an attack on the Institutions and procedures characteristic of modern medicine. They inaugurate Foucault's lifelong preoccupation with the ways in which individuals are "administered" by the various bureaucratic institutions—hospitals, prisons, the military, schools—that increasingly render the selves docile in the modern world. His next

book *The Order of Things* examines how the disciplines of economics, linguistics, and biology emerged. Foucault attempted to explicate and justify the methodology of *The Order of Things* in his next major book *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* By 1969, Foucault's focus had shifted away from intellectual history and methodological meditations. He became politically active and remained so to the end of his life. His book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) is a direct outgrowth of his work on prison reform. From 1970 on, Foucault spent longer and longer stints in North America as a lecturer or visiting professor at various universities-most notably at the University of California at Berkeley, where the New Historicists gathered around Stephen Greenblatt brought Foucault-inspired work directly into literary studies.

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 criticizability 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]



LET US KNOW

Foucault's important publications include the following:

Madness and Civilization (1965) [first published in France, 1961]

The Order of Things (1970) [1966]

The Archaeology of Knowledge (1972) [1969]

Discipline and Punish (1977) [1975]

Power, Knowledge and the Subject

In both *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault developed an influential account of the interconnections among power, knowledge, and the subject. He famously stated, "Power is exercised, rather than possessed", and insisted that power is not repressive but "productive". Power, in Foucault's view, does not belong to anyone, nor does it all emanate from one specific location, such as the state. Rather, power is diffused throughout social institutions, and is exercised by innumerable, replaceable functionaries. Thus, for example, the teacher exercises power over students, and schools have countless ways of governing students' behaviour. However, the teacher holds that power only as a function of his or her place in the institution. Both teacher and students are located (though differently) within the institution, and both go through their paces within a network that guides and oversees their conduct.

Foucault held the view that the **knowledge** produced in psychology, sociology, anthropology, criminology, and medicine is itself an integral part of the discursive ordering and physical management wielded by modern power. Thus, Foucault uses the term ***Power/knowledge*** to indicate how the production of knowledge is wedded to productive power. Modern power requires increasingly narrow categories through which it analyzes, differentiates, identifies, and administers the individuals in a society. The psychological test, for example, tells us what needs to be done: is this murderer a criminal who must be sent to prison, or an insane person who must be sent to a hospital. Thus, power/knowledge undercuts any lofty humanistic narrative of "the life of the mind" or "the disinterested pursuit of knowledge." The intellectual comes to look like power's dupe, or perhaps a privileged insider to power's activities. The university, in particular, serves a dual function. As gatekeeper, it sorts students via grades, exams, course requirements, and so on, thereby limiting access to various cherished places in the social hierarchy, such as medical careers. At the same time, the university undertakes funded research, thereby producing the knowledge through which populations are observed and managed. However, in later times, Foucault's thoughts on the power/ knowledge nexus have sparked off intense criticisms of his works.



LET US KNOW

Foucault was often at pains to deny that he was a 'structuralist', but he may legitimately be described as a Post-structuralist. Structuralism ignored or distrusted the superficial appearance or commonsense view of cultural phenomena in its efforts to grasp the conditions of their possibility. Foucault did the same, but where the structuralists like Lévi-Strauss, or the early Barthes, used language and linguistics as their methodological model or tool, Foucault used the history of social and political institutions and discourses.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention some of the important works of Michel Foucault.

Q 2: What is the role of an author, according to Foucault?

Q 3: State Foucault's views on Power.

8.4 READING THE TEXT: "WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?"

[Taken from David Lodge and Nigel Wood's Anthology]

The following are some excerpts from Foucault's essay. We shall do well if we can highlight the important points discussed in the essay.

The coming into being of the notion 'author' constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences. Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scansions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work.

I shall not offer here a socio-historical analysis of the author's persona. Certainly it would be worth examining how the author became individualized in a culture like ours, what status he has been given, at what moment studies of authenticity and attribution began, in what kind of system

of valorization the author was involved, at what point we began to recount the lives of authors rather than of heroes, and how this fundamental category of 'the-man-and-his-work criticism' began. For the moment, however, I want to deal solely with the **relationship between text and author and with the manner in which the text points to this 'figure' that, at least in appearance, is outside it and antecedes it.**

Beckett nicely formulates the theme with which I would like to begin: '"What does it matter who is speaking"… In this indifference appears one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing [*écriture*]. I say 'ethical' because this indifference is not really a trait characterizing the manner in which one speaks and writes, but rather a kind of immanent rule, taken up over and over again, never fully applied, not designating writing as something completed, but dominating it as a practice. Since it is too familiar to require a lengthy analysis, this immanent rule can be adequately illustrated here by tracing two of its major themes.

First of all, we can say that today's writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression. Referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority. This means that it is an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier. **Writing unfolds like a game [*jeu*] that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits.** In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears.

The second theme, writing's relationship with death, is even more familiar. This link subverts an old tradition exemplified by the Greek epic, which was intended to perpetuate the immortality of the hero: if he was willing to die young, it was so that his life, consecrated and magnified by death, might pass into immortality; the narrative then redeemed this accepted death. In another way, the motivation, as well as the theme and the pretext of Arabian narratives — such as *The Thousand and One Nights* — was also the eluding of death: one spoke, telling stories into the early

morning, in order to forestall death, to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator. Scheherazade's narrative is an effort, renewed each night, to keep death outside the circle of life.

Our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death. Writing has become linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life: it is now a voluntary effacement, which does not need to be represented in books, since it is brought about in the writer's very existence. The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer, as in the cases of Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka. That is not all, however: this relationship between writing and death is also manifested in the effacement of the writing subject's individual characteristics. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.

None of this is recent; criticism and philosophy took note of the disappearance — or death — of the author some time ago. But the consequences of their discovery of it have not been sufficiently examined, nor has its import been accurately measured. A certain number of notions that are intended to replace the privileged position of the author actually seem to preserve that privilege and suppress the real meaning of his disappearance. I shall examine two of these notions, both of great importance today.

The first is the idea of the work. It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather, to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships. At this point, however, a problem arises: 'What is a work? What is this curious unity, which we designate as a work? Of what elements is it composed? Is it not what an author has written?' Difficulties appear immediately. If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he

wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a 'work'? When Sade was not considered an author, what was the status of his papers? Were they simply rolls of paper onto which he ceaselessly uncoiled his fantasies during his imprisonment?

Even when an individual has been accepted as an author, we must still ask whether everything that he wrote, said, or left behind is part of his work. The problem is both theoretical and technical.…..How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death? A theory of the work does not exist, and the empirical task of those who naively undertake the editing of works often suffers in the absence of such a theory.

We could go even further: does *The Thousand and One Nights* constitute a work? What about Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* or Diogenes Laertius' *Lives?* A multitude of questions arises with regard to this notion of the work. Consequently, it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work in itself. The word 'work' and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality.

Another notion which has hindered us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance, blurring and concealing the moment of this effacement and subtly preserving the author's existence, is the notion of writing [*écriture*]. When rigorously applied, this notion should allow us not only to circumvent references to the author, but also to situate his recent absence. The notion of writing, as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indication — be it symptom or sign — of a meaning, which someone might have wanted to express. We try, with great effort, to imagine the general condition of each text, the condition of both the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds.

In current usage, however, the notion of writing seems to transpose the empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity. We are content to efface the more visible marks of the author's empiricity by playing off, one against the other, two ways of

characterizing writing, namely, the critical and the religious approaches. Giving writing a primal status seems to be a way of retranslating, in transcendental terms, both the theological affirmation of its sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character. To admit that writing is, because of the very history that it made possible, subject to the test of oblivion and repression, seems to represent, in transcendental terms, the religious principle of the hidden meaning (which requires interpretation) and the critical principle of implicit significations, silent determinations, and obscured contents (which gives rise to commentary). To imagine writing as absence seems to be a simple repetition, in transcendental terms, of both the religious principle of inalterable and yet never fulfilled tradition, and the aesthetic principle of the work's survival, its perpetuation beyond the author's death, and its enigmatic *excess* in relation to him.

This usage of the notion of writing runs the risk of maintaining the author's privileges under the protection of writing's a priori status: it keeps alive, in the grey light of neutralization, the interplay of those representations that formed a particular image of the author. The author's disappearance, which, since Mallarmé, has been a constantly recurring event, is subject to a series of transcendental barriers. There seems to be an important dividing line between those who believe that they can still locate today's discontinuities [*ruptures*] in the historicotranscendental tradition of the nineteenth century, and those who try to free themselves once and for all from that tradition.

It is not enough, however, to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. For the same reason, it is not enough to keep repeating (after Nietzsche) that God and man have died a common death. Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers.

First, we need to clarify briefly the problems arising from the use of the author's name. What is an author's name? How does it function? Far from offering a solution, I shall only indicate some of the difficulties that it presents.

The author's name is a proper name, and therefore it raises the problems common to all proper names. (Here I refer to Searle's analyses, among others.) Obviously, one cannot turn a proper name into a pure and simple reference. It has other than indicative functions: more than an indication, a gesture, a finger pointed at someone, it is the equivalent of a description. When one says ' Aristotle', one employs a word that is the equivalent of one or a series of, definite descriptions, such as 'the author of the *Analytics*', 'the founder of ontology', and so forth. One cannot stop there, however, because a proper name does not have just one signification. When we discover that Rimbaud did not write *La Chasse spirituelle* [*The Spiritual Pursuit*], we cannot pretend that the meaning of this proper name, or that of the author, has been altered. The proper name and the author's name are situated between the two poles of description and designation: they must have a certain link with what they name, but one that is neither entirely in the mode of designation nor in that of description; it must be a *specific* link. However - and it is here that the particular difficulties of the author's name arise — the links between the proper name and the individual named and between the author's name and what it names are not isomorphic and do not function in the same way. There are several differences……..

These differences may result from the fact that an author's name is not simply an element in a discourse (capable of being either subject or object, of being replaced by a pronoun, and the like); it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition, it establishes a relationship among the texts. Hermes Trismegistus did not exist, nor did Hippocrates — in the sense that Balzac existed — but the fact that several texts have been placed under the same name indicates that there has been established among them a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentification of some texts by the use of others, reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilization. The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say 'this was written by so-and-so' or

'so-and-so is its author', shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status.

It would seem that the author's name, unlike other proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being. The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture. It has no legal status, nor is it located in the fiction of the work; rather, it is located in the break that founds a certain discursive construct and its very particular mode of being. As a result, we could say that in a civilization like our own there are a certain number of discourses that are endowed with the 'author-function,' while others are deprived of it. A private letter may well have a signer — it does not have an author; a contract may well have a guarantor — it does not have an author. An anonymous text posted on a wall probably has a writer — but not an author. The author-function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society.

Let us analyze this 'author-function' as we have just described it. In our culture, how does one characterize discourse containing the author-function? In what way is this discourse different from other discourses? If we limit our remarks to the author of a book or a text, we can isolate four different characteristics. First, discourses are objects of appropriation. The form of ownership from which they spring is of a rather particular type, one that has been codified for many years. We should note that, historically, this type of ownership has always been subsequent to what one might call penal appropriation. Texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors (other than mythical, 'sacralized' and 'sacralizing' figures) to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive. In our culture (and

doubtless in many others), discourse was not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods; it was essentially an act — an act placed in the bipolar field of the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous. Historically, it was a gesture fraught with risks before becoming goods caught up in a circuit of ownership.

Once a system of ownership for texts came into being, once strict rules concerning author's rights, author-publisher relations, rights of reproduction, and related matters were enacted — at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century — the possibility of transgression attached to the act of writing took on, more and more, the form of an imperative peculiar to literature. It is as if the author, beginning with the moment at which he was placed in the system of property that characterizes our society, compensated for the status that he thus acquired by rediscovering the old bipolar field of discourse, systematically practicing transgression and thereby restoring danger to a writing which was now guaranteed the benefits of ownership.

The author-function does not affect all discourses in a universal and constant way, however. This is its second characteristic. In our civilization, it has not always been the same types of texts which have required attribution to an author. There was a time when the texts that we today call 'literary' (narratives, stories, epics, tragedies, comedies) were accepted, put into circulation, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author; their anonymity caused no difficulties since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status. On the other hand, those texts that we now would call scientific — those dealing with cosmology and the heavens, medicine and illnesses, natural sciences and geography — were accepted in the Middle Ages, and accepted as 'true', only when marked with the name of their author. ' Hippocrates said', ' Pliny recounts', were not really formulas of an argument based on authority; they were the markers inserted in discourses that were supposed to be received as statements of demonstrated truth.

…….**The third characteristic of this author-function is that it does not develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to an individual**. It is, rather, the result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call 'author'. Critics doubtless try to give this intelligible being a realistic status, by discerning, in the individual, a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power, or a 'design', the milieu in which writing originates. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice. All these operations vary according to periods and types of discourse. We do not construct a 'philosophical author' as we do a 'poet', just as, in the eighteenth century, one did not construct a novelist as we do today. Still, we can find through the ages certain constants in the rules of author-construction.

It seems, for example, that the manner in which literary criticism once defined the author — or rather constructed the figure of the author beginning with existing texts and discourses — is directly derived from the manner in which Christian tradition authenticated (or rejected) the texts at its disposal. In order to 'rediscover' an author in a work, modern criticism uses methods similar to those that Christian exegesis employed when trying to prove the value of a text by its author's saintliness. In *De viris illustribus [Concerning Illustrious Men]*, Saint Jerome explains that homonymy is not sufficient to identify legitimately authors of more than one work: different individuals could have had the same name, or one man could have, illegitimately, borrowed another's patronymic. The name as an individual trademark is not enough when one works within a textual tradition.

How then can one attribute several discourses to one and the same author? How can one use the author-function to determine if one is dealing with one or several individuals? Saint Jerome proposes four criteria: (1) if among several books attributed to an author one is inferior to the others, it must be withdrawn from the list of the author's works (the author is therefore defined as a constant level of value); (2) the

same should be done if certain texts contradict the doctrine expounded in the author's other works (the author is thus defined as a field of conceptual or theoretical coherence): (3) one must also exclude works that are written in a different style, containing words and expressions not ordinarily found in the writer's production (the author is here conceived as a stylistic unity); (4) finally, passages quoting statements that were made, or mentioning events that occurred after the author's death must be regarded as interpolated texts (the author is here seen as a historical figure at the crossroads of a certain number of events).

Modern literary criticism, even when — as is now customary — it is not concerned with questions of authentication, still defines the author the same way: the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design). The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing — all differences, having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence. The author also serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts: there must be — at a certain level of his thought or desire, of his consciousness or unconscious— point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction. Finally, the author is a particular source of expression that, in more or less completed forms, is manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in works, sketches, letters, fragments, and so on. Clearly, Saint Jerome's four criteria of authenticity (criteria which seem totally insufficient for today's exegetes) do define the four modalities according to which modern criticism brings the author function into play.

But the author-function is not a pure and simple reconstruction made second hand from a text given as passive material. The text always contains a certain number of signs referring to the author. These signs, well known to grammarians, are personal pronouns, adverbs of time

and place, and verb conjugation. Such elements do not play the same role in discourses provided with the author function as in those lacking it. In the latter, such 'shifters' refer to the real speaker and to the spatio-temporal coordinates of his discourse (although certain modifications can occur, as in the operation of relating discourses in the first person). In the former, however, their role is more complex and variable. Everyone knows that, in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, nor the present indicative refer exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work. It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author-function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance……

No doubt analysis could discover still more characteristic traits of the author function. I will limit myself to these four, however, because they seem both the most visible and the most important. They can be summarized as follows: (1) the author-function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses; (2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all types of civilization; (3) it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations; (4) it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects — positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals.

Up to this point I have unjustifiably limited my subject. **Certainly the author function in painting, music, and other arts should have been discussed, but even supposing that we remain within the world of discourse, as I want to do, I seem to have given the term 'author' much too narrow a meaning.** I have discussed the author only in the limited sense of a person to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed. It is easy to see that in the sphere of discourse one can be the author of much more than a book — one can be the author

of a theory, tradition, or discipline in which other books and authors will in their turn find a place. These authors are in a position which we shall call 'transdiscursive'. This is a recurring phenomenon – certainly as old as our civilization. Homer, Aristotle, and the Church Fathers, as well as the first mathematicians and the originators of the Hippocratic tradition, all played this role.

Furthermore, in the course of the nineteenth century, there appeared in Europe another, more uncommon, kind of author, whom one should confuse with neither the 'great' literary authors, nor the authors of religious texts, nor the founders of science. In a somewhat arbitrary way we shall call those who belong in this last group 'founders of discursivity'. They are unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts. In this sense, they are very different, for example, from a novelist, who is, in fact, nothing more than the author of his own text. Freud is not just the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams or Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*; Marx is not just the author of the *Communist Manifesto or Capital*: they both have established an endless possibility of discourse….

In this way, we can understand the inevitable necessity, within these fields of discursivity, for a 'return to the origin'. This return, which is part of the discursive field itself, never stops modifying it. The return is not a historical supplement which would be added to the discursivity, or merely an ornament; on the contrary, it constitutes an effective and necessary task of transforming the discursive practice itself. Re-examination of Galileo's text may well change our knowledge of the history of mechanics, but it will never be able to change mechanics itself. On the other hand, re-examining Freud's texts, modifies psychoanalysis itself just as a re-examination of Marx's would modify Marxism.

What I have just outlined regarding the initiation of discursive practices is, of course, very schematic; this is true, in particular, of the opposition that I have tried to draw between discursive initiation and scientific founding. It is not always easy to distinguish between the two; moreover,

nothing proves that they are two mutually exclusive procedures. I have attempted the distinction for only one reason: to show that the author-function, which is complex enough when one tries to situate it at the level of a book or a series of texts that carry a given signature, involves still more determining factors when one tries to analyze it in larger units, such as groups of works or entire disciplines.

To conclude, **I would like to review the reasons why I attach a certain importance to what I have said.**

First, there are theoretical reasons. **On the one hand, an analysis in the direction that I have outlined might provide for an approach to a typology of discourse.** It seems to me, at least at first glance, that such a typology cannot be constructed solely from the grammatical features, formal structures, and objects of discourse: more likely there exist properties or relationships peculiar to discourse (not reducible to the rules of grammar and logic), and one must use these to distinguish the major categories of discourse. The relationship (or nonrelationship) with an author, and the different forms this relationship takes, constitute — in a quite visible manner — one of these discursive properties.

On the other hand, I believe that one could find here an introduction to the historical analysis of discourse. Perhaps it is time to study discourses not only in terms of their expressive value or formal transformations, but according to their modes of existence. The modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each. The manner in which they are articulated according to social relationships can be more readily understood, I believe, in the activity of the author-function and in its modifications, than in the themes or concepts that discourses set in motion….

Second, **there are reasons dealing with the 'ideological' status of the author. The question then becomes: How can one reduce the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world?** The answer is: One can reduce it with the author. The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within

a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. As a result, we must entirely reverse the traditional idea of the author. We are accustomed, as we have seen earlier, to saying that the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations. We are used to thinking that the author is so different from all other men, and so transcendent with regard to all languages that, as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely.

The truth is quite the contrary: **the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.** In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion. One can say that the author is an ideological product, since we represent him as the opposite of his historically real function. (When a historically given function is represented in a figure that inverts it, one has an ideological production.) The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning…..

All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur. We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: 'Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?' Instead, there would be other questions, like these: 'What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions?' And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: 'What difference does it make who is speaking?'

8.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

[Adapted from *Norton Anthology*]

The essay "What Is an Author?" questions some of the most fundamental assumptions of literary criticism. Foucault realizes that he had taken the author for granted in *The Order of Things,* and asks himself what it would mean to take seriously "the death of the author" (in Roland Barthes' famous phrase). Foucault's approach in this question is characteristic of much of his work. We must consider, he says, what "functions" the category of "author" fulfills within the "discourse" the historian or critic deploys in the analysis of written texts. The concept *author,* he points out, is an organizing device, permitting us to group certain texts together. More crucially, the concept underwrites a number of interpretive conventions. We ascribe a certain unity and coherence to all the works written by a single author, or at least we feel that an author's drastic changes in style or opinion must be explained. And we assume, at the most fundamental level, that the author is the source of the text. Interpretation moves from the written text (which may be all we know of a writer) back toward the author, searching out an Individual's biography, psychology, and intentions. The author thus functions both to organize the vast reservoir of materials that the past bequeaths us and to anchor a certain way of interpreting those materials.

Foucault's crucial point here is "humanism," the Renaissance understanding of who and what individuals are. He highlights the historical contingency of the belief that we are "individuals" with unique natures, possessing coherent interior identities, motives, desires, and conscious intentions that cause our actions. Humanism claims for each individual the capacities that literary criticism ascribes to authors. Significantly, the "author function" has not always been deemed necessary to the apprehension and interpretation of texts. Prior to 1500, anonymous texts were the norm. Even today, the importance of authors varies from field to field. A contract has no author, nor does the average poster. We barely note the authors of most newspaper articles. Generally speaking, Foucault opines that emphasis on the author is a mark of prestige, "Discourse that possesses an author's

name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten .... Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates."

Foucault's essay, then invites us to examine the ways in which literary criticism approaches the text, and accords it the prestigious title of "literature" partly through the exaltation of the author (as talented, as worthy of honour and study). He also shifts our focus away from the author and toward larger systematic social forces. What if the author is not the cause, the source, of the text? What if author and text are both effects? In that case, the critic's inquiries and scrutiny need to be directed toward their common cause, toward cultural conventions and their inclusions and exclusions, not confined to formal analyses of texts or psychological investigations of writers' lives.



LET US KNOW

In "What Is an Author?" (1969) Foucault asked what "functions" the category called "author" fulfils within the "discourse" the historian or critic deploys in the analysis of written texts. The concept *author,* he points out, is an organizing device, permitting us to group certain texts together. We also assume, at the most fundamental level, that the author is the source of the text. Interpretation moves from the written text (which may be all we know of a writer) back toward the author, searching out the author's biography, psychology, and intentions. The author thus functions both to organize the vast reservoir of materials that the past bequeaths us and to anchor a certain way of interpreting those materials. Foucault's essay invites the readers to examine the ways in which literary criticism approaches its object—the text, and accords it the prestigious title of "literature" partly through the exaltation of the author (as talented, as worthy of honour and study).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Explain the concept of the author as devised by Foucault?

Q 5: Which statement in the text of the essay suggest that 'author' is a mark of prestige?

8.6 RECEPTION OF MICHEL FOUCAULT AND HIS IDEAS

Michel Foucault is one of the most influential European writers and thinkers of the second half of the 20th century. His works are unclassifiable and controversial and have attracted much criticism. But, the questions he raised, the topics he addressed and the positions he took have become central features of today's intellectual landscape. In literary studies, Foucault stands as a major source for Post structuralism, New Historicism, Cultural studies, and Queer theory, while also fuelling the growing interest in literature and medicine, the examination of the institutional bases from which writers and critics operate, and the interest in processes of identity formation.

As one of his commentators Paul Robinow stated, "Foucault is highly suspicious of claims to universal truths. He doesn't refute them; instead his consistent response is to historicize grand abstractions." His example has had a powerful effect upon the writing of literary history in Britain and America. The essay "What is an Author?" is typical of this historicizing approach. Foucault shows that the idea of the author, which we tend to take the for granted, as a timeless, irreducible category, is, rather, a 'function' of discourse which has changed in the course of history. For example, whereas before the Renaissance the attribution of a text to an author was more important in science than in literature, the reverse is true in the era of humanism and capitalism. In the early part of the essay, Foucault acknowledges the effort of some radical modern criticism (he may be thinking of Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author", to abolish the idea of the author as origin and owner of his work, but suggests that this easier said than done.



The essay "What is an Author?" ends with a vision of a culture in which literature would circulate 'anonymously'; but whether this vision (which has something in common with the conclusion to Derrida essay "Structure, Sign and Play" offers an attractive prospect is open to argument. Though, Foucault's focus on the historical and institutional contexts of discourse inspired many critics on the intellectual left, his Nietzschean insistence on the struggle for power as the ultimate determinant of all human action is not encouraging to progressive political philosophies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: In what way, has Foucault influenced literary studies?

Q 7: How does Foucault historicise the concept of the author?



8.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Michel Foucault is one of the significant names in Paris along with Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida in between 1960s and 1970s. He has been variously described as a philosopher, social scientist and historian of ideas. We have learnt that Foucault was highly suspicious of claims to universal truths. He never refutes them, but his consistent response is to historicise grand abstractions. This is where Foucault can be termed a post structuralist. The essay "What is an Author". is typical of this historicising approach. He is of the view that the idea of the author, which we tend to take for granted, as a timeless irreducible category, is rather a 'function' of discourse, which has changed in the course of history. He also gave an example by stating that before the Renaissance the attribution of a text to an author was more important in science than in literature. However, in the era of humanism and capitalism, the reverse has taken place.



8.8 FURTHER READING

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

Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (2005). *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. New Delhi: Pearson.

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

Makaryk, Arena. (Ed.). (1993). *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*. Canada: University of Toronto Press.

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

8.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: *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 2: 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 organizing device, permitting us to group certain texts together… …the author thus functions both to organize the vast reservoir of materials that the past bequeaths us and to anchor a certain way of interpreting those materials.

Ans to Q 3: Foucault stated that "power is exercised, rather than possessed"… …power does not belong to anyone, nor does it all emanate from one specific location, such as the state… …power is diffused throughout social institutions, and is exercised by innumerable, replaceable functionaries… …for example, the teacher exercises power over students, but the teacher holds that power only as a function of his or her place in the institution.

Ans to Q 4: The concept *author* is an organizing device, permitting us to group certain texts together… …the concept underwrites a number of interpretive conventions… …we ascribe a certain unity and coherence to all the works written by a single author… …that the author is the source of the text… …usually, the interpretation moves from the written text back toward the author, searching out an Individual's biography, psychology, and intentions… …the author thus functions both to organize the vast reservoir of materials that the past bequeaths us and to anchor a certain way of Interpreting those materials.

Ans to Q 5: "Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten .... Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates."

Ans to Q 6: In literary studies, Foucault stands as a major source for Post structuralism, New Historicism, Cultural studies, and Queer theory, while also fuelling the growing interest in literature and medicine, the examination of the institutional bases from which writers and critics operate, and the interest in processes of identity formation.

Ans to Q 7: Foucault shows that we tend to take the idea of the author as a timeless, irreducible category… …rather, it is a 'function' of discourse which has changed in the course of history… …for example, whereas before the Renaissance, the attribution of a text to an author was more important in science than in literature… …however, he reverse is happening in the era of humanism and capitalism.



8.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the life and works of Michel Foucault? How does his contribution influence literary studies?

Q 2: In what way does Michel Foucault view the idea of an 'author'?

Q 3: The essay "What is an Author?" is typical of Foucault's historicising approach. Discuss.

Q 4: Do you think that Foucault's essay "What is an Authors?" is a reply to Roland Barthes' views on the 'death of the author'? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 5: Based on your reading of the essay "What is an author?"; write a note on Foucault's notion of 'writing'.

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UNIT 9: HAYDEN WHITE: "THE HISTORICAL TEXT AS LITERARY ARTEFACT"

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Hayden White: Life and Works

9.4 Reading the Text: "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact"

9.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

9.6 Reception of Hayden White and His Ideas

9.7 Let us Sum up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.10 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Hayden White
- read the essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact" in terms of its various important aspects
- identify the important issues raised by White in the essay
- provide a critical reception of Hayden White as a leading theorist of his time.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss yet another important literary essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact" by Hayden White. White has been an American historian whose elaboration of metahistory in work *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) is an important contribution to the questing of the traditional forms of historical thinking that often characterises Post modernism. His claim in the prescribed essay is that the manifest historical text is marked by strategies of explanation, which include explanation by argument, explanation by

emplotment and explanation by ideological implication. As we finish reading the unit, we shall understand his argument that literary writing in many ways influenced historical writing, sharing the strong reliance on narrative for meaning, therefore eliminating the possibility of objective or truly scientific history.

9.3 HAYDEN WHITE: LIFE AND WORKS

White was born in Martin, Tennessee. After attending Wayne State University, he did his graduate work in history at the University of Michigan, earning an M.A. in 1952 and a Ph.D. in 1956. He taught first as an instructor at Wayne State (1955-58), then in 1958 was appointed to the history faculty at the University of Rochester, where he served as head of the· department from 1962 to 1964. He subsequently taught history at the University of California, Los Angeles (1968-73), served as the director of the Center for Humanities at Wesleyan University in Connecticut (1973-77), and in 1978 became a professor in the History of Consciousness program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Since formally retiring in 1994, he has been the Bonsall Professor of Comparative Literature at Stanford University.

Hayden White has been a historian by training since the 1970s. He is also a central figure in literary debates about the nature of history. While critic like Stephen Greenblatt began to turn to history to explain the formal structures of literary texts, White was examining the formal literary structures of history beginning with his celebrated 1973 book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth-Century Europe.* This book outlines an ambitious structuralist scheme for describing a "poetics of history." Drawing on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) to describe the underlying "deep structure" of historical narratives, this project brings together historiography and literary criticism in a broad reflection on narrative and its relation to culture. "To raise the question of the nature of narrative," White writes in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), "is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So natural is the Impulse to narrative, inevitable is the form of narrative for any report on the way

things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused."

White's basic argument is that historical narratives are verbal fictions supported by philosophical theories of history that seek to validate their 'plots.' The sequences of events they record are selected from the historical data, and plot structures are imposed upon them into a comprehensible narrative, which is told as a particular kind of story. Thus the style of any given historiographer can be described in terms of the linguistic poetic protocols he uses to shape his historical field by bringing together the explanatory strategies he uses to shape a story out of the jumbled 'chronicle' of events that make up the historical record. White is firm on his argument that history cannot reveal truth in the way that the natural sciences can; it will not reveal predictive or probable laws. Given that history is primarily a literary-narrative genre, it is to be studied from models derived from literary and theoretical studies and the truths it does reveal are of a literary or artistic order. Although there is no external point from which these truths can be judged, this does not imply that White's relativism is absolute. The choices that are made between historigraphic models do influence our understanding of the present and our visions of the future, but they are to be made on aesthetic and ethical grounds.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In what way did Hayden White draw on Northrop Fry?

Q 2: Why does Hayden White state that historical narratives are verbal fictions?

9.4 READING THE TEXT: "THE HISTORICAL TEXT AS LITERARY ARTEFACT" [Excerpts taken from *Norton Anthology*]

One of the ways that a scholarly field takes stock of itself is by considering its history. Yet it is difficult to get an objective history of a

scholarly discipline, because if the historian is himself a practitioner of it, he is likely to be a devotee of one or another of its sects and hence biased; and if he is not a practitioner he is unlikely to have the expertise necessary to distinguish between the significant and the insignificant events of the field's development. One might think that these difficulties would not arise in the field of history itself, but they do and not only for the reasons mentioned above. In order to write the history of any given scholarly discipline or even of a science, one must be prepared to ask questions *about* it of a sort that do not have to be asked in the practice *of* it. One must try to get behind or beneath the presuppositions, which sustain a given type of inquiry, and ask the questions that can be begged in its practice in the interest of determining why this type of inquiry has been designed to solve the problems it characteristically tries to solve. **This is what metahistory seeks to do. It addresses itself to such questions as, What is the structure of a peculiarly *historical* consciousness? What is the epistemological status of historical *explanations,* as compared with other kinds of explanations that might be offered to account for the materials with which historians ordinarily deal? What are the possible *forms* of historical representation and what are their bases? What authority can historical accounts claim as contributions to a secured knowledge of reality in general and to the human sciences in particular?**

Now, many of these questions have been dealt with quite competently over the last quarter-century by philosophers concerned to define history's relationships to other disciplines, especially the physical and social sciences, and by historians interested in assessing the success of their discipline in mapping the past and determining the relationship of the past to the present. But, there is one problem that neither philosophers nor historians have looked at very seriously and to which literary theorists have given only passing attention. **This question has to do with the status of the historical narrative, considered purely as a verbal artifact purporting to be a model of structures and processes long past and therefore not subject to either experimental or observational controls.** This is not to say that historians and philosophers of history have failed to take notice of the

essentially provisional and contingent nature of historical representations and of their susceptibility to infinite revision in the light of new evidence or more sophisticated conceptualization of problems. One of the marks of a good professional historian is the consistency with which he reminds his readers of the purely provisional nature of his characterizations of events, agents, and agencies found in the always-incomplete historical record. Nor is it to say that literary theorists have *never* studied the structure of historical narratives. **But, in general there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as *much invented as found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences.**

Now, it is obvious that this conflation of mythic and historical consciousness will offend some historians and disturb those literary theorists whose conception of literature presupposes a radical opposition of history to fiction or of fact to fancy. As Northrop Frye has remarked, "In a sense the historical is the opposite of the mythical, and to tell the historian that what gives shape to his book is a myth would sound to him vaguely insulting. Yet Frye himself grants that "when a historian's scheme gets to a certain point of comprehensiveness it becomes mythical in shape, and so approaches the poetic in its structure." He even speaks of different kinds of historical myths: Romantic myths "based on a quest or pilgrimage to a City of God or classless society"; Comic "myths of progress through evolution or revolution"; Tragic myths of "decline and fall, like the works of Gibbon and Spengler"; and. Ironic "myths of recurrence or casual catastrophe." But, Frye appears to believe that these myths are operative only in such victims of what might be called the "poetic fallacy" as Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Spengler, Toynbee and Sartre—historians whose fascination with the "constructive" capacity of human thought has deadened their responsibility to the "found" data. ''The historian works inductively," he says, "collecting his facts and trying to avoid any informing patterns except those he sees, or is honestly convinced he sees, in the facts themselves." He does not work "from" a "unifying form," as the poet does, but "toward" it;

and it therefore follows that the historian, like any writer of discursive prose, is to be judged "by the truth of what he says, or by the adequacy of his verbal reproduction of his external model," whether that external model be the actions of past men or the historian's own thought about such actions.

What Frye says is true enough as a statement of the *ideal* that has inspired historical writing since the time of the Greeks, but that ideal presupposes an opposition between myth and history that is as problematical as it is venerable. It serves Frye's purposes very well, since it permits him to locate the specifically "fictive" in the space between the two concepts of the "mythic" and the "historical." As readers of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* will remember, Frye conceives fictions to consist in part of sublimates of archetypal myth structures. These structures have been displaced to the interior of verbal artifacts in such a way as to serve as their latent meanings. **The fundamental meanings of all fictions, their thematic content, consist, in Frye's view, of the "pre-generic plot-structures" or *mythoi* derived from the corpora of Classical and Judaeo-Christian religious literature. According to this theory, we understand *why* a particular story has "turned out" as it has when we have identified the archetypal myth, or pregeneric plot structure, of which the story is an exemplification. And we see the "point" of a story when we 'have identified its theme** (Frye's translation of *dianoia)*, **which makes of it a "parable or illustrative fable."** "Every work of literature," Frye insists, "has both a fictional and a thematic aspect," but as we move from "fictional projection" toward the overt articulation of theme, the writing tends to take on the aspect of "direct address, or straight discursive writing and cease[s] to be literature." And in Frye's view, as we have seen, history (or at least "proper history") belongs to the category of "discursive writing," so that when the fictional element-or mythic plot structure-is *obviously* present in it, it ceases to be history altogether and becomes a bastard genre, product of an unholy, though not unnatural, union between history and poetry.

Yet, I would argue, histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of *mere* chronicles; and stories in turn are made out of chronicles by an operation which I have elsewhere called

"emplotment." And by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures, in precisely the way that Frye has suggested is the case with "fictions" in general.

The late R. G. Collingwood insisted that the historian was above all a storyteller and suggested that historical sensibility was manifested in the capacity to make a plausible story out of a congeries of "facts" which, in their unprocessed form, made no sense at all. In their efforts to make sense of the historical record, which is fragmentary and always incomplete, historians have to make use of what Collingwood called "the constructive imagination," which told the historian-as it tells the competent detective-what "must have been the case" given the available evidence and the formal properties it displayed to the consciousness capable of putting the right question to it. This constructive imagination functions in much the same way that Kant supposed the *a priori* imagination functions when it tells us that even though we cannot perceive both sides of a tabletop simultaneously, we can be certain it has two sides if it has one, because the very concept of *one side* entails at least *one other.* Collingwood suggested that historians come to their evidence endowed with a sense of the *possible* forms that different kinds of recognizably human situations *can* take. He called this sense the nose for the "story" contained in the evidence or for the "true" story that was buried in or hidden behind the "apparent"" story. And he concluded that historians provide plausible explanations for bodies of historical evidence when they succeed in discovering the story or complex of stories implicitly contained within them.

What Collingwood failed to see was that no given set of casually recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most it might offer to the historian are story *elements.* The events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motif in repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a

novel or a play. For example, no historical event is *intrinsically tragic;* it can only be conceived as such from a particular point of view or from within the context of a structured set of events of which it is an element enjoying a privileged place. For in history what is tragic from one perspective is comic from another, just as in society what appears to be tragic from the standpoint of one class may be, as Marx purported to show of the 18th Brumaire of Louis Buonaparte, only a farce from that of another class. Considered as potential elements of a story, historical events are value-neutral. Whether they find their place finally in a story that is tragic, comic, romantic, or ironic-to use Frye's categories-depends upon the historian's decision to configure them according to the imperatives of one plot structure or mythos rather than another. The same set of events can serve as components of a story that is tragic *or* comic. as the case may be, depending on the historian's choice of the plot structure that he considers most appropriate for ordering events of that kind so as to make them into a comprehensible story.

This suggests that what the historian brings to his consideration of the historical record is a notion of the *types* of configurations of events that can be recognized as stories by the audience for which he is writing. True can misfire. I do not suppose that anyone would accept the emplotment of the life of President Kennedy as comedy, but whether it ought to be emplotted romantically, tragically, or satirically is an open question. The important point is that most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings. Thus, for example, what Michelet in his great history of the French Revolution construed as a drama of Romantic transcendence, his contemporary Tocqueville emplotted as an ironic Tragedy. Neither can be said to have had more knowledge of the "facts" contained in the record; they simply had different notions of the kind of story that best fitted the facts they knew. Nor should it be thought that they told different stories of the Revolution because they had discovered different *kinds* of facts, political on, the one hand, social on the other. They sought out different kinds of facts because they had different kinds of stories to tell. But why did these alternative, not to say mutually exclusive, representations of what

was substantially the same set of events appear equally plausible to their respective audiences? Simply because the historians shared with their audiences certain preconceptions about how the Revolution might be emplotted, in response to imperatives that were generally extra historical, ideological, aesthetic, or mythical.

Collingwood once remarked that you could never explicate a tragedy to anyone who was not already acquainted with the kinds of situations, that are regarded as "tragic" in our culture. Anyone who has taught or taken one of those omnibus courses usually entitled Western Civilization or Introduction to the Classics of Western Literature will know what Collingwood had in mind. Unless you have some idea of the generic. attributes of tragic, comic, romantic, or ironic situations, you will be unable to recognize them as such when you come upon them in a literary text. But historical, situations do not have built into them intrinsic meanings in the way that literary texts do. Historical situations are not *inherently* tragic, comic, or romantic. They may all be inherently ironic, but they need not be emplotted. All the historian needs to do to transform a tragic into a comic situation is to shift his point of view or change the scope of his perceptions. Anyway, we only think of situations as tragic or comic because these concepts are part of our generally cultural and specifically literary heritage. How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation. And to call it that in no way detracts from the status of historical narratives as providing a kind of knowledges. For not only are the pregeneric plot structures by which sets of events can be constituted as stories of a particular kind limited in number, as Frye and other archetypal critics suggest; hut the encodation of events in terms of such plot structures is one of the ways that a culture has of-making sense of both personal and public pasts.

We can make sense of sets' of events in a number of different ways. One of the ways is to subsume the events under the casual laws which may have governed their concatenation in order to produce the· particular

configuration that the events appear to assume when considered as "effects" of mechanical forces. This is the way of scientific explanation. Another way we make sense of a set of events which appears strange, enigmatic, or mysterious in its immediate manifestations is to encode the set in' terms of culturally provided categories, such as metaphysical concepts, religious beliefs, or story forms. The effect of such encodations is to familiarize the unfamiliar; and in general, this is the way of historiography whose "data" are always immediately strange, not to say exotic; simply by virtue of their distance from us in time and their origin in a way of life different from our own.

The historian shares with his audience *general notions* of the *forms* that significant human situations *must* take by virtue of his participation in the specific processes of sense making which identify him as a member of one cultural endowment rather than another. In the process of studying a given complex of events, he begins to perceive the *possible* story form that such events *may* figure. **In his narrative account of how this set of events took on the shape which he perceives to inhere within it, he emplots his account as a story of a particular kind. The reader, in the process of following the historian's account of those events, gradually comes to realize that the story he is reading is of one kind rather than another: romance, tragedy, comedy, satire, epic, or what have you.** And when he has perceived the class or type to which the story that he is reading belongs, he experiences the effect of having the events in the story explained to him. He has at this point not only successfully *followed* the story; he has grasped the point of it, *understood* it, as well. The original strangeness, mystery, or exoticism of the events is dispelled, and they take on a familiar aspect, not in their details, but in their functions as elements of a familiar kind of configuration. They are rendered comprehensible by being subsumed under the categories of the plot structure in which they are encoded as a story of a particular kind. They are familiarized, not only because the reader now has more *information* about the events, but also because he has been shown how the data conform to an *icon* of a comprehensible finished process, a plot structure with which he is familiar as a part of his cultural endowment…..

The evasion of the implications of the fictive nature of historical narrative is in part a consequence of the utility of the concept "history" for the definition of other types of discourse. **"History" can be set over against "science" by virtue of its want of conceptual rigor and failure to produce the kinds of universal laws that the sciences characteristically seek to produce. Similarly, "history" can be set over against "literature" by virtue of its interest in the "actual" rather than the "possible," which is supposedly the object of representation of "literary" works.** Thus, within a long and distinguished critical tradition that has sought to determine what is "real" and what is "imagined" in the novel, history has served as a kind of archetype of the "realistic" pole of representation. I am thinking of Frye, Auerbach, Booth, Scholes and Kelogg, and others. Nor is it unusual for literary theorists, when they are speaking about the "context" of a literary work, to suppose that this context-the "historical milieu"-has a concreteness and an accessibility that the work itself can never have as if it were easier to perceive the reality of a past world put together from a thousand historical documents than it is to probe the depths of a single literary work that is present to the critic studying it. **But the presumed concreteness and accessibility of historical milieux, these contexts of the texts that literary scholars study, are themselves products of the fictive capability of the historians who have studied those contexts.** The historical documents are not less opaque than the texts studied by the literary critic. Nor is the world those documents figure more accessible. The one is no more "given" than the other. In fact, the opaqueness of the world figured in historical documents is, if anything, increased by the production of his to deal narratives. Each new historical work only adds to the number of possible texts that have to be interpreted if a full and accurate picture of a given historical milieu is to be faithfully drawn. The relationship between the past to be analyzed and historical works produced by analysis of the documents is paradoxical; the more we know about the past, the more difficult it is to generalize about it.

But if the increase in our knowledge of the past makes it more difficult to generalize about it, it should make it easier for us to generalise about the

forms in which that knowledge is transmitted to us. Our knowledge of the past may increase incrementally, but our understanding of it does not. Nor does our understanding of the past progress by the kind of revolutionary breakthroughs that we associate with the development of the physical sciences. **Like literature, history progresses by the production of classics, the nature of which is such that they cannot be disconfirmed or negated, in the way that the principal conceptual schemata of the sciences are.** And it is their nondisconfirmability that testifies to the essentially *literary* nature of historical classics. There is something in a historical masterpiece that cannot be negated, and this nonnegatable element is its form, the form which is its fiction.

So too for historical narratives. They succeed in endowing sets of past events with meanings, over and above whatever comprehension they provide by appeal to putative causal laws, by exploiting the metaphorical similarities between sets of real events and the conventional structures of our fictions. By the very constitution of a set of events in such a way as to make a comprehensible story out of them, the historian charges those events with the symbolic significance of a comprehensible plot structure. Historians may not like to think of their works as translations of fact into fictions; but this is one of the effects of their works. **By suggesting alternative emplotments of a given sequence of historical events, historians provide events with all of the possible meanings with which the literary art of their culture is capable of endowing them.** The real dispute between the proper historian and the philosopher of history has to do with the latter's insistence that events can be emplotted in one and only one story form. History writing thrives on the discovery of all the possible plot structures that might be invoked to endow sets of events with different meanings. And our understanding of the past increases precisely in the degree to which we succeed in determining how far that past conforms to the strategies of sense-making that are contained in their purest forms in literary art.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What does the term 'emplotment' mean?

Q 4: What did R. G. Collingwood insist about the historians?

Q 5: In what way, according to Hayden White, can history be set over against science and literary works?

Q 6: According to White, what does Metahistory seek to do?

9.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

[Adapted from *Norton Anthology*]

"The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," provides an accessible and engaging synopsis of White's main arguments in *Metahistory* beginning with his definition of metahistory as the attempt to "get" behind or beneath the presuppositions which sustain a given type of inquiry (in this case historical inquiry)." A key assumption that, according to White, has sustained historical inquiry is the belief that history (judged by its correspondence to reality) and literature (judged as fiction) are two distinct, diametrically opposed, activities, a presupposition shared by practitioners in both disciplines. On the contrary, White argues, because history, like literature, is a verbal structure and the historian, first and foremost, is a writer, the tools that have served literary critics, the tools that compose the linguistic and rhetorical structures of a text, serve the historian well. The language in which history is written cannot be dismissed as window dressing, as most historians are tempted to do.

Language in history is never merely a means to an end; it is neither transparent nor neutral, nor does it disappear to allow the pure truth of history to emerge. In White's view, historical narratives are verbal fictions with invented contexts. He goes beyond Erich Auerbach, arguing that history, because of its claims to represent reality adequately, is the form best suited for a study of the style of narrative "realism." Histories gain their explanatory power by processing data into stories. Those stories take their shape from what White calls "emplotment," the process through which the facts

contained in "chronicles" are encoded as components of plots. Plots are not imminent in events themselves but exist in the minds of historians, who rarely reflect on them. No historical event can itself constitute a story, tragic or ironic: it can only be presented as such from a particular historian's narrative point of view. The event emerges as a plotted story, which takes on meaning when it is combined with otherelements in the limited number of generic plot structures by which a series of events can be constituted. Following Northrop Frye's archetypal analysis, White identifies four possible emplotments: tragic, comic, romantic, and ironic. These generic deep plot structures are shared between historians and their audiences by virtue of their participation in a common culture.



LET US KNOW

The kind of emplotment historians will employ to give meaning to a series of events. White argues, is determined by the dominant figurative mode of the language they use to describe these events and story elements. Drawing on the eighteenth-century philosopher Giambattista Vico and the twentieth-century critic Kenneth Burke, White identifies four master tropes or modes of figurative representation-metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony-which correspond to the four types of emplotment.

For White, the differences between contending histories of, say, the French Revolution cannot be resolved by recourse to the facts, because the facts-and, more important, the relationships among those facts-do not inhere in the events themselves, but instead are constituted by historians in the linguistic and literary structures they use to identify and describe the events they study. Tropes are ineradicable from discourse, as are plots. Thus, history evokes reality: it does not reproduce or represent it. This analysis of historical narrative makes special sense in the context of the structuralism of the 1970s, when it first caught public attention. Although White does not draw directly on the terminology of structural linguistics, his debts to such modern structuralists as Claude Levi Strauss, Roman

Jakobson and the linguist Noam Chomsky are clear. And his adaptation of Frye's archetypal criticism is structuralist both in its basic argument that history uses a few "deep structures" to generate its "surface structures" and in its broad contention that historians have mistakenly focused their attention only on the surface, while ignoring the underlying deep structures that produce those narratives.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How does Hayden White prove that a historian is also a writer?

9.6 RECEPTION OF HAYDEN WHITE AND HIS IDEAS

Historians have objected to White's narrowing of history to language, while more poststructuralist-minded literary critics have taken issue with White's structuralist reductionism (only four master plots and tropes). Some critics argue that Frye's archetypal approach to narrative, which White relies on, is too simple, forcing all narratives "willy-nilly into abstract and timeless structures without regard to how they might function in particular cultural contexts. Others contend that unlike most Structuralists, White imagines plot as a quintessential expression of the historian's personal style and self. Despite these objections, White's skilful dismantling of the opposition between history and literature has paved the way for many productive studies in both fields. Once historians and literary critics no longer believe that history gives its readers a privileged access to the real or the truth, they turn to investigating the grounds of history-its nature and forms, its uses and abuses-as well as its links to other fields of knowledge and to ideologies.

White, who began his career as a historian of the medieval church and turned to nineteenth-century thought in the 1960s, has always been eclectic in his scholarly interests. With the publication of *Metahistory,* however, his scholarship became explicitly engaged in literary and theoretical issues, as he responded to critics from the disciplines of both history and literature. His book *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1978) examines the structuring role of plots and tropes (figures of speech) in the

discourse of history. *The Content of Form* explores the contemporary interplay between narrative theory and history in the work of both historians such as Michel Foucault and literary theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Paul Ricoeur. And in *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (1999), White takes on mimesis-the representation of reality-in history, an issue that has concerned literary critics from Plato to Erich Auerbach.

Hayden White has been in the vanguard of the movement among historians, starting in the 19805, that has come to be known as the "new cultural history." Historians associated with the movement, such as Lynn Hunt, Thomas Laqueur, and, in France, Roger Chartier, began to question the methods and goals of history in general, many turning to literary techniques and approaches to develop new materials and methods of analysis. The influences on this group of historians are varied. They include cultural Marxist approaches developed in the 1980s by British scholars such as E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, as well as the French Annales School founded in the late 1920s by the historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre. The new cultural history has also been strongly influenced by the work of Foucault, by literary theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin, and, of course, by White himself. Many of the historians associated with the new cultural history have ties with literary practitioners of the New Historicism and cultural studies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Write in short about the critical reception of Hayden White.



9.7 LET US SUM UP

As we come to the end of this unit, we have learnt that Hayden White reacted against the tendency of history as a discipline to seek its models in the sciences. Instead, he contends that the literary dimension of history cannot be dismissed as mere decoration; rather, historians deploy

the traditional devices of narrative to make sense of raw data, to organize and give meaning to their accounts of the past. He sought to bring the tools of the literary critic to bear on historical writing. White's analyses are powerful extensions of narrative theory for students like us as well as scholars of literature interested in understanding the nature and mechanisms of history as discourse.



9.8 FURTHER READING

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

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



9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: White's book *Metahistory* outlines an ambitious structuralist scheme for describing a "poetics of history.".. …for this, he drew on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) to describe the underlying "deep structure" of historical narratives… …his project brings together historiography and literary criticism in a broad reflection on narrative and its relation to culture.

Ans to Q 2: Because, the sequence of events they record are selected from the historical data, and plot structures are imposed upon them into a comprehensible narrative which is told as a particular kind of story.

Ans to Q 3: By 'emplotment', White means the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures, in precisely the way that Frye has suggested is the case with "fictions" in general… …stories take their shape from what White calls "emplotment," the process through which the facts contained in "chronicles" are encoded as components of plots.

Ans to Q 4: He insisted that the historian was above all a storyteller and suggested that historical sensibility was manifested in the capacity to make a plausible story out of a congeries of "facts" which, in their unprocessed form, made no sense at all.

Ans to Q 5: History can be set over against science by virtue of its want of conceptual rigor and failure to produce the kinds of universal laws that the sciences characteristically seek to produce… …history can be set over against literature by virtue of its interest in the "actual" rather than the "possible," which is supposedly the object of representation of "literary" works.

Ans to Q 6: Metahistory addresses itself to such questions as, What is the structure of a peculiarly *historical* consciousness? What is the epistemological status of historical *explanations,* as compared with other kinds of explanations that might be offered to account for the materials with which historians ordinarily deal? What are the possible *forms* of historical representation? What authority can historical accounts claim as contributions to a secured knowledge of reality in general and to the human sciences in particular? etc.

Ans to Q 7: Because history, like literature, is a verbal structure and the historian is a also writer… …the tools that have served literary critics, the tools that compose the linguistic and rhetorical structures of a text, serve the historian well… …the language in which history is written cannot be dismissed as window dressing, as most historians are tempted to do.

Ans to Q 8: Historians have objected to White's narrowing of history to language… … poststructuralist critics have taken issue with White's structuralist reductionism… …some critics argue that Frye's archetypal approach to narrative which White relies on, is too simple, forcing all narratives willy-nilly into abstract and timeless structures without regard to how they might function in particular cultural contexts.



9.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a note on Hayden White's ideas of history and history writing.

Q 2: Discuss the contributions of Hayden White in the context of literary and critical theory.

Q 3: Hayden White argued that historical writing was influenced by literary writing in many ways. Discuss.

Q 4: Historical narratives are verbal fictions supported by philosophical theories of history that seek to validate their plots. Discuss.

Q 5: Write a note on the reception Hayden White as a historian who sought to establish the 'poetics of history'.

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UNIT 10: WALTER BENJAMIN: "THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION"

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Walter Benjamin: Life and Works

10.4 Reading the Text: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

10.4.1 Major Themes

10.4.2 Style and Language

10.5 Critical Reception of Benjamin

10.6 Let us Sum up

10.7 Further Reading

10.8 Answers to Check Our Progress (Hints Only)

10.9 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the essayist Walter Benjamin
- explain the context of the prescribed essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
- highlight the major themes that emerge from the text of the essay
- analyse the style and language employed by Benjamin in his writings
- gain an idea on the critical reception of Benjamin's work

10.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" written by Walter Benjamin. This essay is an essay of cultural criticism, which proposes that the *aura* of a work of art is devalued by mechanical reproduction. The subject and themes of the essay

have substantially influenced the fields like art history, architectural theory, cultural studies and media theory. Benjamin who was a German Jewish philosopher, cultural critic and essayist, made lasting contributions to aesthetic theory, literary criticism and historical materialism. He was also associated with the Frankfurt School, and remained informed about the thinkers including the playwright Bertolt Brecht. Benjamin wrote this essay during the Nazi régime (1933–1945) in Germany, to produce a theory of art that is "useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art" in mass culture. He also held the view that in the age of mechanical reproduction and the absence of traditional and ritualistic values, the production of art would be inherently based upon the praxis of politics. As we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to discuss the important aspects of the essay in sufficient details.

10.3 WALTER BENJAMIN: THE ESSAYIST

Benjamin was not only a well-known philosopher but was also a cultural critic and essayist. Before we delve into the text of the essay in a detailed manner, let us gain a glimpse into the life and the literary contributions of the renowned philosopher in the introductory subsection.

Walter Benjamin was raised in a prosperous Jewish family by his guardians, Emil Benjamin and Pauline Schonflies in Berlin, Germany. He was born in the year 1892, as the eldest of two siblings named Georg and Dora, first attending school at the Kaiser Friedrich School in 1902 before joining a boarding school known as Hermann-Lietz-SchuleHaubinda from 1905-1906. Following these two years, he decided to return to his old school where he had completed his early education. Benjamin went on to pursue his higher studies at the University of Freiburg again returning home to finally complete his studies in Philosophy from the University of Berlin.

Walter Benjamin's chosen discipline had opened up his worldviews and his special interests in the philosophy of religion, with growing interests in Judaism, Zionismand an inclination towards the spiritual. He took interests in the lectures of the philosopher Herinrich Rickert and gradually, began to develop his own worldviews and sharpen his own intellect. As a young man,

he travelled to Italy and France, and had also met with poets such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Gershom Scholem at the University of Munich. He completed his postdoctoral studies at the University as well; having studied the topic entitled "The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism". Given the range of his interests in areas such as German idealism, Romanticism and Western Marxism, he had forwarded his own perspectives that enriched literary theory to a great extent. Benjamin began translating a portion of *Fluers du Mal* by the famous French poet Charles Baudelaire in the year 1914 and later a volume of Marcel Proust's work titled- *In Search of Lost Time* (1924) into German with developing interests and deepening fascination for the works of Leo Strauss. Also, Benjamin joined and taught at the University of Heidelberg in the year 1929. He was married to Dora Sophie Pollak until the two separated ways in 1930 and also had a child named Stefan Rafael.

The learner may be interested to know that Benjamin was well-acquainted with the leading playwright Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno and Georg Lukacs. He had also contributed his writings to *The Frankfurt Times and The Literary World* starting from the year 1926.Thus, some of the significant works by Walter Benjamin are namely: *Charles Baudelaire, Tableaux Parisiens* (1923), *Elective Affinities* (1924), *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1924), *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), *One Way Street* (1930), *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1930) and the incomplete volume *The Arcades Project* (1927). The best known essays by Benjamin are- "The Task of the Translator" (1923), "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) which has been taken up for study in this unit and "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940). Benjamin's life was not without its share of difficulties as a Jewish man, he had to constantly escape the clutches of the Nazi Forces, which had tragically prosecuted the Nazi Jews at that time under the dictates of Adolf Hitler who took over the German empire. Thus, Benjamin spent his time in exile at Ibiza, Spain and in Paris, as well where he came to be acquainted with his fellow German thinkers and intellectuals. The learner will be interested to know that Benjamin had also found refuge in the home of dramatist, Bertolt Brecht at

Svendborg during these difficult times. Finally, in a bid to escape the tortures of the Nazi forces, Benjamin took the drastic steps of taking his own life at Portbou in the year 1940.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the complete name of the German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin?

Q 2: Where did Walter Benjamin first receive his formal education?

Q 3: Mention some of the significant works by Walter Benjamin

10.4 READING THE TEXT: "THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION"

In this subsection, we shall take up the prescribed essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"(1935) which was first published by Max Horkheimer in a journal for the Institute of Social Research. Let us then, gain a concise idea on the content of the essay through the summarised explanation of the text. The essay begins with a quotation by Paul Valery from the essay "Le Conquete de l'ubiquite" or "The Conquest of Ubiquity" which states that the fine arts that were established in the classical age or the "ancient craft of the beautiful" are bound to be different from that of the present context and that with the change in human perspectives and practices of the fine arts, it is necessary to be more accepting of the inevitable changes and transformations. According to Valery, we must "expect great innovations" in order to bring about changes in our own perceptions towards art as that is what shall make it progressive.

Although, the essay is lengthy, yet it is well divided into a short preface followed by fifteen subsections taking up various aspects on the core theme of mechanical reproduction of works of art, ending with an epilogue. The Preface begins with Benjamin's discussion on Karl Marx and the Marxist perspectives on the modes of production in a capitalist society, the status of art in such an economy and the exploitation of the working classes in the industrial economy. Benjamin mentions the suppressive role of the fascists who tend to impose their terms on the means of production have no

consideration or regard towards the aesthetic value of art or as he states the ideas of 'creativity', 'genius', 'eternal value' and 'mystery' (2). However, the same aspects are essential in the groundbreaking development with regard to the "politics of art".

The introductory subsection takes up the development of all works of art since the beginning of time, the establishment of formal traditions of the works of art and the role of the present day mechanical reproductions of art. With relevant examples, Benjamin cites the importance of mechanical reproduction and justifies its 'accuracy', as well as, 'efficiency' in reproducing works of art on a large scale. He highlights the earlier methods of manual reproduction that was practiced by the Ancient Greeks, the practices of woodcut relief painting, etching, engraving and lithography before the advent of photography, which is the more modern version of mechanical reproduction. Just as the art of lithography had inspired the idea of illustrated newspapers, the camera which was a quick and convenient way to capture images in fractions of a second had eventually inspired the production of sound films.

The second subsection discusses the fact that even the most perfect reproduction has a certain drawback with regard to its time and space. A work of art undergoes various changes such as physical condition or even in terms of the ownership. Moreover, the original work can possibly be determined through the process of chemical or physical examination and analysis. Thus, the presence of the original version or the traceability of an old work of art is necessary in determining its validity and authenticity. Therefore, Benjamin states that the "original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" and cites for an instance on how a chemical examination can establish the authenticity of the patina of a bronze or establish evidence that an archive of the fifteenth century is the source of a document belonging to the middle ages. The mechanical reproduction of an original work of art, however, alters its 'aura' or and a reproduction of a work of art loses out on its 'original charm'. Thus, he states, "[t]he situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated" (4).

The third subsection takes up the aspect of changes in the evolving interests of the masses towards works of art with the passage of time, which is only too inevitable. The sensibilities of people in general tend to undergo leaps of changes through the changing aspects of 'nature' and 'historical' contexts as he writes, "During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence" (5). This brings into context the element of 'aura' with regard to historical objects. For an instance, imagine a summer afternoon with the distant mountains in sight capturing your attention and overwhelming you with the sheer power of its presence or in other words its aura. Aura is defined as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (5). It is the inherent human desire to bring all that is at a distance all the more closer that explains their efforts of mechanical reproductions of such works of art. Thus, he writes-"Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye" (5). It is therefore, a universal phenomenon so to say, that the aura of an object is not appreciated as it is done in its natural or original state, its captivating beauty or aura is extracted, even if in parts by means of reproductions of the same. Although, the essence of an original object or work of art can never really be extracted, yet reproduction precisely tries to get as close as it can to copy, resemble or take after an original piece of work. The impression of socio-cultural effects undoubtedly influences the reproduction of a work of art.

The fourth subsection takes up the uniqueness of a work of art which Benjamin states is "inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition" (6). For an instance, for the Greeks the ancient statue of Venus was an object of reverence and worship unlike the religious clerics in the Middle ages who considered the same statue as an idol (as they stood against idolatry). Nevertheless, the aspect of commonality of both the Greeks and the religious clerics is that they were undeniably engaged with the aura of the Goddess, regardless of whether they worshipped her or stood against such worship. Moreover, there is the related aspect of 'ritualisation' that

gives a work of art its due significance. In this regard, he writes thus, "…the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value."(6). Again, Benjamin in weighing the pros of 'mechanical reproduction' states that for the first time it became a means of 'emancipating' a work of art from its original state, of being an authority in itself by reproducing the same work of art and thereby, also freeing it from the "parasitical dependence" (6) of finding its basis in ritual. Thus, a work of reproduced art also came to mean that it was designed for further reproductions, an example being 'photographs' which could be easily developed from its negatives into end number of copies. With time, the divide between the private and the public came to be broken down as well, where the works of art created and kept within the private realm came to find a larger scope of representation for larger viewership in exhibitions.

Thus, Benjamin notes- "With the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products" (7). In the prehistoric times, early forms of art gained its significance owing to its association with the magical, until art came to be oriented into formalised traditions and gained recognition. Man in the Stone Age drew figures of elk on the cave walls which were open for other men to look at, even as they were actually meant for personal purposes i.e., to ward off spirits. However, with time, works of art acquired a cult status, which also demanded that it should remain hidden from the public eye and this precisely explains the inaccessibility of certain statues of Gods or Goddesses by the masses. In many cases, the high priests and religious authorities exert their rights on their exclusive accessibility to these objects that acquire a cult status as he states, "Certain statues of gods are accessible only to the priest in the cella; certain Madonnas remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are invisible to the spectator on ground level" (7). Again, given the advantages of reproductions, it is always easier to exhibit a bust of a statue as a work of art, which can be handled and transferred from one place to the other rather than exhibit an object of worship, which is considered to have a fixed place inside a religious or spiritual sanctuary. Similarly, the earlier forms of

'frescoes' or special paintings which donned the ceilings of cathedrals gave way to oil paintings which could be easily displayed in exhibitions and transported from place to place. Again, the impact of religious mass which was considerably powerful and influential on the public also made way for the equally powerful mode of musical or instrumental symphony, which in a way surpassed the earlier mode of reaching out to the masses of people.

In the sixth subsection, Benjamin takes up the aspect of photography in which the cult status of a work of art came to be replaced by the exhibition mode. Photography was preceded by portraits or paintings. Photography came to acquire a cult status as they captured the special moments and fond remembrances of the near and dear ones, the significant moments of one's life, as well as, the memories of the departed. These captured photographic images thus, came to form the vestiges of one's memories, which is what had made it so special. Here, he mentions the photography of Atget in the 1900s that was revolutionary in itself and which when analysed revealed not just the historical events but also implied the underlying political significance.

The seventh subsection highlights the debate of the nineteenth century, which examines on whether 'painting' or 'photography' had higher artistic value. With the coming of the mechanical age of reproduction, the cult status of art or its authority was broken down in a sense. Again, it came to be debated whether photography, which was a means of mechanical reproduction, was a work of art or not. In the eighth subsection, Benjamin analyses the artistic performance of stage actors and the functional role of the camera. The camera thus, becomes the roving lens and by means of its special camera angles, close ups and other such technical aspects. Thus, the performance of the actor is never free from the technical intervention of the camera, which is why he states "… the performance of the actor is subjected to a series of optical tests" (10). For this reason, the performance of an actor is through the medium of "optical tests" (10) and the filtering lens of the camera. Thus, he further states,

"This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experimenting any personal contact with the camera. The audience's

identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently, the audience takes the position of the camera; its approach is that of testing" (10)

The ninth subsection, further discusses this aspect by highlighting the dramatist Luigi Pirandello's observations on how the actor undergoes a sort of transformation or "metamorphosis" (10) while acting and undergoing a screen test in front of the camera. With regard to the sound film, he quotes Pirandello on the actor's uneasy experience on stage and in front of the camera thus,

"The film actor feels as if in exile- exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort, he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, voice, and the noises caused by his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence…The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera" (10).

He notes that while the stage actor tends to relate to the role that he or she portrays, the film actor is often deprived from that liberating experience. In the shooting of a film, the spontaneity or the flow of acting for the actor is continuously interrupted, as the acting scenes are broken and repeated into several takes and retakes of the same performance.

He notes that Pirandello on his observations as a dramatist noted that a stage plays or the theatre has its base in mechanical reproduction as the film. Also, the greatest of critics have noted that "the greatest effects are almost always obtained by 'acting' as little as possible" (11). In many ways then, an actor becomes a puppet or a prop that is placed as per convenience in the scheme of things. However, if a stage actor is compared to that of a film actor, it is found that while the former has scope to identify or relate to the role portrayed, the latter has little or no scope of doing the same. The stage or theatre actor performs live and thus there is a spontaneity in the acting. Now, as far as the film actor is concerned, his or her performance is composed of many parts or fragments that are composed to form a whole almost like a montage. There are several

concerns such as the expenses of studios, availability of co-actors, the designed sets to mention a few which breaks down the shooting of an entire film into many parts.

In the tenth subsection, Benjamin discusses the sense of estrangement or the "feeling of strangeness" (11) that effects the actor which Pirandello describes as similar to the strangeness that one experiences when facing his or her own image in the mirror. The image of the role portrayed is "transportable" (11) to the public and the actor is conscious of this fact all along. The actor knows that he or she is not just portraying a role that is recorded in the camera but also the public viewers to whom these performances are eventually transported to. Even as the actor gives in his or her heart and soul to these performances, as far as the market is concerned, it is not in the hands of the actor. This is compared to that of an article made in the factory, which has no role in its marketability. The problem that is identified herein is that not only the aura of the actor or rather the "cult of the movie star" (11) is subject to the finances involved but also to the development of a certain artifice or "spell of personality" (11) in place of aura. Benjamin notes that as long as the capital of movie makers continues to control the making of film, the credibility of films as the medium of revolutionary change in the society will be lacking in many ways, writing thus, "…a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today's film than the promotion of a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art. We do not deny that in some cases today's films can also promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions, even of the distribution of property." (12)

Diverting a little from this aspect, Benjamin goes on to discuss how for centuries there were two distinct spaces, i.e., of the writers and that of the readers. However, towards the end of the 20th century, these spaces were seen to dissolve. He states the changing developments with regard to the reception and practice of literature thus, "Literary license is now founded on polytechnic rather than specialized training and thus becomes common property" (12). With the print media publishing and extensively covering the new socio-political, religious, scientific or professional issues and aspects together with the local developments for the readers. This had

in turn led to the enlightened readers taking up the pen and becoming writers themselves. At first they became the occasional writers writing letters to the editor in the dailies but with time, they (particularly, the employed Europeans) sought opportunities of publishing in some form or the other, whether work related aspects, grievances or complaints, documentary reports and the like. Owing to this, Benjamin writes,

"Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment, the reader is ready to turn into a writer. As expert, which he had to become willy nilly in an extremely specialized work process, even if it only in some minor respect, the reader gains access to authorship." (12)

Further, he extends the same phenomenon with regard to film, filmmaking and its changing equation with regard to its viewership as noted in the case of Russia and Western Europe in general.

The eleventh subsection takes up the aspect of film shooting, particularly that of a sound film and takes us behind the scenes, where in the studio, mechanical equipment take control over the entire projection of the film. There are various techniques that generally are used in filmmaking, one of the common forms being the use of specially adjusted cameras, mounting of shots etc. Here, Benjamin makes his observations thus, "The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology" (13).

In the twelfth subsection, Benjamin takes up the aspect of how mechanical reproduction of art also alters the perspective of the masses. He notes that Picasso's painting will probably draw a reactionary response from the masses and perhaps disturb their aesthetic sensibilities, owing to the dramatic changes in artistic expression from that of the earlier conventions. While a movie like Charlie Chaplin which while presenting comedy at its best also reveals all the socially significant messages that depict the realities of a capitalist society and it is precisely this work of art that draws a progressive response of the audiences. Thus, he notes, "The progressive

reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert, such fusion is of great social significance" (14). Moreover, particularly in the case of a film the reaction of the mass audiences has an extensively controlling influence on individual reactions- "The moment these responses become manifest they control each other" (14), much unlike the case of a painting.

As far as paintings are concerned- it acquires a certain established reception after the passing of ages and centuries. For an instance in the churches and monasteries of the Middle Ages, princely courts to the 18th century, a work of art i.e., a painting acquired layered meanings of the patrons and its limited viewers with the passing of time "by graduated and hierarchized mediation" (14) and not by immediate responses. It was much later that with the mechanical reproduction of such works of art that they came to be exhibited and viewed in galleries, salons and every other place.

The thirteenth subsection takes up the characteristics of the film and discusses certain aspects of psychoanalysis, which is a method of reading or even analysing the psychological state of the human mind that was first considered by the French psychologist Sigmund Freud. The human mind is considered to be pre-conditioned in a particular way and that meanings surface from our deeper level of consciousness. He opines that the film precisely provides a similar scope whereby we as audiences have now gained a sharper insight into the workings of the human mind. Thus, with the publication of the seminal work, *Psychology of Everyday Life,* the minute psychological aspects that earlier went unnoticed are now subject to the analysis of the viewers. Therefore, the nuances of human emotions, actions and expressions are now subject of our inquiry into the deeper realms of the human mind or in other words the human psyche. Thus, he notes,

"By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rile our lives; on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the

other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling" (16).

He cites the example of something as simple as a slow motion shot of a person walking which breaks up the entire walking movement in several fragments, thereby presenting the way in which the muscle operates in a minute way which only the camera shot can capture accurately rather than our naked eye. Therefore, the camera he opines, "introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (16).

The fourteenth subsection, delves into the fact that one of the pressures on art has been the "creation of a demand" (16) whereby it almost amounts to a necessity so that a work of art can sustain itself with "a changed technical standard" (16) and the changing times. All the modern artistic movements came up with distinct appeal characterising the very temperament of the times for an instance the artistic movement of Dadaism that was radical in its day stemmed from the intellectual ferment of the modern times. It had a certain shock value in terms of the kind of art and literature that it had inspired, almost disturbing the sensibilities of people who were conventional in their perspectives as he notes, "Dadaistic activities actually assured a rather vehement distraction by making works of art the centre of scandal. One requirement was foremost" to outrage the public" (17). However, even as these works of art and literature pierced the consciousness of the modern public much like a 'bullet', it also presented newer modes of thinking and reasoning, gradually immersing the public in its fold. Again, while comparing a painting to a film, he notes that a painting image enables a viewer to be easily immersed in contemplation without being interrupted; however, a film with its continuously changing scenes interrupts the thought process of the viewer making it difficult to concentrate and demanding the presence of mind.

In the fifteenth section, which is also the final sub section of the essay, Benjamin takes up the opposite aspects of distraction and

concentration, which creates a tussle in the perception of the viewers. From the example of paintings and films, he moves on to discuss architecture, which he states has a longer history than that of any other art, being a "living force" even with the change of times. Then, he goes on to discuss the reception of the masses, regarding, which he writes,

"Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one" (19).

On a closing note in the Epilogue, Benjamin discusses how Fascism has resulted in the production of works of art, which provides the masses a means of expression within the limiting frame of the political aim and agenda. Therefore, he notes, "Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life" (19).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Who had first published the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"?

Q 5: What does the introductory lines of the essay reveal?

Q 6: Define the term 'aura' with regard to a work of art.

Q 7: Why did photography acquire a cult status when it first came about?

Q 8: What is the basic difference found in the role of a stage/ theatre or film actor?

Q 9: Highlight some of the changes that took place at the turn of the 20th century with the flourishing of the print media.

Q 10: What did Walter Benjamin opine regarding certain aspects of 'Psychoanalysis'? What scope does it provide to the viewer of films?

10.4.1 Major Themes

The following subsection takes up the emergent themes from the text of the essay as also discussed below. The learner may also add his or her own interpretation to the text of the same essay followed by a thorough reading of the text, thereby exercise, and enhance his or her own analysis of the essay.

Mechanical Reproduction:

Reproduction by mechanical means does considerably take away from the aura of a work of art, however it's necessity and importance cannot be denied as well. The essay is considerably important and draws together the fields of art history, architectural theory, film studies, cultural studies and mass studies. It was first written when the Nazis were in rule in Germany. Benjamin wrote the essay on this significant theme of mechanical reproduction of works of art as an attempt to conceive a theory of art, thereby examining certain aspects regarding the ways in which the masses react to works of art. By the term art, we may refer to all forms of art such as the fine arts, literature, sculpture, architecture, music, film, photography and other such works of art, which can also be mechanically reproduced. With the advent of film and photography, there has been a wave of change in our accessibility and perceptions towards various works of art. Benjamin notes that photograph as a reproduced work of art is twice removed from the original painting owing to which is no more 'authority' in the original work of art (given the fact that it can be easily reproduced). Further, he notes that the advantage of film is immense in the sense that it is a powerful means of projecting 'images', distracting our minds easily while also highlighting certain minute aspects of reality to the public eye.

With the opening up of the arts, several new modes and platforms of public reception has emerged- as a result of which the general masses have easy access to art exhibitions, films, theatre, museums, galleries etc. which considerably opens up public access

to all works of art. However, according to Benjamin, much of the originality of a work of art or 'aura' inconsiderably worn out with widespread availability or public access. Do you not agree with the saying that 'familiarity breeds contempt'? Anything that is easily accessible to human perception tends to lose out on the value or worth that a work of art is accorded with. Thus, in this regard, Benjamin delves into certain minute aspects such as- aura, cult-ritual status, the diminishing of authority in relation to 'works of art' and their widespread 'reproductions', in order to probe or examine how these are critically received and the ways in which the cultural meanings and other markers are ascribed to the same.

Comparative Role of an Artist:

In his discussion on art, Benjamin sketchily discusses the role or function of an artist. For an instance, in the essay, he notes that similarities can be traced in the magician, the surgeon, the painter and the camera operator, and thereby be compared to each other. In the example that he cites, the 'magician' who heals and the 'surgeon' who operates are not much different from each other. While the magician establishes a connection with the patient by placing his hands on the head or the body in order to heal on a one-to-one basis, the surgeon is relatively distant from the patient as he equips himself or herself and penetrates the body from a distance with surgical instruments. While the painter comes up with a painting which is one whole work of art by itself, the cameraman comes up with multiple images in fragments recorded in the camera that are later combined to form one whole completed picture or work of art. According to Benjamin, however, it is the film that is more significant or rather relevant as a work of art to the contemporary man than a painting, as it portrays social realities which thematically or in terms of content is free from the technicalities of reproduction.

Politicisation of Art:

Art is also open to both 'covert' means, as well as, 'overt' means of politicisation, irrespective of whether it is positive or

negative in its impact. Here, covert politicisation refers to the politics that takes place in a concealed or unacknowledged manner and overt politicisation refers to politics that is apparent or the presence of which is acknowledged. The reproduced and the reproducibility of a work of art as discussed earlier, makes it all the more vulnerable to 'questions', as well as,(continuous) 'changes 'in perceptions. Benjamin thus, takes into account the question on what politicised and reproduced art means in the modern times.

According to Benjamin, it is the tussle of the old and new, as well as, the 'revolutionary' that ultimately results in raising the bar of aesthetics, inviting newer ways of producing creative works of art. This is the only way that dialectical history of art-works can be achieved or else there shall be no growth or progress of the same. For the same reason, if the learner goes through the epilogue of the essay, he or she will find that Benjamin makes a statement towards the tail end of the essay thus, "Communism responds by politicizing art" (20) or that there is an extensive political intervention in every work of art in the modern day. Walter Benjamin was conscious of the Marxist aspects with regard to the status of art in the capitalistic mode of production, taking into account the means of production or the ideologies involved in this regard, it is certain that he opened up the essay to questions of the 'politics' that engages and envelopes any work of art through the changing times and the opposing forces through which 'Art' continues to develop.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: What are some of the academic disciplines that the essay takes into account?

Q 12: What according to Benjamin raises the bar of aesthetics?

10.4.2 Style and Language

Walter Benjamin's literary works have undergone many translations particularly in English. He had brought into fore the concerns of technology and the media that had brought about a revolution in culture. As a philosopher and a thinker, he was very sharp and observant, being an intellectual in his own right. In his review article in *The American Reader*, Ben Mauk notes the range of subjects that Walter Benjamin wrote on stating thus,

"His range of subjects was no less unprecedented: in addition to epochal pieces on Kafka, Baudelaire, and Goethe, he wrote treatises on radio and film (including his famous "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"); arguments concerning the philosophy of language; dreary accounts of his childhood; exponential travelogues and "city portraits", radio plays; fairy tales; and essays on his experience with everything from children's books to gambling, [smut] and drugs. He was among the first workers to take "popular culture" seriously as an object of study. At the same time, he cultivated his role as a curator, rather than interpreter."

While reading through the writings of Benjamin particularly the text of the prescribed essay, the learner will note that he makes several cross-references in terms of works and intellectual ideas of other thinkers on the area of discussion i.e., the work of art and mechanical reproduction. The essay is presented in a structured manner which takes up one aspect after the other in anorganised manner, as you may have also noticed in the text of the essay or the explanation of the text provided in the earlier subsection of this unit. It is relatively easy to grasp the ideas that Benjamin highlights in the essay and to pin point the ideas that he tries to get across to the discerning reader. However, it is not to say that the ideas that are presented in the essay are all too simplistic and easy. In fact, they are loaded with minute observations and these also provide scope

for further discourse and debate with regard to mechanical reproductions of art and the status of art in the modern age. The interesting aspect of his essay is that Benjamin also elucidates his statements and provides ample examples to illustrate his views and critical analysis of the discourse that he presents.

His style of writing is scholarly, coherent and precise. The prescribed essay is undoubtedly one of Benjamin's most influential works so far which further explains its relevance across various academic disciplines. In addition, it may be noted that the widely available text of the essay is in translation and therefore, there is bound to be slight differences in terms of language and expression. However, it is important to note that considering the close translation of Benjamin, the essay is presented in a discursive, detailed and conversational manner almost as if it were his co-scholar to whom he presents his views and perspectives. The presentation of ideas in the essay in a way tends to take for granted that the reader may not necessarily be well versed in the area of discussion. For the same reason, the learner is advised to also follow the footnotes available in some of the translations of the same text, which will provide him or her an inkling, or even a vague idea of the frequent cross references that Benjamin makes in his essay.

10.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF BENJAMIN

Jeffrey Grossman in assessing the critical reception of Walter Benjamin discusses how the Marxists and deconstructionist critics had interpreted and had also drawn extensively from his work on art in the mechanical age noting thus, "In the last twenty years, debate about the meaning of Walter Benjamin's writings has exploded in a vast production of articles and books in the academic institution, and especially in the areas of literary and cultural theory" (414). Further, Ben Mauk in tracing the development of Walter Benjamin's intellectual writings and discourses also mention one of the noteworthy works by the scholars Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (who have extensively worked on the philosopher)

titled 'The Name of the Critic: On "Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life"', delve into the biographical details and also provide a comprehensive study on the influential writings of the philosopher.

There are several versions of the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", the first being the German edition published in 1935 with a long title 'Das Kunstwerhim Zeitalter Seiner Technischen Reproduzierbarkeit'. This was followed by the French edition published in 1936 and the Revised edition of 1939. From which the English translations were done. Benjamin was highly influenced by the Frankfurt School and the intellectual views of Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkhemier and Herbert Marcuse. The essay examines what the work of art means in the modern context and in the contemporary time. Thus, artistic reproduction cuts into the aesthetic, cultural and political authority of art- "For the first time ever, images of art become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valuable, free" as it is no more surrounded by the aura that surrounded a work of art earlier.

As mentioned in the essay, the popular French phrase- *L'artpour'l'art* which is translated as 'Arts for Art's sake' is a French slogan that dates back to the 19th century that emphasises on the fact that a work of art is delineated from didactic, moral or utilitarian functions. This concept was brought forth by Theophile Gautier in his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835). Those like John Rustin and the later communists (who supported socialist realism) - held that art was to serve moral or didactic purposes. The communists who believed in socialist realism idealised realistic art whereby socialist or communist values were projected through realistic imagery that was practiced in Soviet Union from the early 1920s until the late 1960s and late 80s. They stood against the mushrooming of popular culture. They were thus, limiting or restrictive in a sense, as they privileged everyday realities which were more comprehensible and to which the proletariats could easily relate. Art was no more meant for aesthetic pleasure alone- it had higher agendas to serve which was its primary purpose. Therefore, the appreciation of art for its own sake was relegated to the background.

Some of the important groups in this regard were the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AARR). It is debated even by contemporary writers and intellectuals on whether art should be for the sake of art alone or not but it was adopted by many like Walter Pater, Charles Baudelaire, Stefan George among others. According to Benjamin, the phrase 'art for art's sake' is rather extends to a "theology of art" (6). Even the Futurists (those associated with the futurist movement in art and culture) believed in the phrase '*Fiat arspereat mundus'*- that translates as- 'let wit be created, though the world perish'. Many like Diego Riveria opine that this belief could create a deeper split between the poor and the rich, as pure and refined art would only cater to the elite few or the privileged and thereby, repress the importance of its social responsibility. Further, the Communist leader, Mao Zedong had opined that it was necessary to produce art, which was not just meant for art's sake, but the kind that took into account the larger interests or the welfare of the proletariat.



10.6 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit on the German-Jewish thinker and prolific writer, Walter Benjamin and the prescribed essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", we have gained a fair idea on the philosopher's eventful life, as well as, his literary contributions. As the unit provides a concise explanation on the content of the rather lengthy essay, it also highlights the themes that emerge from the text, as well as, the style and language employed by Benjamin in his writing. Also, by this time, we must have gained a fair idea on the critical reception of his work. Thus, the unit will enable the learner to engage himself or herself critically and enjoy the text of the essay, which is also considered a seminal essay by Walter Benjamin written in eloquent and a reader-friendly manner. However, we should go through the text of the essay in order to gain a better comprehension of the prescribed text.



10.7 FURTHER READING

Atendt, Hannah. (1969). "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by Walter Benjamin. Trans. Harry John in *Illustrations*. New York: Schocken Books.

Grossman, Jeffrey. (1992). "The Reception of Walter Benjamin in the Anglo-American Literary Institution." *The German Quarterly* 65.3/4 (1492-1992) Five Centuries of German-American Interrelations (Summer-Autumn, 1992) pp. 414-425.

Web Resources:

www.theamericanreader.com



10.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: The complete name of Walter Benjamin is Walter Bendix Schonflies Benjamin.

Ans to Q 2: Walter Benjamin first began his formal education at the Kaiser Friedrich School in 1902 before joining a boarding school known as Hermann-Lietz-SchuleHaubinda from 1905-1906. Following these two years, he decided to return to his old school where he had completed his early education. Benjamin went on to pursue his higher studies at the University of Freiburg again returning home to finally complete his studies in Philosophy from the University of Berlin.

Ans to Q 3: Some of the significant works by Walter Benjamin are namely: *Charles Baudelaire, Tableaux Parisiens* (1923), *Elective Affinities* (1924), *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1924), *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), *One Way Street* (1930), *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1930) and the incomplete volume *The Arcades Project* (1927).

Ans to Q 4: The essay was first published by Max Horkheimer in a journal for the Institute of Social Research.

Ans to Q 5: The essay begins with a quotation by Paul Valery from the essay "Le Conquete de l'ubiquite" or "The Conquest of Ubiquity" which states that the fine arts that were established in the classical age or the "ancient craft of the beautiful" are bound to be different from that of the present context and that with the change in human perspectives and practices of the fine arts, it is necessary to be more accepting of the inevitable changes and transformations. According to Valery, we must "expect great innovations" in order to bring about changes in our own perceptions towards art as that is what shall make it progressive.

Ans to Q 6: Aura is defined as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (5). It is the inherent human desire to bring all that is at a distance closer in perspective, which also explains the efforts of mechanical reproductions of various works of art.

Ans to Q 7: Photography came to acquire a cult status as they captured the special moments and fond remembrances of the near and dear ones, the significant moments of one's life, as well as, the memories of the departed. These captured photographic images thus, came to form the vestiges of one's memories, which is what had made it so special.

Ans to Q 8: If a stage actor is compared to that of a film actor, it is found that while the former has scope to identify or relate to the role portrayed, the latter has little or no scope of doing the same. The stage or theatre actor performs live and thus there is spontaneity in the acting.

Ans to Q 9: With the print media, publishing and extensively covering the new socio-political, religious, scientific or professional issues and aspects together with the local developments for the readers. This had in turn led to the enlightened readers taking up the pen and becoming writers and critics themselves.

Ans to Q 10: Walter Benjamin discusses certain characteristics of the film and certain aspects of psychoanalysis, which is a method of reading or rather analysing the psychological state of the human mind that was first considered by the French psychologist Sigmund Freud. The

human mind was considered to be pre-conditioned in a particular way and that 'meanings' essentially surfaced from our deeper level of consciousness. Benjamin opines that the film precisely provides a similar scope whereby we as audiences have now gained a sharper insight into the workings of the human mind.

Ans to Q 11: The essay draws together the fields of art history, architectural theory, film studies, cultural studies and mass studies.

Ans to Q 12: According to Benjamin, it is the tussle of the old and new, as well as, the 'revolutionary' that ultimately results in raising the bar of aesthetics, inviting newer ways of producing creative works of art.

10.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the life and works of the philosopher Walter Benjamin.

Q 2: Explain the text of the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

Q 3: What are some of the emergent themes of the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"?

Q 4: Discuss the style and language employed by Walter Benjamin in his essay.

Q 5: Give a critical reception of the Walter Benjamin's work and his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

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UNIT 11: TORIL MOI: "FEMALE, FEMININE, FEMINIST" FROM *SEXUAL TEXTUAL POLITICS*

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Toril Moi: Life and Works

11.4 Reading the Text: "Femal, Feminine, Feminist"

11.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

11.6 Reception of Toril Moi

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 the life and works of the feminist critic Toril Moi
- explain feminist critiques of the patriarchal social order
- identify the connections between feminism and poststructuralist thought
- read and respond to key ideas, concepts, and concerns of Anglo-American feminist criticism

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 3. In this unit, we shall try to discuss the ideas of concepts like Female, Feminine, Feminist as conceived by Toril Moi. Feminism has always focused on gender right from its inception. While, Feminist studies has called attention to the ways in which patriarchal domination of women have repressed and silenced women's voices throughout history. As part of the feminist enterprise, feminist critics and theorists have focused on the rehabilitation of forgotten and marginalised

female writers. The attempt to establish a female tradition of writing was a major focus of much of American feminist studies in the seventies and the eighties. Toril Moi's essay not only problematises the textual and apolitical focus of the literary feminism but also interrogates the homogeneity of experience that is attributed to women. As we finish reading the unit, we shall see how Toril Moi also discusses the contributions of French feminism in understanding some of the important political and theoretical issues of feminist criticism.

11.3 TORIL MOI: LIFE AND WORKS

Toril Moi is an important voice within feminist studies. Her seminal work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) is an important intervention within feminist studies that argues for a political and theoretical approach to criticism as against merely textual criticism. Toril Moi was born in Norway in 1953 and graduated from the University of Bergen and earning her doctorate in 1980. She began her academic career at Oxford University in England in 1983 where she researched and taught on the areas of gender, sexuality and body, which later culminated in the publication of *Sexual Textual Politics.*

Moi joined the literature and romance studies department at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina in 1989. She has continued to expand her analytical work on gender and sexuality especially concerning the contribution of French feminism towards feminist politics. She has edited the writings of French feminists Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. She has also edited a collection of essays *The Kristeva Reader* (1986) and a book on French Feminism *French Feminist Thought* (1987). Moi's writings on Simon de Beauvoir have tried to rehabilitate the significance of her work in contemporary feminism. Her work *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir* comprises a critical overview of Moi's literary theory and two essays on Beauvoir by Moi. Another important work of Toril Moi is *What is a Woman?* That sees her engaging with feminist theory once more since the publication of *Sexual/Textual Politics.* Toril Moi has also received several prestigious fellowships including the 2001 Guggenheim fellowship and a fellowship at

Harvard University in 2002-03, where she researched on the works of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen.



LET US KNOW

***Sexual Textual Politics*: The significance of the book**

Toril Moi's *Sexual Textual Politics* was published in 1985. It is a thought provoking and illuminating work that examines and analyses the methods, principles and politics that inform Anglo-American feminist discourses. Moi's work not only engages with feminist critiques of the patriarchal order but also identifies the ways feminist studies can appropriate poststructuralist theoretical models to further the aims of feminist critical studies. She is especially interested in the works of French feminists like Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva and the implications it has for feminist studies. Her work represents an ongoing process of questioning of the various theoretical models and the political strategies within feminist studies.

11.4 READING THE TEXT: FEMALE, FEMININE, FEMINIST"

Toril Moi's essay "Feminist, Female, Feminine" shows the different ways in which feminists have used these terms. One of the main goals of the essay, as Moi states, is to demonstrate the clear differences between these terms in order to show "what the crucial political and theoretical issues of contemporary feminist criticism really are" (117). Toril Moi differentiates between these three terms. According to her 'feminism' is a political position, "femaleness" refers to biology and "femininity" is a cultural construct. Moi mentions that feminist criticism and theory must provide a critique of patriarchal social order. In order to do this, feminist critics and theorists must expose the pervasive inequalities and structures of power that support male dominance and constitute "'perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power'" (118).

Feminism is now a new branch of study and because its methodological impulses carry a political slant, feminists therefore find

themselves in a position that is quite similar to other radical approaches: "speaking from their marginalised positions on the outskirts of the academic establishment, they strive to make explicit the politics of the so called 'neutral' or objective works of their colleagues as well as to act as cultural critics in the widest sense of the word" (118). At the same time, this peripheral status also sets feminists free to be "tolerantly pluralistic" in their selection of methods and theories. In other words, they can draw from a variety of sources. She calls this 'appropriation' or creative transformation. Moi indicates the fact that there is no true female intellectual tradition, but the feminists do not in any way minimise the legitimacy of such an enterprise. Such acts of creative appropriation does not in any way diminish the value of this epistemology simply because "there is no pure feminist or female space from which we can speak" given the pervasiveness of patriarchal power and "all ideas including feminist ones, are in this sense 'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology" (118). What is important is not the origin or source of the idea but the "the use to which it is put and the effects it can produce" (118). As Toril Moi states, "What matters is therefore not so much whether a particular theory was formulated by a man or a woman, but whether its effects can be characterised as sexist or feminist in a given situation" (118-119). As an example of this type of appropriation, Moi cites the example of French feminists who have revisited Freudian psychoanalytic theories to offer a "feminist analyses of sexual difference and the construction of gender in patriarchy." (120)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What does Toril Moi's essay endeavour to do?

Q 2: How does Moi use the idea of appropriation in relation to feminist epistemology?

The essay makes a further differentiation between female and feminist. According to Toril Moi, being female is not synonymous with feminist practice. She states that if feminist criticism is characterised by its political commitment against all forms of patriarchal dominance, then the mere fact of biology is not commensurate with a feminist practice: "It is a truism, but it still needs to be said that not all books written by women on women

writers exemplify anti-patriarchal commitment…A female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a feminist one" (120). Moi refers to Rosalind Coward who discusses the erroneous association of feminist with female writing in her essay "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" Coward argues that women cantered writings need not be about feminism. She gives the example of Mills and Boons novels that are "written by, read by, marketed for and are all about women" (120). These novels based as they are on themes of 'sexual, racial and class submission" are hardly the kind to further the aims of feminism. The reason for such confusion is a false belief that "the very fact of describing experience typical of women is a feminist act" (120).

While this idea of making visible women's experiences from the systemic repression of patriarchy does make sense as an anti-patriarchal strategy to some extent, one must be careful to remember that "women's experience can be made visible in alienating, deluded or degrading ways: The Mills and Boons accounts of female love or Anita Bryant's praise of heterosexual love and motherhood are not per se emancipator reading for women" (121). Thus, while acknowledging the importance of the female experience to the exercise of feminism, Moi cautions against the tendency to reduce feminist practice to a mere representation of female experience: "Although crucially shaped by its anti-patriarchal emphasis on female experience, feminism as a political theory cannot be reduced to a reflection or a product of that experience" (121). In other words, Moi's idea of feminist critical theory is to go beyond textual or a political approaches, "It is not its object, but its political perspective which gives feminist criticism its (relative) unity" (122). Another interesting point Moi raises in the essay is whether men can be feminists or feminist critics. Moi states that men can be provided they understand the purpose of feminism vis a vis their 'different' position as men otherwise it will dilute the very reason of feminist criticism: "…the would be male feminist critic ought to ask himself whether he as a male is really doing feminism a service in our present situation by muscling in on the one cultural and intellectual space women have created for themselves within 'his' male-dominated discipline (122).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Who wrote the essay "Are women's Novels Feminist Novels?" What is its main argument?

Q 4: What does Toril Moi have to say on the question of whether men can be feminists?

Moi's essay also discusses the political pitfalls of collapsing the 'feminine' with 'female'. According to Moi, one of the problems of feminist politics is the problem of definition, i.e. how to define the terms female and feminine. The established usage is to represent femininity as a social construct and female to refer to the biological aspects of sexual difference. The representation of femininity is an outcome of patriarchal ideology that seeks to control female sexuality through the imposition of certain culturally/ socially sanctioned standards of femininity on all biological women "in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for femininity are natural" (123). Patriarchal discourse normalises the idea of an intrinsic female nature. According to Moi, the feminists must resist such essentialism and stereotyping of female experience: "Feminists, on the contrary, have to disentangle this confusion, and must therefore always insist that though women undoubtedly are female there is no guarantee that they will be feminine" (123).

The problem for feminists then is to understand "whether it is desirable for feminists to try and fix the meaning of femininity at all" as any attempt at definition becomes a self-limiting condition and ends up falling into the trap of what Helene Cixous criticised as death-dealing binary oppositions: "There is a danger of turning a positive, feminist definition of femininity into a definition of femaleness, and thereby falling back into another patriarchal trap" (123). Helene Cixous in her essay "Sorties" has explored how binary thinking, "death-dealing binary thought" as she calls it, supports patriarchal values. Feminists therefore have a key role to play in understanding and challenging patriarchal binary thinking. Summarizing Cixous arguments, Moi says that feminist critical practice can undo such opposition by appropriating deconstructive criticism. Cixous criticises the

equation of femininity with passivity and death, as it leaves no positive space for women. As she states, "'either woman is passive or she does not exist'" (125). Cixous sees everything in the patriarchal world as related to the man/ woman opposition where one is always superior to the other, i.e. they have a hierarchal relationship. Cixous finds this male/female binary opposition central to Western culture and philosophy. In this opposition, the inferior term is associated with the feminine, while the term that occupies the privileged position is associated with masculinity. Her work shows that it does not matter which 'couple' one chooses to highlight, "the hidden male/ female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm" (125). Instead, Cixous proposes a new form of female writing, ecriture feminine that will escape the metaphysical trap of the phallocratic system: "Against any binary scheme of thought, Cixous sets multiple, heterogeneous difference" (126).

Psychoanalytic feminist theories have tried to critique the patriarchal social order through their emphasis on the Symbolic. Following the deconstruction theories of Derrida, French feminist Julia Kristeva refuses to define femininity. Instead of giving a definition of femininity, Kristeva prefers to see it as a position: "if femininity then can be said to have a definition at all in Kristevan terms, it is simply as that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order" (126). In this scheme of things, even men can be viewed as marginal to the symbolic order. As Moi points out by defining the category of woman, patriarchy represses them making it necessary to fight for their rights. Kristeva's notion of femininity as relational arises from her deep distrust of identity as constituted in the symbolic that leads her to reject any notion of ecriture feminine that is inherently female or feminine.

Thus, Kristeva does not offer a theory of femininity, rather her description of femininity as marginality theorises feminist struggle just like any other struggle against an overarching power structure. As Moi explains, "Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of positionality rather than essences" (127). While such positional perspective on the definition of femininity thwarts the dangers of biologism, it fails to address the political questions feminism raises: "An

adoption of Kristeva's 'deconstructed' form of feminism therefore in one sense leaves everything as it was—our positions in the political struggle have not changed; but in another sense, it radically transforms our awareness of the nature of that struggle" (129).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Discuss Helene Cixous's idea of "death dealing binary thought."

Q 6: How according to Toril Moi can appropriation of deconstructive criticism facilitate feminist politics?

Q 7: Explain Kristeva's concept of femininity as marginality.

Against this background, Moi elucidates that feminist criticism and theory prevalent may be divided into two categories: female criticism and feminine theory. Moi defines female criticism as a field, which can be analysed whether it is feminist or not, or whether it confuses female with feminine. Moi stresses that while apolitical study of female authors cannot be called feminist but in a male dominated context, "…an interest in women writers must objectively be considered a support for the feminist project of making women visible" (129). One just needs to remember that a female critic need not necessarily be a feminist one. As an example, Moi discusses the concept of Gynocriticism or the study of women writers.

According to Moi, this approach to feminist critical practice is problematic as it may at times reinforce the same stereotypes about woman that feminist studies want to dismantle. Moi states that the problem with works such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is that they not only confuse femaleness with femininity but also affiliate femaleness/femininity with feminism. They are guilty of homogenizing "all female creative utterances into feminist self-expression" (130). Feminine theory, on the other hand, refers to theories concerned with the construction of femininity. From a feminist standpoint, this kind of study is "prone to attacks of biologism and often unwittingly turns into theories about female essences" (131). Moi however states that such categorisations are never desirable but they are

helpful in delineating the trajectory of feminist theory and politics: "All these three labels are not essences. They are categories as readers or critics operate" (132). Moi's own view is that "such conceptual terms are at once politically crucial and ultimately metaphysical; it is necessary at once to deconstruct the opposition between traditionally 'masculine' and traditionally 'feminine' values and to confront the full political force and reality of such categories" (131). In the end, these definitions/categorisations are not meant to be absolute or conclusive. They are best viewed as interventions to open up and carry forward the debate on the relevance and implications of feminist theory and politics.

11.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

The following are the important issues addressed in the essay by Toril Moi

- Toril Moi's essay shows the differences between the terms feminist, female and feminine and what their implications are for feminist studies. According to Moi, 'feminist' is used to refer to the political aspect, 'female' refers to the biological component and 'femininity' is a cultural construction defined as a set of normative female characteristics.
- Moi further qualifies the distinction between female and feminine by saying that being female or female writing does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach. It is a fallacy to assume women centered writing to always have a feminist approach. Also, the description of female experience cannot in all circumstances be said to be a feminist act.
- Toril Moi's essay addresses the problem of feminist methodology. How do feminists further the goal of knowledge making in the absence of any reliable source of feminist intellectual tradition? According to Moi, feminists must be pluralistic in their choice of literary methods and theories, i.e. they must work with existing ideas and must learn to 'appropriate' epistemology to their own ends as there is "no purely female intellectual tradition available to us"(119) . As she says, "there is no pure feminist or female space from which we can speak. All ideas,

including feminist ones, are in this sense 'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology." (118)

- To the question whether men can be feminists, Moi says yes men can be feminists. Men however must be aware of their different position from the standpoint of gender and the political strategies they use otherwise they risk diluting the very purpose of feminist enterprise.
- The essay raises the problem of definition for feminist studies i.e. how to define femininity: "…The question is, however, whether it is desirable for feminists to try to fix the meaning of femininity at all. Patriarchy has developed a whole series of 'feminine' characteristics. Should feminists then really try to develop another set of 'feminine' virtues, however desirable?"(123). This is because; language under phallogocentrism is highly imbricated in patriarchal discourse and lacks the means to embody authentic female experience.
- Summarizing the theories of the French feminist Helene Cixous, Moi demonstrates how the appropriation of deconstruction can have implications for feminist politics. Helene Cixous has emphasised the hierarchal nature of binary opposition through the use of the masculine/ feminine dichotomy. According to Cixous, binary opposition supports patriarchal values and "the hidden male/female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm" (125).
- Toril Moi discusses the contribution of French feminist Kristeva who defines femininity as a position of marginality. The problem with her positional perspective is that it does not sufficiently engage with the historical and social analyses. In other words, it leaves out the political questions that feminism addresses.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Name the author of *A Literature of Their Own.*

Q 9: Name an important work by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

11.6 RECEPTION OF TORIL MOI

Toril Moi's *Sexual/textual Politics* initially received criticism from many Anglo-American feminists for its seemingly critical stance on feminist literary studies. Many academics and feminist critics considered her work to undermine the objectives and discourse of feminism. Some critics have questioned her work as oversimplifying Anglo-American feminist thought while some others have criticised her for overlooking the contribution of Afro-American and lesbian feminists. Critical reception of Moi's work in later years has been more positive, especially concerning her work on French feminism and her assessment of its influence on the development of Anglo American feminism. Critics have also praised her work on Simon de Beauvoir that is seen as a major contribution to the cultural history of feminism. Her essays in *What Is a Woman?* have mostly received positive reviews and may be seen as a sign of Moi's development as a feminist theorist as also the significance and relevance of Beauvoir's thought to contemporary gender studies. Her work *Sexual/textual Politics* is now applauded for having opened up a space for dialogue and healthy debate within feminist studies as also for indicating some of the weaknesses of contemporary feminism. The strength of her work lies in Moi's brilliant ideas that suggest that no literary text or its reading is politically neutral and that the politics of feminist critical studies demand critical re-examination.



11.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Toril Moi's essay demonstrates the importance of theoretically nuanced and politically committed studies for feminist critical practice. Her own work she draws a great deal from the works of French feminism. Her work *Sexual/textual Politics* (1985) from where the essay "Female, Feminine, Feminist" is taken is a thought- provoking work on the intersection between feminism and post-structural thought. While she is credited as having coined the term "Anglo-American feminism", her work surveys the development of feminist studies in America and the influence of French feminism as an analytical tool for feminist literary studies.



11.8 FURTHER READING

Elaine Showalter. (1998). "A Literature of Their Own". Princeton University Press, subsequent edition.

Helene Cixous & Catherine Clement (1986). "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/ Ways Out/Forays." *The Newly Born Woman*. University of Minnessota Press.

Julia Kristeva. (1989). "Women's Time." In Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. (Ed.). *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism.* New York: Basil Blackwell.

Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar. (1979). *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Yale University Press.

Toril Moi. (1989). "Feminist, Female, Feminine." (Ed.). Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism.* New York: Basil Blackwell.



11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Toril Moi's essay shows the difference ... …and what their... … for feminist studies.

Ans to Q 2: Toril Moi states that there is no true... …accessible to feminists. Feminists have to draw from... …as there is no pure... …given the pervasiveness of... …power.

Ans to Q 3: The essay "Are women's novels Feminist novels" is by Rosalind... ...She argues that writings need not be about... ...She gives the example of… ...that are written by... ...These novels are based on themes of… ...that does not resonate with the principles of… ...One of the reasons for such a confusion is a false... …that describing experience typical... …

Ans to Q 4: Moi states that men can be... ...provided they understand the purpose... ...vis a vis their 'different' position as men otherwise it will dilute the very reason of feminist criticism

Ans to Q 5: Helene Cixous concept of "death dealing binary thought" emphasises the ... …nature of… ...through the use of… ...Cixous is critical of binary opposition because it supports... ...Feminists must challenge… ...thinking

Ans to Q 6: Toril Moi states that it is not about whether a particular theory… ...by a man or woman but whether its effects can be... ...as... ....or… ...Moi gives the examples of… ...who have revisited... …to offer new insights into analyses of... …and the construction of… ...in patriarchy

Ans to Q 7: Kristeva refuses to define... ...Instead of giving a definition of femininity, Kristeva prefers to see it as a... …: "if femininity then can be said to have a definition at all in Kristevan terms, it is simply as that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order" (126). In this scheme of things, even... …can be viewed as… ...to the… ... order… …Kristeva's notion of… ...as… ...arises from her deep distrust of… ...that leads her to reject any notion of… ...feminine that is inherently female or feminine. Thus, Kristeva does not offer a theory of... …rather her description of femininity as… ...theorises feminist struggle just like any other struggle against an... ...power structure.

Ans to Q 8: The author of the book… ...is Showalter.

Ans to Q 9: An important work by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar is *The Madwoman*.



11.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Toril Moi distinguish between feminist, female and feminine?

Q 2: "A female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a feminist one." Explain.

Q 3: Moi states that behind the conflation of feminist with female texts is "a complex web of assumptions." What are some of the assumptions that Moi indicates?

Q 4: How does Toril Moi position her argument in relation to the idea of femininity as a cultural construct?

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UNIT 12: ELAINE SHWOALTER: "TOWARDS A FEMINIST POETICS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Elaine Shwoalter: Life and Works

12.4 Reading the Text: "Towards a Feminist Poetics"

12.5 Important Issues raised and Their Significance in Literary Studies

12.6 Reception of Shwoalter

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:

- acquaint yourself with women's suffrage movement and the feminist movement.
- list the key feminist literary theorists and their major works.
- read about the life and works of Elaine Showalter
- analyze the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into
- explain terms such as Gynocriticism, Poetics, Feminist Critique, Suffrage, among others
- gain an idea of the essay by Showalter in the context of the feminist movement.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed Toril Moi's essay "Female, Feminine, Feminist" from her seminal book *Sexual Textual Politics.* In this unit, we shall discuss Elaine Shwoalter's essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" which is yet another important text in the field. We shall note that

the women's suffrage movement of the nineteenth century was also a women's rights movement where women fought for the right to vote. This was followed by the feminist movement of the 20th century which called for equality in gender, leading the way for groundbreaking changes in political and economic emancipation of women mainly in the global North. This background paved the way for various women's organisations to spread awareness, and demand equal wages and legal rights in large parts of the world. For since time immemorial, human civilization has witnessed the domination of patriarchy where, as the French feminist Simone De Beauvoir in her groundbreaking text *The Second Sex* (1949) reiterates how man is the 'essential', the 'absolute' and woman is the 'inessential other'. So are the gender roles comprising masculinity and femininity. Beauvoir states, 'one is not born a woman, one becomes one' (Beauvoir 267). History brings to light how feminist critics for centuries struggled for the acknowledgment of the woman's role in society and gender equality, the primary feminist theorists being Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792), John Stuart Mill (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869), Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*), Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Elaine Showalter, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Kate Millett, Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to name a few. Specifically, in America, Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968) marked the onset of modern feminist criticism followed by Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature Of Their Own: British Women Novelist From Bronte To Lessing* (1977). These feminist critics, in their quest to question origins, tried to locate the discourses of patriarchy and pointed how dominant knowledge systems gradually promoted a male-dominated society which was repressive towards the female gender and hindered productivity and creative possibility. A major voice is Elaine Showalter who in her essay *Towards A Feminist Poetics* (1979) analyses feminist criticism from varied perspectives. As we finish reading this unit, we shall learn that Showalter mostly concentrates on five dominant areas; namely, woman as reader, woman as writer, feminist critique and its problems, aims of gynocritics, and finally the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into, the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage.



"We need literary history, critical judgments, even a literary canon as a necessary step towards doing the fullest justice towards women's writing." Elaine Showalter in *A Jury Of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet To Annie Proulx.*

12.3 ELAINE SHOWALTER: LIFE AND WORKS

Elaine Showalter (1941-) is an American feminist literary critic who is best known for her works on 19th century British and American female writers. She is also known for being one of the original pro-pounders of feminist literary criticism in United States Academia and is responsible for developing the concept of 'gynocritics' which, in simple terms, describes the study of women as writers.

Born in Boston in the state of Massachusetts, Showalter faced an era when women were hard-pressed for employment. However, she pursued a career in academia and earned her degrees and a Ph.D. which led to her first academic appointment at Douglas College and her subsequent work in feminist literature. Through her intensive reading and knowledge, she observed that women did not figure prominently in literary history, which was dominated by man. Hence, throughout her life she spent much of her time and career remedying this error through her studies and research, apart from encouraging other female writers to write. *A Jury Of Her Peers: American Women Writers From Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* was the first comprehensive book at the tradition of women writers and its history. Another remarkable work was *A Literature of Their Own* (1980) which was extremely influential in the study of feminist literature and uncovered a previously unknown area of literary study which was a long but forgotten tradition of women writers in England.

Many of her works were groundbreaking in the examination and analysis of feminist literature such as her essay *Towards a Feminist Poetics* which uses the term poetics within the context of structuralism of the 1970s, a dominant form of literary theory during that era. In this context, poetics is a systematic semi-scientific account of how literature works. It refers to both poetry and any form of comprehensive theory. Using the term in her title, she indirectly pointed out how much of poetics marginalized women and a feminist literary tradition.

Similarly, in another critical work *These Modern Women: Autobiographical Essays from the Twenties* she examines the lives of

feminine authors. Her work in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (1985) and *The Speaking Of Gender* (1989) reimagined feminist theory for a whole generation of women writers. She also wrote on the cultural history of the psychiatric treatment of women in her book work *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985) in which she examines the influence of the male perception and culture on how an average woman should behave, subsequently defining insanity in females and its treatment, according to the dominant cultural discourse.

By the 1990s, she analysed British literary history with *Sexual Anarchy: Gender at Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990) which describes the history of the sexes, its context, themes, and problems with a fight for pre-eminence and identity at the fin de siècle (turn of the century) as well as *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin De Siècle*, a collection of stories from the turn of the century with female writers openly expressing non-patriarchal themes such a female sexuality, marital discontent and feminist protest which shocked traditional Victorian critics, and hence, it was not popular among the common masses. Her latest works include *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997), and *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage* (2001).

Till date, Showalter has been a controversial figure both in the field of literature and television for her non-conformist views and ideas. Apart from many accolades, she has also been awarded the *Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism,* which is the biggest annual cash prize for literary criticism in the English language. Showalter was also chair of the judges for the prestigious British literary award, the Man Booker International Prize, in the year 2007.



CHECK YOR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some of the early feminist critics along with their noteworthy works.

Q 2: Which moments of world history are the noteworthy markers of the past?

Q 3: In their quest to question patriarchy, what did the feminist critics try to locate?

Q 4: What do you understand by the women's suffrage movement and the feminist movement?

Q 5: What do you mean by 'gynocritics' in simple terms?

Q 6: What do you understand by the term 'poetics' within the context of literary theory?

Q 7: What are some of the significant works of Elaine Showalter?

Q 8: Elaine Showalter is the recipient of which major award?

12.4 READING THE TEXT: TOWARDS A FEMINST POETICS"

Elaine Showalter's *Towards a Feminist Poetics* is constructed from a comprehensive study of women's writing informed by the female literary past. In this influential essay, Showalter traces a trail of modern, i.e., mid 19th to 20th century, feminist theory and analyses feminist criticism from diverse perspectives. She mainly concentrates on five dominant areas; namely, woman as the reader, woman as a writer, feminist critique and its problems, aims of gynocritics, and finally, the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into, the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage.

According to her, feminist criticism can be divided into two distinct branches. She terms the first variety of feminism as one that studies 'woman as reader' which she calls 'feminist critique.' To quote Showalter, "Feminist criticism can be divided into two distinct varieties. The first type is concerned with *woman as the reader* - with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature and with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual code. I shall call this kind of analysis the *feminist critique*, and like other kinds of critique, it is a historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena." (216)

In this first variety of feminism, which she calls feminist critique, women as a reader studies the text written by men or male writers. According to her, instead of directly taking what is given to them by the

patriarch, women can instead start questioning the origins and thereby change the established idea of a text. This critique is complicated and needs more profound knowledge by women. She goes on stating on the subject of this feminist critique which includes images and stereotypes of women in literature. It also looks into omissions and how women have been misrepresented in criticisms. Finally, it looks into the fissures and gaps in literary history constructed by men. It also questions the exploitation of female audience in films and consumer products. A parallel view expressed by Showalter, in her introduction to *The Vintage Book Of American Woman Writers* states, "the main reason women do not figure in American literary history is because they have not been the ones to write it." (Vintage, 2011)

The second type of feminist criticism, as Showalter states analyses 'woman as a writer', where meanings from texts are produced by woman with the themes, history, and structures of literature written by women. She named the second variety after the French term *la gynocritic*, and called it 'gynocritics'. In simple terms, it deals with literature written by women, in every aspect, or in other words, it is the study of women as writers. Critic M. H. Abrams pertinently defines 'gynocriticism' as 'a criticism which concerns itself with developing a specifically female framework for dealing with works written by women, in all aspects of their productions, motivation, analysis, and interpretation, and all literary forms including journals and letters.' (Abrams, 102)

The primary subjects, according to Showalter, include the psychodynamics of female creativity, the varied aspects of female language and the problems related to it, the diverse paths of a female literary career, both individual and collective, literary history and finally the study of female writers and their works. For Showalter, 'women as writer' or 'gynocritics' is better than 'women as reader' or 'feminist critiques'. She points out the problems of the feminist critique since it is basically male-oriented and thereby renders what women have felt and experienced as unimportant. It concentrates on what men think rather than what women should be. The biggest drawback of this critique is a tendency to naturalise female victimisation by making it the obsessive topic of discussion.

Gynocritics, on the other hand, constructs a female framework analysing women's literature wherein they develop new models based on the female experience. To quote Showalter, '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 male tradition and focus instead of nearly visible world of female culture.'(217) Reconstructing the female literary past, rediscovering the hundreds of women poets and novelist whose work has been reduced to oblivion by time and thereby establishing continuity of the female tradition is the first step before analysing the aspects of how the literature of women would be different and magnanimous.

Showalter talks about locating the unique female patterns and phrases in the evolution of female tradition, where one has to go beyond the famous women writers such as Jane Austen, the Brontes, and George Eliot, among others. Here, as mentioned, Showalter uses the term 'poetics' in the title, within the context of structuralism of the 1970s, a dominant form of literary theory during that era. In this context, poetics is a systematic semi-scientific account of how literature works and using the term in her title, she indirectly pointed out how much of poetics marginalized women and a feminist literary tradition. Showalter realises that the dependence on male literature needs to discarded for the gynocritics to thrive and construct a feminist poetics.

Showalter thereafter divided the history of women's literature into three stages, namely 'the feminine', 'the feminist' and 'the female' stage. The first phase or the feminine phase dates from 1840 to 1880 where women writers wrote in a way very similar to men, imitating the man's style of writing and perception. The women writer's perception of themselves and of other women were based on the popular discourse dominated by patriarchy. The female nature was defined by man. They looked up to the male writers and tried to follow them. Many women writers tried to conform by taking up male pseudonyms instead of writing under their own names. This popular practice, which became a national characteristic of English women writers, pointed out the inferiority complex in their minds and the lack of confidence. Showalter thereafter states 'the feminist content of

feminine art is typically oblique, displaced, ironic and subversive: One has to read it between the lines, in the missed possibilities of the text.'(217)

The second phase or the feminist phase, dating from 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote by women marks the efforts put in the women suffragette movement. The women writers, during this stage started becoming more expressive with their emotions and feelings, and began writing in a style not conforming to male writers. The suffering and pain of women in a patriarchal society came to be represented in their writings. The medium of literature became a voice to question male hegemonic discourses and their writings became a mode of protest to break down the system of patriarchy gradually. To quote Showalter, 'In the feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote, women are historically unable to reject the accommodating postures of feminity and to use literature to dramatise the ordeals of wronged womanhood.' (217)

Finally, from the 1920s to the present marks the commencement of the third phase which she called 'the female' phase. A marked difference is the rejection of imitation to male forms of writing (feminine phase) along with rejecting the form of protest (feminist phase). To participate in the literary process, women depended on their own experiences. Writers such as Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson started identifying the uniqueness of female experience and its vast difference from the male writers. Art and literature, forms and techniques became the central point of interest and analysis.

Showalter advocates this third phase or the female phase since it leads to self-discovery and autonomy. She states, "women reject both imitation and protest–to forms of dependence–and turn instead to female experience as the source an autonomous extended the feminist analysis of cultural forms and techniques of literature" (218). This phase refers to a wide range of experiences, which is varied and diversified.

Thus, to conclude, Showalter's views on feminist poetics involves a re-reading of women's writing of the past, embracing the present writings by women and leading a path for the future generation of female writers. It is provocative as well as inspirational, outrageous as well as beckoning, all

the while sustaining for radically female-cantered literature and supporting the formulation of a women's poetics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are the two varieties of feminist criticism?

Q 10: What do you understand by 'Feminist Critique'?

Q 11: Define 'Gynocriticism'.

Q 12: What are the three stages that the history of women's writing can be divided into?

Q 13: Showalter advocates which stage as the best stage and why?

Q 14: How can one formulate a women's poetics?

12.5 IMPORTANT ISSUES RAISED AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN LITERARY STUDIES

Gynocriticism:

Elaine Showalter's major contribution to the field of literary criticism is the concept of 'Gynocriticism.' The main concern of 'gynocritics' can be subdivided into three fundamental aspects. First, to identify the subject matters in literature written by women which are distinctively feminine. It includes the domestic world, childbirth and nurture, emotional relationships and sentiments which form a significant aspect of female nature, among others.

Women's writing has been characterised as having attributes such as being concerned with the 'details' and the 'diary', categorizations that Rebecca Hogan interrogates in "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form." These are outcomes of women's confinement to the personal sphere of the home, wherein the 'details' being referred to are the everyday activities deemed small, insignificant and mundane by the masculine public sphere, and the 'diary' is the only space (literate) women found a voice and medium of expression, because even in the home, their identity was defined by their socio-cultural gender roles. Needless to say, the significance of the details and the diary has been severely undermined in the literary canon as having little value.

The second aspect involves tracing the female literary tradition and the history behind it. It includes looking back at the female writers of the past and connecting them to the present lot of female writers and subsequently providing role models and examples to the future generation of women writers. The third aspect of 'gynocritics' is uncovering or stressing the uniqueness of the feminine mode of the experience of writing. This does away with the earlier intention of woman to imitate male writers or protesting against them. This led to the female writers to embrace literature as art, without competing with their male counterparts, thereby leading to their true emancipation as 'female' writers.

Since the feminine way of writing is very different from man due to the difference in experiences, perceptions, and identities, one can examine the genre of autobiography writing to draw on the narrative. For a woman, the medium of autobiography writing is often a means to survive the traumas of childbirth, illness, deaths of spouses and children, loss of cultural identity and personal regard, fear of loss of beauty, while the narrative is their struggle to find a voice to express. She cannot experience herself as an entirely separate identity as she is aware of the fact that she is being defined as a woman whose identity has been pre-determined by the dominant male culture. While on the other hand, male autobiographies enforce unity and identity across time by reconstructing the ego as a safeguard against disintegration, and they seldom admit their internal fears and insecurities, hesitations and ruptures, only to glide smoothly over gaps in memory and blind spots. The basic masculine self is separate and not connected to the world.

A seminal work identifying critical differences between men's and women's autobiographies was *Women's Autobiographies: Essays in Criticism,* edited by Estelle C. Jelinek, in which she writes that men set themselves apart as "success stories and histories of their era" (Jelinek, 10) focusing on their professional lives, whereas women emphasize personal and domestic details as well as their connections to people in their lives. Further, she says men "idealize their lives or cast themselves into heroic moulds to project their universal import," (Jelinek, 14) women, on the other hand, seek to find validation, "sifting through their lives for

explanation and understanding" (Jelinek 15). And, while men's narratives are characterized by linearity, harmony and orderliness, women's stories are irregular, disconnected and fragmentary. In her essay, "In the Cultural Hall of Mirrors: Issue of Gender Genre Incompatibility of Women's Autobiography" (1998), Dr. Ranjana Harish contends how the restrictive notion of the autobiography being about the centrally located isolated self has obscured the significance of women's autobiographical writing as well as that of other marginalized people. A broadening of what is understood as an autobiography, then, has been necessary to make it more inclusive of voices that do not find themselves at the centre of their own narrative.

Thematically, women's writing has often been identified as being concerned with the personal and private, rather than the public and the political–more so, in the case of autobiographies. In *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (1978) Sheila Rowbotham writes, a woman defines herself as belonging to a collective that has been assigned a role by the dominant masculine culture. Her journey is that of a dual consciousness–one of the self that is defined by culture, and the other is of that what she creates for herself apart from cultural prescription (Rowbotham 31). Theorising on women's autobiographies, Mary G. Mason in her essay "The Other Voice" argued that it is women's status as the alternative or Other that informs their identity as relational rather than individuating, "The self-discovery of the female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of the female self is linked to the identification of some 'other'" (Mason 210).

This is the narrative of just one genre namely the autobiography and similar narratives can be drawn in the genre of poetry, fiction, drama, literary theory, among others.



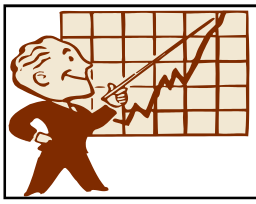
CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 15: Which concept is Showalter's most noteworthy contribution to the field of literary theory?

Q 16: What are the three aspects of 'Gynocriticism'?

12.6 RECEPTION OF SHOWALTER

Elaine Showalter has been appreciated in various ways. Josephine Donovan in *Towards a Women's Poetics* (1984) named Elaine Showalter as one of the leading feminist critics who led the way towards formulating a women's poetics calling 'Gynocritics' as the next phase of feminist criticism. Toril Moi, in her work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), described Showalters views as limited and essentialist as she believed that there is no fundamental female self. She set the stage for a broader debate by suggesting that a female-oriented literary canon or poetics would never be able to represent all the women writers because tradition differs on the basis of many factors including class, sexuality and ethnicity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 17: How was Showalter's work received both positively and negatively?



12.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have learnt about the women's suffrage movement and the feminist movement. We have learnt that Showalter is a powerful voice in the feminist movement. In this essay we have discussed in this unit, Showalter analyses feminist criticism from varied perspectives and she mainly concentrates on five dominant areas, namely—woman as reader, woman as writer, feminist critique and its problems, aims of gynocritics, and finally the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into, the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage. During the "feminine" phase (1840-80) of feminism, women imitated the dominant tradition in writing. During the "feminist" phase (1880-1920) of feminism, women were increasingly focused on exposing hatred for woman in male-authored texts and pressed on equal rights along with protested against male hegemonic discourses. During the "female" phase (1920-present) of feminism, women focused on women's texts and women as a balanced

individual capable of higher feats. Thus, to conclude Showalter's views on feminist poetics involves a re-reading of women's writing of the past, embracing the present writings by women and leading a path for the future generation of female writers. It is provocative as well as inspirational and supports the formulation of a woman's poetics.



12.8 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H, Geoffrey Galt Harpham. (2011). *A Handbook of Literary Terms*. Delhi: Cengage Learning.

Donovan, Josephine. (1984). "Toward a Women's Poetics." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol 3, No. 1/2, pp. 99–110. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/463827.

Evans, Sara. (1980). *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left.* New York: Vintage Books.

Neumann, Birgit, et al., (Eds.) (2008). *Narrative and Identity: Theoretical Approaches and Critical Analyses*. Trier: WVT.

Newton, K. M. (Ed.). (1997). "Elaine Showalter: Towards a Feminist Poetics." *Twentieth Century Literary Theory.* Palgrave, London.



12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792)… …John Stuart Mill (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869)… …Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*)… …Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949)… …Elaine Showalter (*A Literature Of Their Own: British Women Novelist From Bronte To Lessing* (1977)… …Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968)… …Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), among others.

Ans to Q 2: In world history, the noteworthy markers of the past have been moments of conflict and disagreement between culturally and ideologically variant groups.

Ans to Q 3: The feminist critics, in their quest to question origins, tried to locate the discourses of patriarchy… …pointed how dominant knowledge systems gradually promoted a male-dominated society… …hindered productivity and creative possibility of the women.. …a major voice is *Towards A Feminist Poetics* by Elaine Showalter.

Ans to Q 4: The women's suffrage movement was an influential movement of the 19th century… …women fought for the right to vote…. …followed by the feminist movement of the 20th century which called for equality in gender… …changes in political and economic emancipation of women… …paved the way for various women's organisations to spread awareness, and demand equal wages and legal rights… …human civilization has witnessed the domination of patriarchy and the feminist joined hands to bring equality between the genders.

Ans to Q 5: 'Gynocritics', in simple terms, describes the study of women as writers.

Ans to Q 6: Showalter in her essay *Towards A Feminist Poetics* uses the term poetics within the context of structuralism of the 1970s… …poetics is a systematic semi-scientific account of how literature works…. …it refers to both poetry and any form of comprehensive theory… …Showalter indirectly pointed out how much of poetics marginalized women and a female literary tradition.

Ans to Q 7: Some of Showalter's major works are *A Jury Of Her Peers: American Women Writers From Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx, A Literature of Their Own* (1980), *Towards A Feminist Poetics (1979), These Modern Women: Autobiographical Essays From The Twenties, The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory(1985)*, The *Speaking Of Gender (1989)*, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980(1985)*, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender at Culture at the Fin de Siècle(1990), Daughters Of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin De Siècle*, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997), and *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage*(2001), among others.

Ans to Q 8: Elaine Showalter has been awarded the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism, which is the biggest annual cash prize for literary criticism in the English language.

Ans to Q 9: Showalter terms the first variety of feminism as one that studies 'woman as reader' which she calls 'feminist critique' and terms the second variety of feminism as one that studies 'woman as writer' which she calls 'gynocritic'.

Ans to Q 10: Feminist critique or women as a reader, studies the text written by men or male writers… …instead of directly taking what is given to them by the patriarch, women can instead start questioning the origins and thereby change the established idea of a text.

Ans to Q 11: Gynocritic or 'woman as a writer' analyses where meanings from texts are produced by woman with the themes, history, and structures of literature written by women.

Ans to Q 12: The three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into are the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage.

Ans to Q 13: Showalter advocates the third phase or the female phase since it leads to self-discovery and autonomy… …instead of imitating man (feminine) or protesting against them (feminist), women focus on women's texts and women as a balanced individual capable of higher feats.

Ans to Q 14: By involving in a rereading of women's writing of the past, embracing the present writings by women and leading a path for the future generation of female writers.

Ans to Q 15: Gynocriticism.

Ans to Q 16: First, to identify the subject matters in literature written by women which are distinctively feminine… …second aspect involves tracing the female literary tradition and the history behind it, and the third aspect of 'gynocritics' is uncovering or stressing on the uniqueness of the feminine mode of the experience of writing.

Ans to Q 17: It was received positively by Josephine Donovan in *Towards a Women's Poetics* (1984) and was criticized by Toril Moi in her work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985).



12.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What does Elaine Showalter mean by the term 'poetics' in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics"?

Q 2: What do you understand by the term 'Gynocriticism'? Elaborate.

Q 3: Discuss the three phases of feminism in detail.

Q 4: Analyze 'Feminist Critique' as opposed to 'Gynocritic'.

Q 5: Assess the significance of Elaine Showalter in feminist literary criticism.

Q 6: What do you understand by the terms 'poetics' and 'feminist poetics' within the context of literary theory?

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UNIT 13: GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK: *CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK?*

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Gayatri Chakarvorty Spivak: The Critic

13.4 Reading the text: "Can the Subaltern Speak"

13.4.1 Major Themes

13.4.2 Style and Language

13.5 Critical Reception

13.6 Let us Sum up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers to Check Our Progress (Hints Only)

13.9 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- gain an idea on the life and literary contributions of Gayatri C. Spivak
- explain the ideas contained in the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
- discuss the major themes emerging from the text of the essay
- analyse the style and language employed in the essay
- discuss the critical reception of the essay
- appreciate the core ideas that the essay has to offer

13.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit takes up the essay titled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which is considered a seminal work by Gayatri Spivak, particularly with reference to postcolonial and subaltern studies. Before we delve into the textual details of the prescribed essay, let us gain a brief idea on the life and scholarly contributions of this leading academician, writer and translator,

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is also an award-winning critic with an international repute for her scholarly contributions worldwide.

13.3 GAYATRI CHAKARVORTY SPIVAK: THE CRITIC

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was born in 24 February 1942 in Calcutta where she grew up and began her formal education. Spivak studied at the prestigious Presidency College in Calcutta graduating in the year 1959 before deciding to pursue her higher studies at the University of Cambridge, eventually completing her doctoral studies at Cornell University in 1967. After completing her studies, she took up teaching English and Comparative Studies across various universities such as University of Iowa, University of Texas, University of Pittsburgh, University of Pennsylvania and also at Emory University, Atlanta Georgia as the Longstreet Professor of English. Spivak continues to teach at Columbia University as University Professor at present, having joined there as the Avalon Foundation Professor in Humanities in the year 1991.

Spivak who is a name to reckon with in the academic world, has made a mark for herself through the course of her proficient academic career. She has to her credit many scholarly works namely,

Myself I Must Remake (1974),
Of Grammatology (1976),
In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (1987),
The Post-Colonial Critic (1990),
Thinking Academic Freedom in Gendered Post-Coloniality (1992),
Outside in the Teaching Machine (1993),
The Spivak Reader (1995),
A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999),
Death of a Discipline (2003),
Other Asias (2008),
An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization (2012), and
Readings (2014).

Also, she has translated several works by the leading writer and activist, Mahaswata Devi from Bengali to English, namely *Imaginary Maps* (1994), *Breast Stories* (1997), *Old Women* (1999) and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (2002). Besides, she has also translated a story by writer, Ramproshad Sen titled *Song for Kali: A Cycle* (2000) with an introduction to his work. Her forthcoming work is titled *Red Thread* and another work titled *Master Discourse, Native Informant*. Apart from her works as a translator, she also happens to be one of the founding members of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society.

Spivak had received the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy in the year 2012 and was honored the Padma Bhushan in the year 2013. She had also received the Guggenheim fellowship and conferred with honorary doctorates from a total of eleven academic institutions and Universities till date. Moreover, she had also received recognition for her translation work from the Sahitya Akademi. Spivak is dedicated to the cause of educating the disadvantaged sections of the society and is associated with founding the Pares Chandra and Sivani Chakravorty Memorial Foundation for Rural Education. Her contributions as a leading critic and literary theorist has provided us today with newer and much necessary perspectives on Marxism, feminism and the subaltern.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: When and where was Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak born?

Q 2: Where did Spivak begin and complete her formal education?

Q 3: Name some of the major works by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak.

Q 4: Mention the works by Mahaswata Devi, which were translated by Spivak.

Q 5: When was Spivak honoured the Kyoto Prize and the Padma Bhushan?

13.4 READING THE TEXT: "CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK"

In this subsection, let us attempt at grasping some of the important ideas that are highlighted in Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In the opening lines of the text, Spivak makes a powerful statement thus, "Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (24). This refers to the fact that the Western thinkers, intellectuals and critics tend to focus and draw more attention on their own issues because of which their concerns are focused as primary. This in a way brushes aside and even denies the equal importance that is due to the Eastern thinkers and the equally important issues that concern the East.

Spivak opines that even the ideas held by the 'postmodernists' and 'deconstructionists' are debatable owing to some of the inherent political contradictions therein. She mentions that the idea of plurality with regard to everything that is upheld by both these intellectual schools of thought only provides an "illusion" that the consideration of plurality or multiplicity of thought or perspective undermines subjective sovereignty, although it is not so. Undoubtedly, the history of Europe is dictated by the law of the land, its political economy and the ideology of the West. However, the West pretends that it is not limited by boundaries or has no such "geo-political determinations" (24) even as it is seen to clearly occupy the position of the Subject.

Spivak then highlights the covert or hidden practices of the Subject; Subject that is with a capital 'S' which she opines, "belongs to the exploiter's side of the international division of labor" (24). Then with the concept of the "S/subject" we have the creation of its opposite i.e., the "Other". There is an intense amount of tension and conflict between the two and likewise among all other binary opposites such as the self and the other, colonial and the colonised, the bourgeois and the proletariat, center and marginal, majority and minority, occident and the orient among other such constructed socio-political and historical notions. This is where the aspect of power-play comes in and where one set of the binary opposite such as the self,

the colonial, the bourgeoisie, the center, the majority, the occident etc. are seen as more powerful than the opposite set i.e., the other, the colonised, the proletariat, the marginal, the minority, the orient who tend to be repressed or subdued in the larger scheme of things. To elucidate this point, Spivak writes thus, "The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (25). This is precisely the way in which the grand narratives of history undermine or even neglect the subaltern narratives of history, where the powerful center represses and silences the voice of the margins. Thus, she cites the reference of the French philosopher Michel Foucault who noted thus, "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiency elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (25).

Spivak then moves on to consider the 'margins' or in her own words- "one can just as well say the silent, silenced center" (25) which encompasses the illiterate peasantry (both male and female), the tribal people, and those at the lowest strata of urban society as well, all of whom are considered as the 'proletariat'. In this regard, she critiques Michel Foucault and another major thinker by the name of Deleuze, whom she regards responsible for the "epistemic violence" (25), i.e., the imposing of Eurocentric or Westernised set of knowledge (episteme) on the Third World, thereby, establishing its superiority over the latter. This not only leaves little scope for the native knowledge(s) to find an acknowledgement but also constructs the idea of the Third World being inferior to the First World order. Thus, the learner may note that even knowledge systems are politicised in a way, for it engages or involves in power play or the tussle for power.

She speculates that if the First World or the 'developed nations' supposedly under the influence of a strict socialised capital, does open itself to receiving or hearing the collective voice of the 'oppressed Other', they would perhaps gain an insight into their conditions or contexts, as well. It is important to take into account the fact that it is always important to consider and weigh all sides of a matter, the absence of which can weaken one's analysis and make it all one-sided. This is where the question arises

which is also forms the core of the text- on whether the subaltern can speak. She thus, highlights the term 'subaltern' itself, which in other words refers the Third World or the 'developing nations'.

Spivak makes the first proposition that there is a counteractive group of intellectuals emerging from the space of the Third World, stating thus, "the phased development of the subaltern is complicated by the imperialist project-is confronted by a collective of intellectuals who may be called the 'Subaltern Studies' group". They must ask, "Can the subaltern speak?" (25). We shall discuss more about the significance of this group in the next subsection with regard to the emerging themes of the text. Basically, the point that Spivak tries to make is that taken as a whole, the Subaltern Group is inclined in a major way to re-examine Indian colonial historiography in a new light and adopt newer insights and perspectives on the same rather than stick to the already given set of established perspectives. She suggests that this new ways of studying historiography draws one's attention to the oft-forgotten peasant uprisings or "insurgencies" (25) also citing the eminent historian and critic Ranajit Guha thus, "The historiography of Indian nationalism has for long time been dominated by elitism-colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism…shar[ing] the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness-nationalism which confirmed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators policies, institutions, and culture, in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings- to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas" (26).

Again, there is a presence of 'internal-politics' or what Guha terms as "the politics of the people" (26) which operates covertly between the indigenous elite and the poor in the Indian context, even as the colonial influence is already in play. Further, Ranajit Guha also notes that there is a "dynamic stratification grid" (26) in which the dominating macro-structural framework or authority in power, the people and the 'buffer group', occupies a 'liminal' space i.e., condition of hanging 'in-between' these two groups which Derrida referred to as 'antre'. Spivak mentions the divisions or stratifications thus, the first two groups defining the elite section-

1. Dominant foreign groups
2. Dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level.
3. Dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels.
4. The terms 'people' and 'subaltern classes' [are] used as synonymous throughout [Guha's definition]. The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'. (26)

Spivak in examining how these indigenous categories tend to be at loggerheads notes that though all the categories were ideally considered as the 'subaltern', depending on the context and conditions, there was much of a power conflict, even within themselves. Thus, she cites the significant purpose and role of research which is- "to investigate, identify and measure the *specific* nature and degree of the deviation of [the] elements [constituting item 3 mentioned above] from the ideal and situate it historically. 'Investigate, identify, and measure the specific': a program could hardly be more essentialist and taxonomic" (27). Further, she states thus, "In subaltern studies, because of the violence of imperialist, epistemic, social, and disciplinary inscription, a project understood in essentialist terms must have traffic in a radical textual practice of differences" (27).

The subaltern is defined as 'different' from the elite; and their academic pursuits or research does focus on this aspect. Spivak notes that both at the local and the regional level, the indigenous have mostly acted in the interests of the socially dominating groups instead of acting in their own interests and standing up for themselves. Therefore, the core identity of the same indigenous groups is their 'difference' and there is possibly no reason as to why they cannot speak and write themselves in the larger narrative of the nation. Thus, the question that emerges is, in the words of Spivak- "How can we touch the consciousness of the people even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?" (27)

The main objective for the Subaltern Group is to revisit the development of consciousness of the Indian nation. Spivak then turns to the following question that further emerges from her discussion focusing

on the "consciousness of the subaltern" (28). This highlights the necessity of taking into account the issues and aspects of the subaltern that often go neglected and hardly receive any importance in the larger narrative of the nation. These voices cannot be drowned out by the continuous "insurgency" that have suppressed them in every way, misrepresenting their protests as mere "utterances" (28). For this reason, a subaltern like the 'peasant' is considered "a pointer to an irretrievable consciousness" (28) i.e., the irretrievable consciousness of the larger masses.

Along with the Postcolonial critics, there are Feminist critics as well who take up certain strands of thought that draw from the ideas of the deconstructionists and subaltern studies. The point that is made here is that irrespective of the intellectual stance that they take, it will be tremendously difficult for the subject to voice themselves and counter the oppressive forces if they catergorise or continue to be separated further by race, gender, class, creed and other such differences as these are bound to create internal conflicts. These differences have to be done away with and in fact, these categories which are in reality only social constructions has to be broken down if the marginalized is to emerge from the shadows, whether it is in relation to the colonised, the peasant or women subjects.

Until and unless the existence of such social constructions are broken down they will continue to be reproduced and reinforced in every way. For an instance, the construction of gender reinforces and reproduces male dominance; if such social construction is broken down, it will definitely break down the dominant male ideology. The problems confronted by women in the margins are acute and Spivak opines that if the subaltern or the marginalised as a whole cannot speak up for itself, then one can imagine how difficult it will be for the female or women subaltern. Thus, 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…" (28). Spivak thus, ends her essay on this note, perhaps, leaving more scope to further probe into these relevant aspects that has taken the academia by storm.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Mention some of the socially constructed binary opposites.

Q 7: When does the aspect of power come into play?

Q 8: Who according to Spivak comprise the proletariat?

Q 9: What does Spivak mean by the term "epistemic violence" in her essay?

Q10: Name the counteractive group emerging from the space of the Third World.

13.4.1 Major Themes

Some of the major themes that are seen to emerge from the text of the essay shall be discussed in this subsection. It is important to note that the learner is also advised to read through the main text of the prescribed essay followed by the explanation of the text provided in the unit in order to form his or her own analysis of any other emergent themes, apart from the ones discussed below.

The Subaltern or the Marginalised:

In her essay, Spivak highlights some of the pertinent issues regarding capitalism and colonialism, functions of Western ideology and Western epistemic violence, the constructions of binaries and the politics defining it and most importantly, the discourses of the Third World and the subaltern or the marginalised. The term 'subaltern' refers to subordination or in other words those lower in rank or position, as was earlier used in reference to official positions in the British army. The Subaltern as already discussed refers to the marginalised sections of a society, those who are considered to be at the margins or the periphery of a society, given their supposedly weak and inferior position in relation to those who are assumed to be powerful and superior. The marginalised are taken for granted and the dominant assume a dominant position at the center or mainstream of a society as is highlighted in the text of the essay.

The Subaltern group comprises those who have been historically silenced, those groups who have always been denied social welfare and those people who have always been the victims of systemic oppression. This particular section of the society, comprising largely the peasants and labourers, the tribal people and indigenous communities and particularly 'women' have suffered oppression for far too long, being socially disadvantaged and crippled with alienation from their rights and the very land that they have helped to build. Therefore, 'justice' is a must for those at the margins and Subaltern Studies is a start that takes up these discourses upfront and creates a space for dialogue from the margins. In this regard, Spivak herself notes that the main objective of the Subaltern Group is to 'revisit the development of consciousness of the Indian nation'.

Social Construction:

If we take up the aspect of 'social construction', which is at the root of the discourse, Spivak discusses how the categories of identities, binary opposites and such convenient divisions are in reality mere social constructions. This explains the ways in which the larger social consciousness tends to shape up, where these social constructs tend to be internalized and then, reinforced into common practice. Through the perspective of the deconstructionists, Spivak opines that it is important to identify the politics behind the formation of social constructs and to debunk or break down the same in order to end the hegemony or domination of the powerful. She is also critical of the Marxists broadly generalizing the issues of the subaltern group as she takes into account the fact that there may be multiple issues, aspects and conditions within the subaltern group itself that needs to be addressed or expressed, by them alone. The subaltern need to re-write their own narratives, newly narrate their own positions and re-engage in highlighting their own historical struggles instead of accepting the grand narratives, as well as, internalising the social constructs established by the mainstream. In the Indian context, Indian histories and historiographies must take into account the marginal histories of the subaltern instead of

highlighting the larger narratives of the nation. Also, the rigid social constructs and the politics of power to suppress those who are assumed as 'weak' needs to be confronted by those at the margins or the periphery. Further, the dominance of one group over the other within the subaltern group itself needs to be broken down before they can unite in their stand against political hegemony and the long historical injustice of being pushed to the social margins, of being othered and neglected in every way. In so many ways then, Spivak addresses the ground realities of truth construction, the maze of socio-political structures, the insidious ways in which such politics of identity operate and most importantly, the importance of human rights.



LET US KNOW

Postcolonial Studies: In simple terms, it is an area of study, which critically examines the concerns of 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' in a social structure, as well as, the socio-political underpinnings that give rise to these processes. Some of the important names associated with postcolonial studies are namely, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Derek Gregory, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Homie Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak herself among many other noted scholars.

Subaltern Studies: The term 'subaltern' was first used by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist. Subaltern Studies had first emerged in the 1980s, comprising several South Asian scholars highlighting the issues and aspects of the subaltern or the marginalised. These scholars came to be known as the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) or Subaltern Studies Collective that focused on narratives from the margins and examined 'history from below'. Some of the leading names associated with the group are scholars and intellectuals namely, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Sumit Sarkar and Susie Tharu among a few others.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: What does the term 'subaltern' refer to?

Q 13: Whom does the Subaltern Group refer to?

Q 14: What is the role that the subaltern should play with regard to their marginalised position?

Q 15: What should the Indian historians and historiographers take into account with regard to historical narratives?

Q 16: Define the term 'Postcolonial Studies'.

Q 17: Mention some of the leading names associated with the Subaltern Studies.

13.4.2 Style and Language

The critical essays and other writings of Spivak tend to stir the reader's consciousness and interest especially with regard to Subaltern Studies. Most of her intellectual writings delve on the significant discourses on postcolonialism, neocolonialism, feminism and the Subaltern. In the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak examines the problems of identity, ideology and injustice, as well as, the unfair positioning of the Third World together with the pertinent issues of the Third World Woman. Spivak unravels the complexities of these issues, reiterating the importance of counter discourses from the margins. Her own position as an Indian-born, Bengali, middle class, woman, academician and American resident is not separate from these major discourses that she takes up, examines, intervenes and then formulates into words.

Thus, it is only too obvious that her style of writing is rhetorical and her style of articulation is as elegant as eloquent (much as her academic lectures, also available on the internet). Her expressions are formulated in an argumentative style and her various points of argument are neat and precise. In addition, the learner may note that there are several cross references available in the text, which calls for referring to the respective scholars in the field and the

significant strands of their argument as well. With regard to her style of writing that encompasses all of these complex and inter-related issues and aspects, Seldon et. al aptly note, "And this, in turn, will affect matters of language, style and audience. If Spivak's prose can be ungracious and convoluted, therefore, we should bear in mind the problematics of her own position and her very evident awareness of its intricacies" (235).

While attempting to read the text of the essay which is reasonably short in length, the learner will note that the language employed is neither too simplistic nor too ornate in its style of expression. Although, the language is dense at times given the complexity of the topic itself and it often appears difficult to extract its meaning in the first reading of the text, yet it is relatively easy to point out the basic arguments highlighted in her essay. Therefore, it is suggested that the learner attempts several reading of the text in order to fully comprehend the arguments and the validity of the justifications that the critic puts forth her readers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q18: What does Spivak basically examine in her essay?

Q19: Write a few words on Spivak's style of writing with reference to her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

13.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Lodge and Wood in *Modern Criticism and Theory* (2008) provide a short entry on the contributions of Spivak as an emerging voice of the times, highlighting her central concerns that clearly defines and shapes up most of her works in the following words, "The Subaltern Studies group who published radical revisions of Asian colonial history between 1982 and 1954, owed much to Spivak and Ranajit Guha's energy in deconstructing imperial accounts of 'native' rebellion and customs to allow other voices freer play" (494). Further, Selden et al. in their entry on Spivak in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (2007) opine thus,

"A leading postcolonial critic who closely follows the lessons of deconstruction and whose work raises once more the difficult politics of this enterprise is Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, also translator and author of the important translator's preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976). In addition to a defiantly unassimilated 'ethics' of deconstruction, Spivak draws, too, on Marxism and feminism, and this stringently 'anti-foundationalist', hybridized eclecticism is itself significant, since she aims not to synthesize these sources but to preserve their discontinuities- the ways they bring each other to crisis" (233).

They aptly note that following closely in the steps of Derrida, both her works and her methodology is clearly deconstructionist in nature or rather "anti-foundationalist" (233) which enquires the validity of structural systems and also examines the politics of identity. Further, if the Western 'intellectuals' are to take the side of the subaltern to speak on their behalf and in another sense if the subaltern themselves fail to take a stand for themselves, then the much needed counter-colonial discourse will not take place in the way it should.

In this regard, Spivak in her discussion on the condition of subalternity and the emerging role of the Subaltern Studies in an essay titled "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" (refer to *Subaltern Studies*) notes that the 'Subaltern Studies Group' significantly "offers a theory of change" (330). While examining the aspect of collective subaltern consciousness and the importance of revisiting historiography, she notes that the Subaltern Studies Group has an extensive role to play in facilitating newer perspectives and dialogues both at present and in the time to come. Thus, the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is considered one of the leading texts, which is widely referred to and highly regarded by academicians, critics, intellectuals and thinkers particularly engaged in this area of study.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 20: What does Seldon et al. opine with regard to the works and methodology employed by Spivak?

Q 21: What according to Spivak does the Subaltern Studies Group do?



13.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, the learner will gain an idea on the life and the scholarly contributions of the leading intellectual and postcolonial critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is internationally reputed for her work particularly in the area of Subaltern Studies. Through the discussion of the text of the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that is provided in the unit, the learner will now be able to explain, as well as, highlight the main ideas and arguments of the essay. After a thorough reading of the text and the present unit, the learner will be in a position to highlight the major themes that emerge from the essay and examine the style and language employed in the text. Moreover, the learner will be aware of the critical reception of this seminal work and thereby discuss the major aspects of the essay addressed in the unit. Therefore, it is hoped that the learner will further explore other critical texts that delve on the issues of the subaltern and those who thrive at the peripheries of the social structures. The subaltern or the marginalized are the agents of change and they need to articulate their narratives, to be heard as they certainly have a voice of their own.



13.7 FURTHER READING

Guha, Ranajit. (Ed.). (2010). *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. New Delhi: OUP.

Lodge, David and Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (1988). *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. 2nd Edition. New Delhi: Pearson.

Selden, Raman. et al. (2007). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Fifth Edition). New Delhi: Pearson.



13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK OUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was born in 24 February 1942 in Calcutta.

Ans to Q 2: Spivak studied at the prestigious Presidency College in Calcutta graduating in the year 1959 before deciding pursue her higher studies at the University of Cambridge and eventually completing her doctoral studies at Cornell University in 1967.

Ans to Q 3: *Myself I Must Remake* (1974), *Of Grammatology* (1976), *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990), *Thinking Academic Freedom in Gendered Post-Coloniality* (1992), *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993), *The Spivak Reader* (1995), *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), *Death of a Discipline* (2003), *Other Asias* (2008), *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012) and *Readings* (2014).

Ans to Q 4: The translated works of the leading writer and activist, Mahaswata Devi from Bengali to English which were done by Spivak are namely *Imaginary Maps* (1994), *Breast Stories* (1997), *Old Women* (1999) and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (2002).

Ans to Q 5: Spivak had received the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy in the year 2002 and was honored the Padma Bhushan in the year 2013.

Ans to Q 6: Some of the binary opposites are such as the self and the other, colonial and the colonised, the bourgeois and the proletariat, center and marginal, majority and minority, occident and the orient among other such constructed socio-political and historical notions.

Ans to Q 7: The aspect of power-play enters when one set of the binary opposite such as the self, the colonial, the bourgeoisie, the center, the majority, the occident etc. are seen as more powerful than the opposite set i.e., the other, the colonised, the proletariat, the marginal, the minority, the orient who tend to be repressed or subdued in the larger scheme of things.

Ans to Q 8: The illiterate peasantry (both male and female), the tribal people, and those at the lowest strata of urban society as well, all of whom are considered as the 'proletariat'.

Ans to Q 9: It refers to the imposing of Eurocentric or Westernised set of knowledge (episteme) on the Third World, thereby, establishing its superiority over the latter. This not only leaves little scope for the native

knowledge(s) to find an acknowledgement but also constructs the idea of the Third World being inferior to the First World order.

Ans to Q 10: The counteractive group of intellectuals emerging from the space of the Third World is the Subaltern.

Ans to Q 12: The term 'subaltern' refers to subordination or in other words those lower in rank or position… …reference to official positions in the British army… …the Subaltern refers to the marginalized sections of a society… …given their assumed weak and inferior position in relation to the powerful and superior or dominant position of those at the center or mainstream of a society.

Ans to Q 13: The Subaltern group comprises those who have been historically silenced, those groups who have always been denied social welfare and those people who have always been the victims of systemic oppression.

Ans to Q 14: The subaltern need to re-write their own narratives, newly narrate their own positions and re-engage in highlighting their own historical struggles instead of accepting the grand narratives, as well as, internalising the social constructs established by the mainstream.

Ans to Q 15: In the Indian context, Indian historians and historiographers must take into account the marginal histories of the subaltern instead of highlighting the larger narratives of the nation.

Ans to Q 16: Examines the concerns of 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' in a social structure… …the socio-political underpinnings that give rise to these processes… … Some important names are namely, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Derek Gregory, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak herself among others.

Ans to Q 17: Some of the leading names associated with the group are scholars and intellectuals namely, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, Partha Chatterjee, Sumit Sarkar, Susie Tharu and Ranajit Guha among a few others.

Ans to Q 18: In the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak examines the problems of identity, ideology and injustice, as well as, the unfair positioning of the Third World together with the pertinent issues of the

Third World Woman. Spivak unravels the complexities of these issues, reiterating the importance of counter discourses from the margins.

Ans to Q 19: Thus, it is only too obvious that her style of writing is rhetorical and her style of articulation is as elegant as eloquent (much as her academic lectures, also available on the internet). Her expressions are formulated in an argumentative style and her various points of argument are neat and precise.

Ans to Q 20: They aptly note that following closely in the steps of Derrida, both her works and her methodology is clearly deconstructionist in nature or rather "anti-foundationalist" (233) which enquires the validity of structural systems and also examines the politics of identity.

Ans to Q 21: Spivak in her discussion on the condition of subalternity and the emerging role of the Subaltern Studies in an essay titled "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography", notes that the 'Subaltern Studies Group' significantly "offers a theory of change" (330).



13.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a note on the life and works of the academician, scholar and critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Q 2: Explain the content of the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in your own words.

Q 3: Discuss the major themes that emerge from the text of the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Q 4: Analyse the style and language employed by Gayatri Spivak in the text of her seminal essay.

Q 5: Give a critical reception of the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in your own words.

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UNIT 14: HOMI K. BHABHA: "NARRATING THE NATION" FROM *NATION AND NARRATION*

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Homi K. Bhabha: The Critic

14.4 Reading the text: "Narrating the Nation"

14.5 Critical Reception of Bhabha

14.6 Let us Sum up

14.7 Further Reading

14.8 Answers to Check Our Progress (Hints Only)

14.9 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of the theorist Homi Bhabha
- read "Narrating the Nation" as one of the significant essays of Bhabha
- identify the important issues raised by Bhabha in the essay
- comment on the reception of Homi Bhabha as a postcolonial critic

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss Homi Bhabha's essay "Narrating the Nation" which is also the Introduction to his book *Nation and Narration* (1990). This book is primarily an intervention into "essentialist" readings of nationality that attempt to define and naturalize Third World "nations" by means of the supposedly homogenous, innate, and historically continuous traditions that falsely define and ensure their subordinate status. Nations, in Bhabha's views, are "narrative" constructions that arise from the "hybrid" interaction of contending cultural constituencies. We have provided the entire short essay in the unit for our reading. Our job shall be to jot down the important

issues and ideas mentioned by Bhabha and then try to locate their significance in the Postcolonial discourse. However, as we finish reading the unit, we should be able to highlight the important issues raised by Bhabha regarding the idea of nation in the prescribed text.

14.3 HOMI BHABHA: THE CRITIC

Homi K. Bhabha (1949-) is an Indian literary and cultural critic, influential theorist of postcolonial culture, and engaged advocate for the humanities. Together with Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, he is recognised as one of the most significant contributors to Postcolonial theory.

He was born in Bombay, India, into a Parsi family. He graduated with a B. A. from *Elphinstone College*, *University of Mumbai* and an M. A., M. Phil., and *D. Phil.* in English Literature from *Christ Church, Oxford University*. After working in the Department of English at the University of Sussex for more than ten years, Bhabha received a senior fellowship at Princeton University, where he was also made Old Dominion Visiting Professor. He was also the Steinberg Visiting Professor at the University of Pennsylvania where he delivered the Richard Wright Lecture Series. At Dartmouth College, Bhabha was a faculty fellow at the School of Criticism and Theory. From 1997 to 2001, he served as Chester D. Tripp Professor in the Humanities at the University of Chicago. Then again, from 2001–02, he served as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at University College, London. He has been the Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University since 2001. Bhabha is also on the Editorial Collective of the journal *Public Culture* published by Duke University Press.

The Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of English and American Literature and Language, and the Director of the Mahindra Humanities Center at *Harvard University*, Bhabha is one of the most important figures in contemporary Post-colonial studies. He is mostly known for coining many of the key terms in the field of Post-colonial theory such as *hybridity*, mimicry, difference, and ambivalence—terms, which describe the ways in which

the colonised people have, resisted the power of the coloniser, as conceived by Bhabha. In 2012, he received the *Padma Bhushan* Award from the Government of India for his contribution in the field of literature and education.

His considerable reputation is based upon two books *Nation and Narration* (1990) an edited volume and *The Location of Culture* (1994)—a collection of his own essays—many of which were published elsewhere and heavily revised. We should note that these essays are dense, richly eclectic and characterised by a style of writing that is personal. *Nations and Narration* takes its inspiration from Benedict Anderson's thesis that the nation is an 'imagined community' whose sense of identity is grounded in an imagined sense of historical community and continuity which may be quite illusory. It is also inspired by the French historian Ernest Renan's "What is a Nation", where he argues that a nation is not based on the 'purity of race', but upon a collective will to live together and a combination of memory and amnesia.

Aligned with the works of the psychoanalytic and post-structuralist thinkers, Bhabha has been a profoundly original voice in the study of colonial, postcolonial, and globalized cultures. His engagements with terms like hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry—formed the basis for postcolonial theory, besides also inspiring further works in Management Studies, Art theory, Architecture, Human rights, Development Studies, Theology, and many other unexpected fields. His works remain an essential reference for anyone interested in the hybrid cultural perspectives associated with Colonialism and Globalization. Drawing on many demanding theorists and covering a range of histories and cultures, Bhabha's work elaborates a series of concepts that capture the ways the colonized resisted the authority of the colonizer, an authority that was from the start ambivalent and anxious.



LET US KNOW

Some Important Concepts of Homi Bhabha:

Hybridity:

One of his central ideas is that of "hybridisation," which, taking up from Edward Said's work, describes the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. Instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. His work transformed the study of colonialism by applying post-structuralist methodologies to colonial texts.

Ambivalence:

The idea of ambivalence sees culture as consisting of opposing perceptions and dimensions. Bhabha claims that this ambivalence—this duality that presents a split in the identity of the colonized other—allows for beings who are a hybrid of their own cultural identity and the colonizer's cultural identity. Ambivalence contributes to the reason why colonial power is characterized by its belatedness. Accordingly, the colonial presence remains ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. This opens up the two dimensions of colonial discourse: that which is characterized by invention and mastery and that of displacement and fantasy.

Mimicry:

Like Bhabha's concept of hybridity, mimicry is a metonym of presence. Mimicry appears when members of a colonized society imitate and take on the culture of the colonizers. Colonial mimicry comes from the colonist's desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is, as Bhabha writes, "almost the same, but not quite". Thus, mimicry is a sign of a double articulation; a strategy which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power.

Third Space:

The Third Space acts as an ambiguous area that develops when two or more individuals/cultures interact. It "challenges our sense of the

historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People". This ambivalent area of discourse, which serves as a site for the discursive conditions of enunciation, "displaces the narrative of the Western written in homogeneous, serial time."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why is Homi K. Bhabha famous for?

Q 2: Name the two books on which rest Bhabha's reputation.

Q 3: Explain the terms 'Mimicry' and 'Hybridity'.

14.4 READING THE TEXT: "NARRATING THE NATION" FROM NATION AND NARRATION

We are here providing the whole essay of the prescribed text for your perusal. For you convenience, we shall italicise some of the important issues and ideas discussed by Bhabha in this text.

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation - or narration - might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. This is not to deny the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present of the *Volk*. Nor have such political ideas been definitively superseded by those new realities of internationalism, multi-nationalism, or even 'late capitalism', once we acknowledge that the rhetoric of these global terms is most often underwritten in that grim prose of power that each nation can wield within its own sphere of influence. *What I want to emphasize in that large and liminal image of the nation with which I began is a particular*

ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality. Benedict Anderson, whose *Imagined Communities* significantly paved the way for this book, expresses the nation's ambivalent emergence with great clarity:

The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. . . [Few] things were (are) suited to this end better than the idea of nation. If nation states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical', the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and...glide into a limitless future. What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which - as well as against which - it came into being.

The nation's 'corning into being' as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social life rather than the discipline of social polity, emphasizes this instability of knowledge. For instance, the most interesting accounts of the national idea, whether they come from the Tory Right, the Liberal high ground, or the New Left, seem to concur on the ambivalent tension that defines the 'society' of the nation. Michael Oakeshott's 'Character of a modern European state' is perhaps the most brilliant conservative account of the equivocal nature of the modern nation. The national space is, in his view, constituted from competing dispositions of human association as *societas* (the acknowledgement of moral rules and conventions of conduct) and *universitas* (the acknowledgement of common purpose and substantive end). In the absence of their merging into a new identity, they have survived as competing dogmas -*societas cum universitate* - 'impos[ing] a particular ambivalence upon all the institutions of a modern state and a specific ambiguity upon its vocabulary of discourse. *In Hannah Arendt's view, the society of the nation in the modern world is*

'that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance' and the two realms flow unceasingly and uncertainly into each other 'like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself'.' No less certain is Tom Nairn, in naming the nation 'the modern Janus', that the 'uneven development' of capitalism inscribes both progression and regression, political rationality and irrationality in the very genetic code of the nation. This is a structural fact to which there are no exceptions and 'in this sense, it is an exact (not a rhetorical) statement about nationalism to say that it is by nature ambivalent'.

It is the cultural representation of this ambivalence of modern society that is explored in this book. If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narritives and discourses that signify a sense of 'nationness': the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the *langue* of the law and the *parole* of the people.

The emergence of the political 'rationality' of the nation as a form of narrative—textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative stratagems - has its own history. It is suggested in Benedict Anderson's view of the space and time of the modern nation as embodied in the narrative culture of the realist novel, and explored in Tom Nairn's reading of Ernest Powell's post-imperial racism which is based on the 'symbol-fetishism' that infests his febrile, neo-romantic poetry. *To encounter the nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, over determined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically in the discourse of the sign. Such an approach contests the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge— Tradition,*

People, the Reason of State, High Culture, for instance—whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity. Traditional histories do not take the nation at its own word, but, for the most part, they do assume that the problem lies with the interpretation of 'events' that have a certain transparency or privileged visibility.

To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. If the problematic 'closure' of textuality questions the 'totalization' of national culture, then its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life. This is a project that has a certain currency within those forms of critique associated with 'cultural studies'. Despite the considerable advance this represents, there is a tendency to read the Nation rather restrictively; either, as the ideological apparatus of state power, somewhat redefined by a hasty, functionalist reading of Foucault or Bakhtin; or, in a more utopian inversion, as the incipient or emergent expression of the 'national-popular' sentiment preserved in a radical memory. These approaches are valuable in drawing our attention to those easily obscured, but highly significant, recesses of the national culture from which alternative constituencies of peoples and oppositional analytic capacities may emerge—youth, the everyday, nostalgia, new 'ethnicities', new social movements, 'the politics of difference'. They assign new meanings and different directions to the process of historical change. The most progressive development from such positions take 'a discursive conception of ideology - ideology (like language) is conceptualised in terms of the articulation of elements. As Volosinov said, the ideological sign is always 'multi-accentual and Janus-faced'. But in the heat of political argument the 'doubling' of the sign can often be stilled. The Janus face of ideology is taken at face value and its meaning fixed, in the last instance, on one side of the divide between ideology and 'material conditions.'

It is the project of Nation and Narration to explore the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation. This turns the familiar two-faced god into a figure

of prodigious doubling that investigates the nation-space in the process of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in medias res; and history may be half-made because is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image. Without such an understanding of the performativity of language in the narratives of the nation, it would be difficult to understand why Edward Said prescribes a kind of 'analytic pluralism' as the *form* of critical attention appropriate to the cultural effects of the nation. *For the nation, as a form of cultural elaboration (in the Gramscian sense), is an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for 'subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding.*

I wrote to my contributors with a growing, if unfamiliar, sense of the nation as one of the major structures of ideological ambivalence within the cultural representations of 'modernity'. My intention was that we should develop, in a nice collaborative tension, a range of readings that engaged the insights of poststructuralist theories of narrative knowledge—textuality, discourse, enunciation, *écriture*, 'the unconscious as a language' to name only a few strategies - in order to evoke this ambivalent margin of the nation-space. To reveal such a margin is, in the first instance, to contest claims to cultural supremacy, whether these are made from the 'old' post-imperialist metropolitan nations, or on behalf of the 'new' independent nations of the periphery. The marginal or 'minority' is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity - progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past - that rationalize the authoritarian, 'normalizing' tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative. In this sense, then, the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as 'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production.



LET US KNOW

By now, we have learnt that Homi Bhabha is a distinguished name in the field of Postcolonial theory. However, in a 1995 interview with W. J. T. Mitchell, Bhabha stated that Edward Said is the writer who has most influenced him.

The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/ inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. The address to nation as narration stresses the insistence of political power and cultural authority in what Derrida describes as the 'irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic'. What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated. It is from such narrative positions between cultures and nations, theories and texts, the political, the poetic and the painterly, the past and the present, *that Nation and Narration seeks to affirm and extend Frantz Fanon's revolutionary credo: 'National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension'.* It is this international dimension both within the margins of the nation-space and in the boundaries in-between nations and peoples that the authors of this book have sought to represent in their essays. The representative emblem of this book might be a chiasmatic 'figure' of cultural difference whereby the anti-nationalist, ambivalent nation-space becomes the crossroads to a new transnational culture. The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'.

Without attempting to précis individual essays, I would like briefly to elaborate this movement*, within Nation and Narration, from the problematic*

unity of the nation to the articulation of cultural difference in the construction of an international perspective. The story could start in many places: with David Simpson's reading of the multiform 'body' of Whitman's American populism and his avoidance of metaphor which is also an avoidance of the problems of integration and cultural difference; or Doris Sommer's exploration of the language of love and productive sexuality that allegorizes and organizes the early historical narratives of Latin America which are disavowed by the later 'Boom' novelists; or John Barrell's exploration of the tensions between the civic humanist theory of painting and the 'discourse of custom' as they are drawn together in the ideology of the 'ornamental' in art, and its complex mediation of Englishness; or Sneja Gunew's portrayal of an Australian literature split between an Anglo-Celtic public sphere and a multiculturalist counter-public sphere. It is the excluded voices of migrants and the marginalized that Gunew represents, bringing them back to disturb and interrupt the writing of the Australian canon.

In each of these 'foundational fictions' the origins of national traditions turn out to be as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation. In this function of national history as *Entstellung*, the forces of social antagonism or contradiction cannot be transcended or dialectically surmounted. There is a suggestion that the constitutive contradictions of the national text are discontinuous and 'interruptive'. This is Geoff Bennington's starting point as he puns (with a certain postmodern prescience) on the 'postal politics' of national frontiers to suggest that 'Frontiers are articulations, boundaries are, constitutively, crossed and transgressed'. It is across such boundaries, both historical and pedagogical, that Martin Thom places Renan's celebrated essay 'What is a nation?'. He provides a careful genealogy of the national idea as it emerges mythically from the Germanic tribes, and more recently in the interrelations between the struggle to consolidate the Third Republic and the emergence of Durkheimian sociology.

What kind of a cultural space is the nation with its transgressive boundaries and its 'interruptive' interiority? Each essay answers this question

differently but there is a moment in Simon During's exposition of the 'civil imaginary' when he suggests that 'part of the modern domination of the life-world by style and civility...is a process of the feminisation of society'. This insight is explored in two very different contexts, Gillian Beer's reading of Virginia Woolf and Rachel Bowlby's study of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Gillian Beer takes the perspective of the aeroplane—war machine, dream symbol, icon of the 1930s poets—to emphasize Woolf's reflections on the island race, and space; its multiple marginal significations—'land and water margins, home, body, individualism'—providing another inflection to her quarrels with patriarchy and imperialism. Rachel Bowlby writes the cultural history of readings of Uncle Tom's Cabin, that debate the feminization of American cultural values while producing a more complex interpretation of her own. The narrative of American freedom, she suggests, displays the same ambivalence that constructs the contradictory nature of femininity in the text. America itself becomes the Dark Continent, doubly echoing the 'image' of Africa and Freud's metaphor for feminine sexuality. George Harris, the former slave, leaves for the new African state of Liberia.

It is when the western nation comes to be seen, in Conrad's famous phrase, as one of the dark corners of the earth, that we can begin to explore new places from which to write histories of peoples and construct theories of narration. Each time the question of cultural difference emerges as a challenge to relativistic notions of the diversity of culture; it reveals the margins of modernity. As a result, most of these essays have ended up in another cultural location from where they started—often taking up a 'minority' position. Francis Mulhern's study of the 'English ethics' of Leavisian universalism pushes towards a reading of Q. D. Leavis' last public lecture in Cheltenham where she bemoans the imperilled state of that England which bore the classical English novel; an England, now, of council-house dwellers, unassimilated minorities, sexual emancipation without responsibility. Suddenly the paranoid system of 'English reading' stands revealed. James Snead ends his interrogation of the ethics and aesthetics of western 'nationalist' universalism with a reading of Ishmael Reed, who 'is revising a prior co-optation of black culture, using a narrative principle

that will undermine the very assumptions that brought the prior appropriation about'. Timothy Brennan produces a panoramic view of the western history of the national idea and its narrative forms, finally to take his stand with those hybridizing writers like Salman Rushdie whose glory and grotesquerie he in their celebration of the fact that English is no longer an English language. This, as Brennan points out, leads to a more articulate awareness of the post-colonial and neo-colonial conditions as authoritative positions from which to speak Janus-faced to east and west. But these positions across the frontiers of history, culture, and language, which we have been exploring, are dangerous, if essential, political projects. Bruce Robbins' reading of Dickens balances the risks of departing from the 'ethical home truths' of humanistic experience with the advantages of developing a knowledge of acting in a dispersed global system. Our attention to 'aporia' he suggests, should be counterpointed with an intentionality that is inscribed in *poros*–practical, technical know-how that abjures the rationalism of universals, while maintaining the practicality, and political strategy, of dealing professionally with local situations that are themselves defined as liminal and borderline.

America leads to Africa, the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis. The island story is told from the eye of the aeroplane which becomes that ‚ornament' that holds the public and the private in suspense. The bastion of Englishness crumbles at the sight of immigrants and factory workers. The great Whitmanesque sensorium of America is exchanged for a Warhol blowup, a Kruger installation, or Mapplethorpe's naked bodies. 'Magical realism' after the Latin American Boom, becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world. Amidst these exorbitant images of the nation-space in its transnational dimension there are those who have not yet found their nation: amongst them the Palestinians and the Black South Africans. It is our loss that in making this book we were unable to add their voices to ours. Their persistent questions remain to remind us, in some form or measure, of what must be true for the rest of us too: 'When did we

become "a people"? When did we stop being one? Or are we in the process of becoming one? What do these big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others?"'

Thus from the reading of the essay, we have learnt that 'Nations; like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye.' This proclamation in the beginning of the essay can serve as a possible starting-point of a postcolonial reading of a major novel written during the period of the Raj in which 'India as the nation' finds a very prominent place. For example, the vast space of the country, in *Gora*, is transformed into some kind of a symbolical space from where and for which the discourse of nationalism can be enunciated in the idioms of 'horizontal society–many as one –people' in a narrative of homogeneous, visual time of the 'nation'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is the ambivalence that Bhabha talks about in the beginning of the essay?

Q 5: What is Hanna Arendt's view on the society of the nation in modern worlds?

Q 6: Mention, from your reading of the essay, the important thinkers and critics from whom Bhabha borrowed his ideas?

14.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF BHABHA

Homi Bhabha's works over the last few decades has been occasional, his influence has grown far beyond postcolonial literary and cultural studies. However, Bhabha has also been criticized for using indecipherable jargon and dense prose. In 1998, the journal *Philosophy and Literature* awarded Bhabha second prize in its "Bad Writing Competition," which "celebrates bad writing from the most stylistically lamentable passages found in scholarly books and articles." Bhabha was awarded the prize for a sentence in his *The Location of Culture* that reads: "If, for a while, the ruse of desire is calculable for the uses of discipline soon the

repetition of guilt, justification, pseudo-scientific theories, superstition, spurious authorities, and classifications can be seen as the desperate effort to "normalize" formally the disturbance of a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality."

Mark Crispin Miller, a professor of Media Studies at New York University, remarked on Bhabha's writing like this: "One could finally argue that there is no meaning there, beyond the neologisms and Latinate buzzwords. Most of the time I don't know what he's talking about."

In a 2005 interview, Bhabha expressed his annoyance at such criticisms and the implied expectation that philosophers should use the "common language of the common person," while scientists are given a pass for the similar use of language that is not immediately comprehensible to casual readers. In his review entitled "Goodbye to the Enlightenment", Terry Eagleton provided a more substantive critique of Bhabha's work, explaining in *The Guardian* (1994) that "Bhabha's aim is to put the skids under every cherished doctrine of Western Enlightenment, from the idea of progress to the unity of the self, from the classical work of art to the notions of law and civility." Bhabha uses India, for instance, as an example of alternative possibilities when he argues that the very idea and practice of secularism is changing.



14.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Homi K. Bhabha is one of the most important thinkers in the field of Post-colonial criticism. His critical works in the form of books and essays developed a set of challenging concepts that are central to post-colonial theory: hybridity, mimicry, difference, ambivalence. These concepts describe ways in which colonized peoples have resisted the power of the colonizer, a power that is never as secure as it seems to be. His views also illuminate our present situation, in a world marked by a paradoxical combination of violently proclaimed cultural difference and the complexly interconnected networks of globalization. From

this unit, we have also learnt about the idea of the 'nation' as conceived by Homi Bhabha.



14.7 FURTHER READING

Bhabha, Homi. (Ed.). (1990). *Nations and Narration*. London & New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi. (1994). *The Location of Culture.* London and New York: Routledge.

Web Resource:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homi_K._Bhabha

http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0057.xml



14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK OUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Bhabha is one of the most important figures in contemporary Post-colonial studies… …also known for coining many key terms in the field of Post-colonial theory such as *hybridity*, mimicry, difference, and ambivalence… …these terms describe the ways in which the colonised people have resisted the power of the coloniser, as conceived by Bhabha.

Ans to Q 2: His considerable reputation is based upon two books *Nation and Narration* (1990) an edited volume and *The Location of Culture* (1994)—a collection of his own essays—many of which were published elsewhere and heavily revised.

Ans to Q 3: Mimicry appears when members of a colonized society imitate and take on the culture of the colonizers… …colonial mimicry comes from the colonist's desire for a reformed, recognizable Other… …mimicry is a sign of a double articulation; a strategy which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power… …with the term

Hybridity, Bhabha shows how histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations.

Ans to Q 4: The image of the nation is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it… …the ambivalence emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.

Ans to Q 5: In Hannah Arendt's view, the society of the nation in the modern world is 'that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance' and the two realms flow unceasingly and uncertainly into each other 'like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself'.'

Ans to Q 6: Benedict Anderson's idea of "Imagined Communities"… …Jacques Derrida's idea of Deconstruction… …Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalysis… …Michel Foucault's notion of discursivity… …



14.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Homi Bhabha's contributions to Postcolonial theory.

Q 2: What are the terms coined and popularised by Homi K. Bhabha? How do they reflect his thinking as a Postcolonial critic?

Q 3: Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time. Discuss.

Q 4: How does Homi Bhabha conceptualise the idea of a nation? Elaborate.

Q 5: Write a note on the reception of Homi K. Bhabha as a Postcolonial critic.

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UNIT 15: EDWARD SAID: "INTRODUCTION" FROM *ORIENTALISM*

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Edward Said: Life and Works

15.4 Reading the Text: "Introduction" from *Orientalism*

15.4.1 A Section-wise Overview of "Introduction" to *Orientalism*

15.4.2 Brief Discussion of the Text

15.5 Important Issues Raised

15.6 Reception of Said

15.7 Let us Sum up

15.8 Further Reading

15.9 Ans to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

15.10 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of Edward Said
- explain the meaning of the term Orientalism
- highlight the central points of importance discussed by Said in the "Introduction"
- examine how Said's idea of orientalism forms an important concept in the larger body of postcolonial theory

15.2 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, in this unit, we shall make an attempt to examine the concept of orientalism as we read the "Introduction" to Edward Said's *Orientalism* which is considered to be one of the most important texts in the field of postcolonial theory. Said's *Orientalism* is regarded as one of the major contributions in this area as it brought to focus the ways in which non- Western cultures had been subjected to the hegemonic construction

of the West. "The East"–generally comprising the countries from Asia, North Africa and Middle East–came to represent a homogeneity, which the West looked upon as reflecting the culture of the 'Other'. Said in this book, attempts a critique of the hegemonic construction of East perpetrated through the colonial discourses while looking at it as the consequence of imperial machinery which sought for justifications and legitimizations of its dominion over the non-west. As we read about the 'Introduction' to his book *Orientalism*, in this unit, we shall be able to locate many of Said's major concerns as a postcolonial critic.

15.3 EDWARD SAID: LIFE AND WORKS

Edward Said was born in the year 1935 in Jerusalem, to a Christian Palestinian family, which had an affluent life. However, as his family was displaced, Said grew up in the genteel surrounds of Cairo. He received his college education at Victoria College, Cairo, Mount Hermon School, Massachussetts and at Princeton and Harvard Universities. He was a Visiting Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard in 1974, a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioural Science at Stanford and a Visiting Professor of Humanities in the John Hopkins University in 1979. Said was also the recipient of several prestigious honours including Harvard University's Bowdoin Prize in 1976 and the Lionel Trilling Award in 1994.

Edward Said has authored several outstanding books some of which include *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), *The Question of Palestine* (1979), *Literature and Society* (1980), *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1984), *Covering Islam* (1981), *After the Last Sky* (1986), *Blaming the Victims* (1988), *Musical Elaborations* (1991), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994) and *Peace and its Discontents: Essays on Palestine and Middle East Peace Process* (1996). Since his childhood, Said was influenced by a number of factors such as the effect of missionaries, British colonialism, his father's professing of American patriotism, the attempts at marginalising of Arab history, culture and language within his family and its silence about Palestine, his Western education including his American

education and his American citizenship and so on. Moreover, Said had also been subjected to the overwhelming social, political and cultural happenings during the period from 1948 to 1967 made him recognize that terms such as America, Europe, or even Islam are in fact 'constructed' categories although they apparently seem innocent and that it is rather impossible to have purist categories in such entities.

Let us have a brief survey of some of the significant texts authored by Said, which shall throw light on the primary issues that are of importance to his works and his philosophy. *The World, the Text and the Critic* is a collection of essays on diverse issues authored by Said and these were composed in the period spreading across 1969 to 1981. In one of the essays contained in this collection, Said has remarked that "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (4) This view of Said throws light on his approach to the activity of reading and writing in relation to his engagement as a responsible intellectual in the larger domain of academics. It is such an approach which highlights Said's "beginning intention and method" in terms of the later works which was to write.

In *The World*, Said acknowledges the significant contributions forwarded by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault in the world of contemporary theory and how going by their approach, the processes of reading and writing has come to be looked upon in an unconventional manner. However, it is also significant to note that for Said it is not only the theoretical underpinnings of critical discourse that occupies centre stage; rather it is perhaps more important to understand the challenging forces which lead to the production of a certain text at a given point of time. Therefore, it is important for the critic to be neutral towards the text – to maintain an equal distance from "critical systems and from the dogmas and orthodoxies of the dominant culture". In this collection of essays, Said contends that it is necessary for the critic to be conscious and responsive towards history, to be aware of the limitations and constraints created by social, political and multifaceted human experience in the process of living,

which influence the shaping of a text. In his own unique manner, Said provides a subtle yet influential and original meaning to literary criticism in modern society.

Beginnings: Intention and Method is one of those works, which belong to the early period of Said's career. Here, Said declares, "the writer's life, his career, and his text form a system of relationships whose configuration *in real human time* becomes progressively stronger" (227). Critics and theorists are of the opinion that *Beginnings* reflect Said's penchant for philology and its acclaimed practitioners and its application of 'generalism' as a method of intellectual performance. Such an approach has perhaps enabled Said to evolve a counter position in relation to his stance as a professional intellectual in the sphere of academics and public space as well while giving shape to a 'oppositional humanistic critical practice.' It is in this work that Said developed his idea on the method of contrapuntal reading, which, according to Paul Gilroy, is a "politically-informed evaluation that sets the logic of particular cultural forms in concrete relationships with the historical processes that shaped them, and to which they in turn contribute." Said's life as a displaced Palestinian has exerted a significant influence in giving shape to his position as a literary and cultural critic. It is noteworthy that Said's personal history has a considerable contribution in making his critical work appear real and relevant for the academia and the reading public in general. In him, one would perhaps be able to discern the merging of the academic the political; and this is evident in the fact that he could actively stand for the Palestinian cause despite having a distinguished stint as a Professor at Columbia University. Besides, it is also interesting to note that Said established himself as a distinguished opera critic, a public speaker, a pianist and an essayist who contributed frequently to Arab newspapers.

In his later works such as *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism* (1978), Said develops further on the method of contrapuntal reading through which makes an effort to reveal that all creative and academic works appear as ideological products situated within a certain social, political and cultural context. As such, these works do not seem to engage with aesthetics solely;

rather what becomes more important is an understanding of the political and ideological forces that were responsible in producing those works at a given point of time. Said is of the view that Western literary output cannot claim autonomy and that the historical, economic, political, cultural and social factors had immensely contributed towards the shaping of literature. It is also noteworthy that such Western discourse, according to Said had produced the non-West as a homogenised entity, as its other, the "imagined communities" to employ Benedict Anderson's phrase– the 'non-West' thus seemed as within reach, visible and predictable to the West. In *Culture and Imperialism,* which was published after *Orientalism*, Said argues that though culture may be distinguished from imperialism, both terms are interrelated. According to him, imperialism may be defined as "thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others" (CI, 7). Subsequently, he goes on to analyse how imperial ideology is still functional especially in the American context post World War II despite the non-existence of colonies.

Another significant text by Said is *Representations of the Intellectual*–a collection of essays based on 1993 Reith Lectures. These essays are an exploration of the idea of being an intellectual in the contemporary times. Said tries to examine the role of the intellectual in the present socio-political scenario while questioning if the intellectual's responsibility can be limited solely to specialised issues concerning academics or do an intellectuals need to associate themselves to the manifold social, political, cultural or other such issues which afflict contemporary lives. Like in all his works Said, the distinguished critic of culture, appears brilliant and impresses his readers through his objective analyses and eloquent writing. Said looks at the intellectual as one who is rather an amateur and an exile in that his or her affiliations should rest with the greater interest of society whereby he/she shall be always inspired to "speak the truth to power" even if it meant putting to risk his individual interests. Perhaps, such belief in the intrinsic value of the intellectual/critic enabled Said to speak for the Palestinian cause despite being an American citizen working in an American University. His approach in the essays reveals

quite clearly that Said had objections to intellectual submitting to the dominant ideologies and exercise of power.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some important works by Edward Said.

Q 2: In which work did Said introduce his idea of 'contrapuntal reading'?

Q 3: What does Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* tend to state?

15.4 READING THE TEXT: "INTRODUCTION FROM *ORIENTALISM*

Let us now examine the basic issues raised in *Orientalism*. First published in 1978, this book generated widespread controversy and attention as well owing to its attempt at counter reading of conventional Western assumptions regarding 'non-West'. Said makes an extensive argument to project how the West has been responsible in constructing the East the other through discourse. Western discourse, according to Said, has been to a considerable extent responsible in producing the 'Orient' which in turn, paved the way for establishing and legitimising West's imperialist ideology through social, political and cultural hegemony. Said's scrutiny of colonial representation of the non-West in *Orientalism* depend largely on the theoretical ideas of Michel Foucault, especially on the notion of discourse and the knowledge/power equation.

The idea of Discourse occupies primary significance in Foucault's philosophy and critical thought. Foucault views discourse as any mode of communication and representation which is established, defined and justified by certain codes within a specific socio-cultural situation. It is through the system validated through a certain discourse which makes us perceive reality in the manner in which we do, thereby shaping the entire process of meaning while producing the ideas related to right or wrong, constituting the range of valid utterances both verbal and through representation, designates the right to speak for and exercise power over everything that may be subjected to such power as legitimised through discourse. Thus, Foucault considers

discourse to be a potent force which leads to the construction of identities, subject positions, processes of thought, and meaning through multiple discursive practices within a society and culture.

Besides Foucault, Said's idea of Orientalism may be said to have been influenced by the concept of hegemony as well drawn from the critical theory propounded by Antonio Gramsci. The Italian Marxist philosopher and Communist politician, Antonio Gramsci is made famous by his theoretical concept related to cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony, according to Gramsci, is the way in which the dominant class, for instance, the state and the capitalist class employ the cultural institutions to maintain power in a society, which is predominantly capitalist. The capitalists facilitate the evolution of a hegemonic culture through the use of ideology. Without any violent exercise, economic pressure or coercion, it is through propagation of ideology that hegemonic culture establishes its own normative values in a manner that these appear natural and given in the lived lives of the people. In this way, hegemonic power derives consent from the subjects towards the capitalist order.

However, it is also important to remember that it is on the basis of the institutions that constitute the superstructure through which the dominant capitalist class engages in the production and reproduction of cultural hegemony. Edward Said employs Gramsci's concept of hegemony to reveal how Orientalism as a system of representations supported the consolidation of the West's authority and supremacy over the East, and discusses how it was not limited merely to a reflection or description of the East. Echoing Foucault, Said proposes to disclose how the real Western imperial practices exercised through governance, administration, social and cultural life, the numerous images and motifs, ideas and texts were all in fact, interdependent and reinforced one another–the strategy of dominion and control over the 'non-West' adopted by the imperial power. It is this understanding that allows Said to perceive western scholarship regarding the Orient, which was commonly known as Orientalism prior to Said, as inevitably linked to and produced by the inherent imperialist mechanism of dominion and control. Through his work Said attempts to show how although colonialism apparently

seems to have been a bygone concept, it may nevertheless be seen in practice in the manner of social, cultural and political intercourse and representations among different countries across the globe. Owing to its rational and in-depth critical enquiry which exposes the inherent central tenets and constructs of colonial culture embedded within diverse systems of knowledge and representation, Said's ground-breaking text has come to be considered as one of the most seminal texts in the realm of post-colonial critical school.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention the names of the two theorists who influenced Said.

Q 5: What is cultural hegemony?

15.4.1 A Section wise Overview of "Introduction" to *Orientalism*

Section I: Said introduces the idea that the Orient is primarily a European invention, which serves to reinforce the European notion of the 'Other'. However, the ways in which the cultural and ideological constructions of the Orient came to be represented in the colonial discourses, it began to exist as a living entity. Said enumerates upon certain qualifying traits of Orientalism stating that it is an academic discipline concerning research, teaching, learning and other associated academic activities which have the Orient as its primary subject matter. Orientalism is also, according to Said, a style of thought through which the West had indulged in the production of the Orient as the 'Other'–a way of perceiving which comprises political, cultural, sociological perspectives. The Orient thus constructed provided a sense of strength, identity and legitimacy to European imperial machinery across the colonies. He also considers Orientalism as a corporate institution, which not only produces the orient, controls and regulates the orient.

Section II: The Orient just like the Occident is a man made category, which has a history, comprises a tradition of thought, which exists as reality in the Western imagination. The two binaries Orient and Occident stand in complementary relation to each other. Western approach to the Orient is predominantly influenced by the ideological assumptions of the West regarding the non-Western cultures. However, it is also very important to remember that any understanding of the Orient necessitates an understanding of the configurations of power that existed between the two–as both are bound in a relationship of power, therefore, a study of the cultural and historical aspects of this relationship shall enable one to arrive at an understanding of the varying degrees of complex hegemony. Western hegemony is perhaps best reflected in the manner in which the West has, very often spoken for or represented the East–the East has always been considered as a silent marginal entity–it is through the 'representations' that the Orient could be 'made Oriental' and thereby produced. However, the Orient is not merely a mythical object; rather, and more importantly it is the reflection of the European-Atlantic exercise of power over the Orient. Eventually, Orientalism developed into a created body of theory and practice, which has permeated into Western consciousness.

Section III: In this section, Said discusses his methodological strategy while doing Orientalism. In order to elaborate upon the methodology of his study and the limitations thereof, Said brings up the distinction between 'pure' and 'political knowledge'. While asserting his approach as a humanist, Said however argues that any knowledge that is produced within a given period shall always have the political, social, cultural and historical aspects embedded within it. The scholar is situated within these specificities and therefore, it would be rather difficult to get rid of the influences upon the author. Therefore, the 'knowledge' produced by the West regarding the 'non-West' as its other was very much influenced by the social, cultural, political and historical fact of colonialism and as

such its objectivity becomes debatable. Owing to the complexities involved in doing Orientalism, Said explains his methodology as a two-way strategy – first, is the strategic location which "is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about", and secondly strategic formation, which is a way of analysing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large." In relation to this, Said also discusses his personal history and how that has been significant in his evolution as a critic of Western cultural hegemony.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the primary qualifying traits of Orientalism?

Q 7: Differentiate between strategic location and strategic formation.

15.4.2 Brief Discussion of the Text:

Said begins his Introduction to *Orientalism* by asserting that the image of the 'Orient' may be attributed largely to European imagination—"The Orient was almost a European invention" (*Orientalism,* p-1). According to Said, the idea of the non-West as the Orient enabled the West to specify its own contours while he elaborates how "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (p.1-2). Said argues that the discourse of Orientalism is not a given category rather it is constructed while he takes recourse to the theoretical concept of discourse put forth by Michel Foucault. As stated earlier, discourse according to Foucault may be defined as the various ways in which knowledge is constituted in relation to the social and cultural practices vis-a-vis human relationships, subjectivity and exercise of power in any given society. In this sense then, discourse may be considered a representative of the social and cultural mores intended

to produce a certain sense of meaning thereby granting legitimacy to the ideological structures of the dominant culture. This is however, not to say that anything considered a discourse is false; rather one needs to perhaps understand that it is through discourse that the construction of a certain 'reality' is facilitated, a reality that is embedded in the lived facts of life encompassing all spheres of human activity ranging from politics to warfare, culture to literature, representation through media among many others.

Therefore, given such understanding, Orientalism as a discourse would perhaps imply the construction of the 'Orient' as the 'other' seen through the practices of imperial culture executed through the West. Such construction, rely on "an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (p. 2) according to Said. Through his engagement with the idea of Orientalism, Said embarks upon the analyses of texts primarily to elucidate the fact that there is no severance between ideas, images and representations and tangible physical reality. Consequent to this, he asserts how Orientalism has produced an extremely domineering organization of control due to the combination of real establishments of power and those constituted through discourse. A closer look at the complementary relationship shared between say for instance, colonial military establishment and literature–both have political and cultural dimensions, administrative and anthropological aspects, all of which complement one another in theory and practice while reinforcing and strengthening Western hegemony over the Orient.

Contemporary research according to Said has been unable to rise above its subjective concerns in that it continues to remain Eurocentric, still not being able to recognise the political nature of the apparently 'pure' knowledge it has produced. The very foundations of research has been established through the canons and parameters justified by the West; an access to the East as a concept for instance, can be made possible only through the canon of

knowledge already produced and crystallised by the West about the East. Said also alludes to his personal history while analysing how it would be rather difficult for him to free himself from the political influences in relation to his research. Considering such circumstances, it is only natural that there would be perhaps multiple areas, which would raise doubts and debates in Orientalism. However, it is also acknowledged worldwide that Said's study came to be recognised as one of the significant works in the area of postcolonial critical theory and literary studies for its analytical exploration of the colonial cultural practices and discussion of the ways in which ideology and power politics play a crucial role in the production of knowledge.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: In what ways does orient and occident share a complementary relationship?

15.5 IMPORTANT ISSUES RAISED

We have by now gained an overview of the 'Introduction' to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, considered a milestone in the school of contemporary postcolonial theory. *Orientalism* is accorded a place of significance owing to its rational and committed analysis of colonial discourse, which served the agenda of imperial power structures. It is also important here to understand Said's observations regarding the function of the academic/ critic in relation to his/her research and the knowledge he/she produces thereafter. Said advocates for objectivity in these without which the purpose of any research would perhaps be defeated. Let us now try to arrive at some of the central theoretical issues, which were raised by Said through his text and make an effort to understand how these issues appear relevant in the field of literary studies.

One needs to keep in mind that Said figures as one of the most influential figures in postcolonial theory. The theories that pertain to colonial discourses appear to have largely responsible in the development of

postcolonialism. Postcolonial theory in general engages in an exploration of the modes of representation and perception while arriving at an understanding how these discourses had been employed as tools and strategies of exercising colonial power and legitimise subjection and imperial hegemony. Said's seminal work *Orientalism* deals with such issues at length revealing how the politics of language and representation were at work during the colonial regime to perpetuate the aims of European imperialism. Some of the central theoretical issues that Said works with in his text may be highlighted as follows:

1. Said puts forward three defining traits of Orientalism–it is an academic tradition; it is a style of thought premised on a radical distinction between Orient and the Occident; Orientalism is also a Western style for dominating the East.
2. Said examines the binaries of coloniser/colonised while looking at the ways in which discourse produced a certain mode of constructing meaning in relation to the contemporary society and culture during the period of colonisation.
3. Said employs the theoretical ideas of Foucault and Gramsci in discussing the significance of power in producing discourse and legitimising hegemony.
4. Said's critique of colonial representation reveals that the knowledge regarding the colonies that was created and thus validated served to stabilise the Self/Other binaries in which the colonised perpetually emerged as the Other.
5. Said's critique also analyses how in fact, the coloniser was also in the need to have an Other without which it's own identity appeared rather vague.
6. Said's attempt to re-read and critique colonial discourse and representations may be understood as an effort to 'write back' and 'reclaim the past'–the fundamental activity that postcolonial critics and thinkers engage with.

In his 'Introduction', Said has stated, "the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there

either. (…) such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made" (4-5). Such observation reveals that the central essence of his thesis is perhaps premised upon an exploration of the processes through which the two aforementioned geographical entities– the Orient and the Occident are produced in and through Orientalism. Therefore, Said emphasises the need to look at Orientalism, which is made apparent as a 'style of thought', through the systematic the network of institutions or even an academic discipline, which operate as discourse on the larger whole. Said's analysis reveals the significance of understanding European dominion of the Orient facilitated through the discursive practices of imperial hegemonic culture. The purpose of Orientalism according to Said is as follows: "(…) the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as a career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient" (1978: 5).

Said's wish to explore the 'internal consistency' reveals the need to examine the ways in which the politics of construction lead to the formation and legitimation of ideas regarding the notion of the Orient as the other.

It is interesting to note that the theoretical issues raised by Said's Orientalism may be applied in the study of texts that would lead to an enriched understanding of the ways in which language works through the politics of representation while creating and legitimising certain perceptions of the lived experience in which conforms to the dominant ideological structures. John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* is of the opinion that there were – "three forms of textual analysis [which] became popular in the wake of *Orientalism*.

One involved *re-reading canonical English literature* in order to examine if past texts perpetuated or questioned the latent assumptions of colonial discourses…In one direction, critics looked at writers who dealt manifestly with colonial themes and argued about whether their work was supportive or critical of colonial discourses…In another direction, texts that

seemingly had little to do with colonialism,…were also re-read provocatively in terms of colonial discourses...

Second, a group of critics who worked in the main with the poststructuralist thought of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan began to enquire in particular into the *representation of colonised subjects* in a variety of colonial texts, not just literary ones…

The third form of literary analysis engendered by the turn to theory brought together some of the insights gained by theories of colonial discourses with readings of the new literatures from countries with a history of colonialism…it became popular to argue that these texts were primarily concerned with *writing back to the centre*…(23-25).

When one examines the above observation by McLeod, it becomes quite clear how Said's theoretical approach to Orientalism can be adopted as a mode of reading and analysing the imperial strategies which worked through the images, symbols and language creating a certain perception regarding the colonies. These representations in fact, served to legitimise colonial rule thereby strengthening the processes of 'othering'–the meaning constructed around the image of the native as the silent, passive, lacking Other, inhabiting the margin apart from the centre–forever in need to be 'represented'. What Orientalism as a part of postcolonial approach does is that it equips the contemporary reader to look at the text as discourse–as a product of a certain cultural hegemony reflective of the ideological practices of the dominant class thereby providing one with not only the ways in 'how' we read but also importantly 'what' we read.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What is the purpose of Orientalism, according to Said?

15.6 RECEPTION OF SAID

Said has been received critically in relation to his contribution to the postcolonial critical school through his views on Orientalism. It has been acknowledged by Said himself that his study on Orientalism is not free

from limitations, which is perhaps true for any area of study in the realm of humanities and the social sciences. Nevertheless, Said has to be accorded due credit for initiating a new way of looking at the cultural politics at work that served to stabilise the exercise of imperial power. He has been acclaimed for his rational and analytical critique of the Western representations of the Orient.

There are also critics such as Bernard Lewis, who is of the opinion that Said's treatise is faulty with several factual, methodological and conceptual errors. For instance, Lewis considers Said's approach as ignorant of the authentic contributions made to the study of the Eastern society and culture by several scholarly figures from the West till the 19th century. Critical views on Said considers his study to be rather limited as Said confines his analysis primarily to British and French imperial exercises. Throughout the 20th century, there has been sustained criticism of Said and his views on Orientalism. However, Said's work is considered one the most important works in the intellectual field owing to its elaborate discussion of the Orientalist ideas and intellectual relations in terms of colonial enterprise.

Critical view also regards Said's application of Foucault's concepts and Gramsci's ideas as faulty in his discussion of colonial discourse on the ground that Said appears to homogenise and generalise his inferences while attempting to critique imperial representations of the Orient. There are critics who are of the opinion that Said has indulged in a sort of misrepresentation of the history of Orientalist scholarship–that Said's critique of Orientalist scholarship appears to have failed to recognise the situational context of the institutions, texts, and authors he had taken up for his study, Said's study seems to appear unable to appreciate the multiple forms of Western culture which were not founded solely on a radical difference between a superior Western culture and an inferior non-Western culture. On the contrary, the Oriental forms of art and culture, according to critical opinion acted as inspirational objects, which were very carefully and interestingly incorporated into creative field in the West.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: On what grounds did Bernard Lewis criticise Said?



15.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Orientalism is a systematic discourse aiming at the production of knowledge. From our discussion above, it is clear that for Said, the object of study is to look at Orientalism as a discourse–a body of knowledge that had been produced by the West in relation to its Eastern counterpart. It is important for us to remember that the texts that were produced from the countries with a colonial history are the primary object of study, as these shall enable the critic to look at the ways in which the Western perceptions of the Orient produced through the exercise of hegemonic culture and the political nature of discourse as well.



15.8 FURTHER READING

Ahmad, Aijaz. (1992). *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Verso.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.

Childs, Peter & Patrick Williams. (1997). *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

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15.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), *The Question of Palestine*

(1979), *Literature and Society* (1980), *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1984), *Covering Islam* (1981), *After the Last Sky* (1986), *Blaming the Victims (*1988), *Musical Elaborations* (1991), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994) and *Peace and its Discontents: Essays on Palestine and Middle East Peace Process* (1996).

Ans to Q 2: *Beginnings: Intention and Method*… …Said further develops the method of contrapuntal reading in *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism.*

Ans to Q 3: The essays contained in the book are an exploration of the idea of being an intellectual in the contemporary times… …he examines the role of the intellectual in the present socio-political scenario while questioning if the intellectual's responsibility can be limited solely to specialised issues concerning academics or do an intellectuals need to associate themselves to the manifold social, political, cultural or other such issues which afflict contemporary lives.

Ans to Q 4: Said borrowed the idea of Discourse from Michel Foucault… …he also borrowed from the concept of hegemony propounded by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

Ans to Q 5: Cultural hegemony, according to Gramsci, is the way in which the dominant class, for instance, the state and the capitalist class employ the cultural institutions to maintain power in a society which is predominantly capitalist. The capitalists facilitate the evolution of a hegemonic culture through the use of ideology.

Ans to Q 6: The Orient is primarily a European invention… …the Orient came to be represented in the colonial discourses, it began to exist as a living entity… …it is an academic discipline concerning research, teaching, learning and other associated academic activities with the Orient as its primary subject matter… …Orientalism is also a thought through which the West had indulged in the production of the Orient as the 'Other'.

Ans to Q 7: Strategic location "is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about"… …strategic formation is a way of analysing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual

genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large."

Ans to Q 8: Orient and Occident stand in complementary relation to each other… …western approach to the Orient is predominantly influenced by the ideological assumptions of the West regarding the non-Western cultures… …it is also important to remember that any understanding of the Orient necessitates an understanding of the configurations of power that existed between the two–as both are bound in a relationship of power.

Ans to Q 9: Said stated, "(…) the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as a career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient".

Ans to Q 10: Bernard Lewis opined that Said's treatise is faulty with several factual, methodological and conceptual errors… …Lewis considers Said's approach as ignorant of the authentic contributions made to the study of the Eastern society and culture by several scholarly figures from the West till the 19th century.



15.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Edward Said's works in terms of his engagement with the concept of the Orient and Occident.

Q 2: Do you think that Said's book *Orientalism* inaugurated the post-colonialist discourse? Justify your views.

Q 3: Write a note on *Culture and Imperialism.* What are the important issues raised by Said in this book. Discuss.

Q 4: What are important issues raised by Said in the text prescribed for your studies? Discuss the three forms of textual analysis highlighted by McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism.*

Q 5: Elaborate upon the term Orientalism from your reading of the prescribed piece.

Q 6: Examine Edward Said's contribution to Postcolonial theory.

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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.

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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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