PGEG S2 04

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

SEMESTER 2

ENGLISH

BLOCK 3: VICTORIAN TO NEW CRITICISM



KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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SEMESTER 2
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 4: LITERARY CRITICISM: CLASSICAL TO MODERN
BLOCK 3: VICTORIAN TO NEW CRITICISM

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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BLOCK 3: INTRODUCTION

Unit 11 introduces you to the major premises of Victorian and New Criticism. With the changes in priority of the writers because of the vast socio-economic changes in the intellectual scenario, Victorian criticism has opened up a new direction opening up prospects for the future dominance of criticism in terms of its importance in literary studies. This unit, therefore, intends to acquaint you with the ways criticism took its shape in the Victorian age. Further, the unit shall emphasise on some of the prominent texts that have laid down the way for criticism its due prominence among scholars and critics alike.

Unit 12 discusses Matthew Arnold and his critical essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time". Arnold is a prominent poet critic of the 19th century. As a critic, he pondered over the role of literary criticism as a vehicle for bringing positive changes in society. He felt that against the Romantic criticism of the previous generation, criticism of his time must be drawn closer to life so that life could be made nobler and better. Defending literature against its enemies and critics, whose emphasis on science, moneymaking, and commercial prosperity had led them to regard poetry as merely a pleasant pastime, Arnold argued that poetry prepared the people of the society to perceive authentic value in the workings of the society and culture around them.

Unit 13 discusses the important aspects of New criticism which is an influential critical movement in the course of modern literary criticism. The term 'New Criticism' appears in John Crowe Ransom's book entitled *The New Criticism,* published in 1941. As a critical trend, it implies a form of critical practice that was gradually becoming dominant in Anglo-American literary criticism in-between 1940s and 1960s. In this unit, we shall discuss the history of New Criticism with reference to the major exponents as well as the important concepts in New Criticism.

Unit 14 introduces you to two important New Critical texts namely—"The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) and "The Affective Fallacy" (1949), co-authored by William Kurtz Wimsatt Jr. (1907-1975) and Monroe C. Beardsley (1915-1985). These two essays are important position papers in 20th century criticism. The main thrust in these essays is on Wimsatt and Beardsley's formalist view that critical analysis must centre on the text itself and a critic is to examine the linguistic structure and the aesthetic unity of the text as an autonomous object.

Unit 15 discusses the essay "Line of Wit" in by F. R. Leavis. Leavis was an English literary critic of early-to-mid-20th century. Leavis is also one of the most influential figures in 20th century English literary criticism, as he introduced a new "seriousness" into the field of English studies. Throughout his entire career as a critic, Leavis took 'evaluation' as the principal concern of criticism, which had the power to shape contemporary sensibility. In this unit, you will get an opportunity to discuss F. R. Leavis and judge for yourself his relative significance in the English critical scenario of the 20th century through a discussion of his essay "Line of Wit."

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 11: INTRODUCING VICTORIAN CRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 History of Victorian Criticism

11.4 Major Exponents of Victorian Criticism

11.5 Important Concepts in Victorian Criticism

11.6 Let us Sum up

11.7 Further Reading

11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.9 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- describe and contextualise Victorian criticism
- write on the emerging trends of criticism in the Victorian age
- identify the major critics contributing towards Victorian criticism
- discuss the significance of criticism in the overall development of Victorian literature
- analyse the main concepts in Victorian criticism

11.2 INTRODUCTION

You may remember reading Wordsworth or Coleridge as a critic belonging to the preceding age, significantly called “romantic critics” and their contributions. However, quite interestingly, with the changes in priority of the writers because of the vast socio-economic changes in the intellectual scenario, Victorian criticism has opened up a new direction opening up prospects for the future dominance of criticism in terms of its importance in literary studies. This unit, therefore, intends to acquaint you with the ways criticism took its shape in the Victorian age. Further, the

unit shall emphasise on some of the prominent texts that have laid down the way for criticism its due prominence among scholars and critics alike.

You must be familiar to the Victorian way of life and the changes that had been brought about by industrialisation and the rapid growth of science. Age-old beliefs were challenged by the scientific ways of thinking most importantly it was the battle of faith versus doubt. A sceptical attitude overshadowed the Victorian period because of this, and it got reflected in literature. Religion that is “an extremely effective form of ideological control” (Eagleton, 20) was questioned and doubted, thereby forecasting a shift in the social structure. With the passing of the Reform Act of 1832, the status of the middle or working class was ultimately elevated as they became very powerful. Following this, the concept of “Popular Education” arose in England. To cater to the needs of the emerging and rapidly growing powerful working class, many new educational institutions including universities were set up as well as government “grants” were passed with respect to the “cost of education” (Newbolt Committee Report, 1921). Hence, education became accessible to a greater public thereby increasing the number of prospective readers and writers.

Naturally, people in general lost the flavour of the early age that laid emphasis on individuality and flexibility. Contradictorily, it can be seen that many writers became didactic and many others turned towards tackling the social condition and problems in their works. All these events shaped Victorian criticism mainly reflected in the form of literary writings such as reviews, essays, introduction to edited books, etc. Let us now in this unit, look forward to gain a better understanding of Victorian criticism by laying our focus on its development and the important figures associated to it. The following sections shall deal with a brief overview of the development of Victorian criticism.

11.3 HISTORY OF VICTORIAN CRITICISM

After getting a background of the Victorian crisis of doubt and faith and the emerging dominance of the middle class, here we shall concentrate upon the factors that initiated criticism. Notably, it was during

the Victorian period that 'criticism' as an individual area of study began to emerge. Primarily, the publication of *The Edinburgh Review* provided scope for the critics to voice out their concerns. Reviewers with strong individual opinions were encouraged through this magazine. The role of this magazine in the initiation of literary criticism in the nineteenth century was significant as works of literature such as poetry, drama and novels were widely reviewed. Gradually, the reputation of a literary work came to be measured by way of reviews. Along with *The Edinburgh Review*, there were other magazines, which promoted the early springs of criticism like *The Quarterly Review*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Cornhill Magazine*, etc.

The Victorians like Matthew Arnold and a few others were greatly influenced by the French critics like Taine and Sainte-Beuve whose main insistence was on finding "a scientific system to assess the worth of a writer" (Prasad, 198). To assess a writer's worth, it was important for them to know about the writer's biographical details. Getting a personal touch would help the readers to measure the worth of a writer in a better way.

Victorian criticism has also paved the way for New Criticism. The influence of Victorian criticism was ardently felt in the way the literary texts, including the novels, were approached.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What changes did the Reform Act of 1832 bring about in the Victorian society with regard to educational opportunities?

Q 2: Give a list of the various reviews that initiated Victorian criticism.

Q 3: Which two French critics had a tremendous bearing upon the Victorian critics?

11.4 MAJOR EXPONENTS OF VICTORIAN CRITICISM

Matthew Arnold:

Matthew Arnold– the poet critic is one of the major figures associated with Victorian criticism. Born in 1822, Matthew Arnold is

remembered not only as a poet but also an influential critic who also showed his concern for various issues such as culture, religion, education, etc. His "Preface" to the *Poems* of 1853 is a notable piece of literary criticism. In the Preface, Arnold's ideas such as his insistence upon 'grand style', his inclination towards the Classical form and his emphasis on art or poetry as a 'criticism of life' are reflected to a great extent. First of all, it must be mentioned that Matthew Arnold was an ardent advocate of Classical poets and considered them suitable for imitation by the Victorian poets. To be precise, the "Preface" was written as a reaction towards the extravagant poetry of the **Spasmodic** poets. Arnold believed that art or poetry as such should depict "joy". Hence, he rebelled against the Spasmodics for their inferior thematic concerns and poor treatment of their verses. Arnold was against their excessive use of metaphors through which they exaggerated their concerns in poetry. Another important work of literary criticism by Arnold is the essay titled "The Study of Poetry" which introduced his famous "Touchstone method". In this essay, he pointed out the higher values of poetry for it enables "to interpret life for us, to console us, and to sustain us" (Arnold, "The Study of Poetry"). Arnold, however, noted that only the poetry, which is 'a criticism of life', could be considered great. In order to find out the worth of poetry, Arnold suggested that poets like Milton, Shakespeare, Dante and Homer must be considered as examples because the essence of high poetry is present in their works. By high poetry, Arnold implied the inclusion of excellent subject matter and style. Talking about 'high seriousness' that is attached to these great classic poets, Arnold emphasised on the "Touchstone Method". He suggested that lines or passages from these poets must be used as 'touchstone' to find out the worth of poetry. Therefore, this essay primarily reflects Arnold's praise and high expectations from poetry. The Victorian crisis of religion that was triggered by scientific developments created an uncertainty in the lives of the people and for Arnold, poetry with its serious preoccupation with life was only capable of bringing stability through its high ideals and moral values. He was well known as a critic also for works like *On Translating Homer*, *The Study of Celtic Literature*, etc.

Apart from these, another significant contribution of Arnold is the essay titled “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” that appeared in his book *Essays in Criticism* in 1865. Here Arnold emphasised on the role of a critic and the function of criticism which is “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas.” (Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”). As such, the first focus of Arnold is on knowledge of the critic that has to be developed with a sense of disinterestedness by trying to see the things as it really is. The critic has to acquire extensive knowledge in order to share his opinions and views and propagate the best that he has acquired. Thirdly, the critic’s role is to promote creative genius by propagating the best ideals prevailing in the society. Arnold laid emphasis on creative faculty because to him it was higher than critical faculty. At the same time, he asserted that only a critic could best appreciate a creative work of literature.



LET US KNOW

The term ‘spasmodic’ coined by William Edmonstoune Aytoun is a term used to refer to poets namely, Philip James Bailey, Sydney Dobell and Alexander Smith. Their poetry was mainly notable for their use of bombastic words. These poets tried to express their scepticism regarding the age in view of their emphasis on poetry as an expression of one’s inner state. Basically, their works reflected the inner turmoil of the protagonists who were mostly poets themselves. Pertaining to their pompous use of words, depiction of the protagonists as lonely and depressed souls, excessive use of imagery and metaphors, these poets lost the favour of their readers, mainly with Aytoun’s parody titled *Firmilian* in 1854.

Walter Pater:

Walter Pater (1839-1894) was a famous literary critic, essayist and art critic. He also wrote fiction. Pater was primarily an advocate of

"art for art's sake". The works from which Pater's ideas regarding criticism can be derived are *Appreciations*, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, *Marius the Epicurean*, *Plato and Platonism,* etc. In the Preface of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater clearly stated that the aim of criticism is "To see the object as in itself it really is" (viii) and "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly" (viii).

Pater, however, did not favour didacticism; for him art must only seek to provide a purely aesthetic experience. He opposed Ruskin who emphasised on the reflection of life through art. We shall read in details about Ruskin in the following paragraph. Talking about style, Pater noted that 'Diction, Design and Personality' are the necessary qualities of a writer for offering a pleasurable experience to his readers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Who were the Spasmodics? Why did Arnold's disapprove of them?

Q 5: In which essay did Arnold talk about Touchstone Method?

Q 6: Who, according to Arnold, were classic poets?

Q 7: What are the threefold functions of a critic according to Matthew Arnold?

Q 8: Mention some of the major works of literary criticism by Walter Pater.

John Ruskin:

John Ruskin (1819-1900) was one of the popular art critics of the Victorian times. Paintings in the Victorian period were one of the most important focuses with regard to the representation of reality. This was more vivid with the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood consisting of painters namely, W. H. Hunt, J. E. Millais and D. G. Rossetti also a poet who were highly influenced by John Ruskin's approach to art. The early Victorian paintings showed the influence of the idealised and sophisticated

masterpieces of the Italian painter, Raphael. It was against this practice that Ruskin revolted since he believed that artists must not idealise, rather the role of an artist is "truth to nature" (Ruskin, *Modern Painters*). Ruskin emphasised on the accuracy of details on the part of an artist while painting 'nature'. Like literature, Victorian art was also an important area of study. John Ruskin's criticism on art is another manifestation of the significance of pictorial aspect to the understanding of literature and criticism during the Victorian period. Few other works by John Ruskin are *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53). All these three books of Ruskin had more than one volume. In the book titled *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, it has been rightly pointed out that "Nineteenth century aesthetic theory frequently makes the eye the predominant organ of truth" (xix-xx). Arts, literature or criticism–whatever might be the medium for a writer, depiction of reality became important. Therefore, it is relevant for us to have a brief overview on Victorian art too in order to examine the overall reputation of criticism during the time.

Algernon Charles Swinburne:

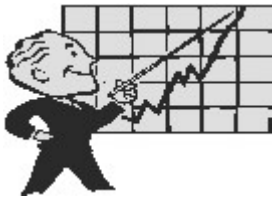
Swinburne (1837-1909) was another major figure in Victorian criticism who also wrote plays, novels and poems. He was closely associated with the Pre-Raphaelites and aestheticism. His *Poems and Ballads* was a very popular work owing to its controversial reception during the Victorian period. This volume dealing with homosexual themes brought him closer to the philosophy of aestheticism by challenging the prevailing cultural mores and importance of morality in the Victorian society. However, his critical output rested mainly on his defence of the above volume, which is titled *Notes on Poems and Reviews* in 1866.*Under the Microscope* is another significant critical work of Swinburne.

Henry James:

Henry James was a notable American born writer who later on acquired British citizenship. His literary output spread across various genres including novels, plays, biographical and autobiographical

writings, etc. In fact, James also contributed towards Victorian criticism by his numerous reviews and works like "The Art of Fiction", "The future of the Novel", etc. Apart from these, his critical works included *French Poets and Novelists*(I878), *Hawthorne* (I879), *Partial Portraits* (1888), *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (I893), *Notes on Novelists* (1914), *Literary Essays and Reviews* (1957), etc. Rene Welleck noted, "James alone in his time and place in the English-speaking world holds fast to the insights of organistic aesthetics and thus constitutes a bridge from the early nineteenth century to modern criticism." (p. 321). It must be noted that Henry James strived for 'a revival of criticism' mainly of the novel form. A fair idea about Henry James as a critic can be summed up in the words of Wellek:

James has an extraordinarily clear grasp of the nature of art, its relations to reality and the other activities of man; he has very definite, though often implicit, requirements for successful art and he has the power to apply his standards to the authors he examines. His theoretical position seems clear-cut and coherent. He is neither a "realist,' the label pinned on him in most histories of literature, nor a "formalist," a devotee of art for art's sake for which he is often dismissed. (p. 299)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What, according to John Ruskin, is the role of an artist?

Q 10: Name any two major works of criticism by Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Q 11: What is your idea regarding Henry James as a literary critic? Explain.

11.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS IN VICTORIAN CRITICISM

Art for art's sake:

'Art for art's sake' was first coined by the French critic Benjamin Constant. However, it was the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant who

laid the basis or principles of Aestheticism. According to Kant, art stands for its own sake or its own beauty and not to mean anything else. Prior to the Victorian period, the romantic poet and critic –S.T. Coleridge supported this philosophy. However, in the Victorian times, this idea got echoed in the writings of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, Charles Algernon Swinburne and D. G. Rossetti who were highly influenced by Kant. By following this doctrine of aestheticism, these critics sought a refuge from the crude depiction of reality prevailing in their society and hence they considered art as a pleasurable activity without succumbing to any morals. You must note here that among the Victorian critics who disregarded this doctrine, the chief among them were John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle. They held a completely different view. Contrary to the followers of aestheticism, they believed that art must have a didactic purpose.

The Touchstone Method:

With reference to Victorian criticism, the Touchstone Method is an important concept. The main figure behind this was the poet and critic, Matthew Arnold. In the essay titled “The Study of Poetry”, Arnold pointed out that in order to judge the value of a work it must be compared with the works of the classic poets as Milton, Shakespeare, Dante and Homer. Arnold believed that the works of these classic poets were poetry of higher order. According to the Touchstone method of Arnold, a line or one passage of any of the classic poets must be used for assessing the worth of other poetic works. By this concept, Arnold led the path to ‘scientific objectivity’ in criticism. He also highlighted comparison as an important aspect of criticism. Some of the passages to be considered as touchstone that

> Arnold suggested were from Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*—
> Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
> Seal up the ship-boy’s eyes, and rock his brains
> In cradle of the rude imperious surge . . .
> from John Milton’s Paradise Lost:

Darken'd so, yet shone
Above them all the archangel; but his face
Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd, and care
Sat on his faded cheek . . .
from Dante's "Inferno":
[I wailed not, so of stone grew I within; / they wailed.]
and from Homer's Iliad:

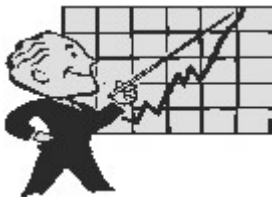
[Ah, unhappy pair, why gave we you to King Peleus, to a mortal? but ye are without old age, and immortal. Was it that with men born to misery ye might have sorrow?]

The touchstone method for Arnold was helpful to overcome the false standards of judging a work. Pointing out personal estimate– judging poetry from a personal point of view; and historic estimate taking the circumstances of the poet into consideration, as insufficient for judging a poetic work, Arnold favoured the touchstone method.



ACTIVITY 11.1

Make a list of the relevant essays, lectures, preface to volumes, etc. or any other source of Victorian criticism by eminent Victorian critics while you are reading the unit. This will enable you to remember not only the important texts but also give you a clarified understanding of Victorian criticism as a whole.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: Which German philosopher is said to have initiated the principles of Aestheticism?

Q 13: Describe in brief the Touchstone method.

Q 14: Describe some of the important concepts in Victorian criticism.



11.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have been familiarised with Victorian criticism and the background in which it has emerged. Swinging in between doubt and faith, the Victorian age is marked for providing inspiration for novel literary undertakings including criticism. To be specific, in this unit you have known that criticism became an important literary practice from the Victorian period onwards. Hence, critically viewed, the Victorian critics can be said to have laid down the basis for twentieth century critics. Since criticism was gradually taking its shape in the various works of the Victorian critics, it must be noted that Victorian criticism is mainly important as it served as the transitional phase for the establishment of criticism as an individual and reputed branch of knowledge and literary practice. As you have now finished reading the unit, you have acquired a fair idea on the socio-economic situation of the age that found its vent through criticism also along with the literature of the period. You have also read about many critics in this unit, some of them are Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, John Ruskin, Henry James, etc. Apart from this, the unit acquainted you with the various contributions of these critics whose works challenged the prevailing approach towards literature. You are now familiar with the concepts that dominated Victorian criticism like art for art's sake, touchstone method, etc. By and large, the unit has provided you with a broad idea on Victorian criticism. You are, however, advised to read the essays and consult the books mentioned in the unit for acquiring a better perception of Victorian criticism.



11.7 FURTHER READING

Christ, Carol T et al. (eds.) (1995). *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*. London: University of California Press.

Eagleton, Terry. (1983). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Second Edition. Minnesota: Blackwell Publishers.

Habib, M. A. R. (ed). (2013). *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 6 The Nineteenth Century c. 1830-1947*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pater, Walter H. (1873). "Preface" to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. London: Macmillan & Co.

Prasad, Birjadish. (1965). *An Introduction to English Criticism*. New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd.

Ruskin, John. (1888, 2nd edition).*Modern Painters*. Harvard University.

Wellek, René. (1958). "Henry James's Literary Criticism and Theory."*American Literature*, Vol. 30, No. 3. Pp. 293-321.

Reports:

"The Teaching of English in England" (Report Of The Departmental Committee Appointed By The President Of The Board Of Education To Inquire Into The Position Of English In The Educational System Of England). (1921). London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Web1 Resources:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273382855_VICTORIAN_CRITICS_AND_METACRITICS_ARNOLD_PATER_RUSKIN_AND_THE_INDEPENDENCE_OF_LITERARY_CRITICISM [accessed Aug 9, 2017] victorianweb.org [accessed September 4, 2017]

http://www.bartleby.com

11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: With the passing of the Reform Act of 1832, the status of the middle or working class… …became very powerful. and the concept of "Popular Education" arose in England. To cater to the needs of the emerging and rapidly growing powerful working class, many new educational institutions including universities were set up… …education became accessible to a greater public thereby increasing the number of prospective readers and writers.

Ans to Q 2: *Edinburgh Review*, *The Quarterly Review*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Cornhill Magazine*, etc.

Ans to Q 3: Taine and Sainte-Beauve.

Ans to Q 4: Philip James Bailey, Sydney Dobell and Alexander Smith were the Spasmodic poets . . . use of bombastic words . . . tried to express their scepticism regarding the age in view of their emphasis on poetry as an expression of one's inner state. Arnold believed that art or poetry as such should depict "joy" . . . he rebelled against the Spasmodics for their inferior thematic concerns and poor treatment of their verses . . . against their excessive use of metaphors through which they exaggerated their concerns in poetry.

Ans to Q 5: "The Study of Poetry".

Ans to Q 6: Milton, Shakespeare, Dante and Homer.

Ans to Q 7: The critic has to be developed . . . a sense of disinterestedness . . . see the things as it really is . . . acquire extensive knowledge in order to share his opinions and views and propagate the best that he has acquired . . . to promote creative genius by propagating the best ideals prevailing in the society.

Ans to Q 8: *Appreciations*, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, *Marius the Epicurean*, *Plato and Platonism,* etc.

Ans to Q 9: Artists must not idealise . . . the role of an artist is "truth to nature" . . . Ruskin emphasised on the accuracy of details on the part of an artist while painting 'nature'.

Ans to Q 10: *Notes on Poems and Reviews* and *Under the Microscope.*

Ans to Q 11: James contributed towards Victorian criticism . . . "The Art of Fiction", "The future of the Novel", *French Poets and Novelists*(I878), *Hawthorne* (I879), *Partial Portraits* (1888), *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (I893), *Notes on Novelists* (1914), *Literary Essays and Reviews* (1957), etc. Rene Wellek noted . . . "James alone in his time and place in the English-speaking world holds fast to the insights of organistic aesthetics and thus

constitutes a bridge from the early nineteenth century to modern criticism" . . . Henry James strived for 'a revival of criticism' mainly of the novel form.

Ans to Q 12: Immanuel Kant.

Ans to Q 13: To judge the value of a work it must be compared with the works of the classic poets as Milton, Shakespeare, Dante and Homer . . . the Touchstone method of Arnold, a line or one passage of any of the classic poets must be used for assessing the worth of other poetic works . . . led the path to 'scientific objectivity' in criticism.

Ans to Q 14: Refer to Section 11.5



11.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the important characteristics of Victorian Criticism? Discuss briefly.

Q 2: Analyse the influence of Matthew Arnold as a critic with special reference to his major contributions in the field of criticism.

Q 3: Consider the factors that contributed towards the development of criticism in the Victorian age.

Q 4: Give an idea of Victorian criticism with reference to the major critics. How did their works influence the conception of Victorian literature in general?

Q 5: Discuss the major concepts that were predominant in Victorian criticism and highlight its importance in relation to the scope of criticism in the succeeding age.

Q 6: Briefly describe the following with reference to Victorian criticism: "Art for art's sake".

Q 7: Highlight the significance of art criticism in the Victorian age. Illustrate your answer by giving examples.

Q 8: Critically comment on the concept of aestheticism in the Victorian context.

* * *

UNIT 12: MATTHEW ARNOLD: "THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM AT THE PRESENT TIME"

UNIT STRUCTURE:

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Arnold: The Critic

12.4 Reading the Text

12.5 Important Concepts

12.6 Arnold as a Victorian Critic

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

- read about the life and works of Matthew Arnold as a critic
- understand the context of Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time"
- explain the role of criticism which Arnold had tried to address in the essay
- discuss the importance of Matthew Arnold as a 19th century English critic

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to Matthew Arnold and his essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time". Arnold is a prominent poet critic of the 19th century. As a critic, he pondered over the role of literary criticism as a vehicle for bringing positive changes in society. He felt that against the Romantic criticism of the previous generation, criticism of his time must be drawn closer to life so that life could be made nobler and better. Arnold believed that literary criticism, to be

worthwhile, must serve the ends of life and promote a better understanding of cultural values so that social regeneration can be brought about. Defending literature against its enemies and critics, whose emphasis on science, moneymaking, and commercial prosperity had led them to regard poetry as merely a pleasant pastime, he argued that poetry prepared the people of the society to perceive authentic value in the workings of the society and culture around them. You will learn that Arnold's essay "The Function of Criticism" seeks to redefine the central responsibilities of criticism. It is precisely the task of criticism to "establish an order of ideas" and "to make the best ideas prevail." These are some of the very relevant ideas that you are expected to understand and comprehend by the time you finish reading the unit.

12.3 ARNOLD: THE CRITIC

Matthew Arnold was born at Laleham in Middlesex in 1822. He was the son of Thomas Arnold, a noted Victorian man of letters, a religious leader, a historian, and the influential headmaster of Rugby from 1828 to 1841. Arnold received education from *Winchester*, *Rugby* and *Balliol College* and finally from *Oxford.* There he won the *Newdigate* Prize for poetry. In 1845, he became a fellow of *Oriel College*. However, soon he left the university and became the private secretary of Lord Lansdowne. In 1840, he travelled abroad and met Marguerite, a Swiss girl who features in most of his early lyrics. In 1851, he became an inspector of school. This post of honour gave him financial security. He married Frances Lucy Wightman in 1851. In 1858, Arnold became a professor of poetry at *Oxford*. Along with being famous for his poetry, prose and criticism, Arnold is also acclaimed for his advocacy of culture.

Educated at Rugby and Oxford University, Matthew Arnold seems to have concentrated more on his social life than on his studies. Soon he got dissatisfied with the kind of poetry that he had been writing. Still they eloquently express the self-doubt, intellectual unease, and emotional uncertainty typical of the contemporary intellectuals. After joining Oxford as a Professor of Poetry in 1858, he started writing literary criticism. He

sought to deal with the problems of his age through a series of literary, political, religious and educational writings. As an Inspector of the schools, Arnold expressed his views about the British and Continental pedagogical systems through a series of reports on differing educational problems. Most of his writings are marked by a strong sense of discipline. You should remember that Arnold's educational writings are related to what we may popularly call "the Rise of English". Arnold often suggested the establishment of an English Academy on the model of the French to regulate literary taste where education would be imparted in terms of the writings of the English writers. Arnold as the model used the great literary heritage of the English writers for 'Culture'. It was also the model with the help of which he could address the issue of 'Englishness'.

In 185I, when Arnold was appointed the inspector of schools, he continued his discussion with teachers and administrators for educational reforms. Subsequently, he also travelled extensively in England and abroad in between 1859 and 1865. The experiences gathered led to the publication of three books on European (particularly French) systems of education. Arnold viewed the schools as the crucial site for "civilising the next generation of the lower classes, who, as things are going, will have most of the political power of the country in their hands." In his duties as an inspector, he took pain at the deprivations that workers and their families suffered, and subsequently he dedicated his life to the task of social and cultural progress, identifying himself as a "Liberal of the future". Arnold was named Professor of Poetry at Oxford University in 1857, a position he held until 1867.

Arnold takes criticism as involving flexibility, openness to new experiences, and curiosity. He insisted on the "free play" of mind—a phrase that Jacques Derrida would define more radically and subversively in the 20th century. Arnold takes criticism to be a rigorous duty as he explains that it "tends to *establish* an order of ideas", and seeks to "make the best ideas prevail." Arnold firmly believed that some ideas are right and others wrong. A good literary critic was inevitably for

Arnold, a person of culture embarked on a steady, steadfast inquiry into self and society. Arnold excelled as a critic and polemicist, and he frequently took delight in the public controversies that his books and articles invited and in the charges raided against him. However, Arnold was also a poet, an educator, and an advocate for civility and moderation who followed the footsteps of his eminent father Thomas Arnold.
He died in 1888.

His Works:

Along with being a critic Arnold also gained popularity as a poet. You will note that Arnold's literary career had started with *The Strayed Reveller and other Poems* (1849) and ended with the publication of *New Poems* in 1867. Between these years, he published *Empedocles on Etna, and other Poems* (1852), *Poems* (1853), *Poems II Series* (1855) and *Merope*, a tragedy in verse (1858). In these volumes, he tried various poetic works like lyrics (*Dover Beach*), Poetic Drama (*Empedocles on Etna*), Narrative poem (*Sohrab and Rustum*), Elegy (*The Scholar Gipsy*) *etc*. Although Arnold derives much from classical literature, his poetry is also marked by the sense of alienation, stoicism, despair and spiritual emptiness.

However, Arnold made his debut as a critic in the *Preface to the Poems of 1853,* in which he follows Dryden's method of throwing light on his own performance and of making critical observations suitable to the occasion. His lectures as the Professor of poetry at Oxford were published in book form in two volumes–*On Translating Homer* and *The Study of Celtic Literature.* His works on Homer is famous for his unconvincing advocacy of English hexameters and his creation of a kind of literature in the "grand style". He also wrote for various literary journals. Of the miscellaneous writings he published, a selection called *Essays in Criticism* in two series (1865 and 1888). The essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" from the 1865 volume develops his views of criticism as a disinterested and flexible mode of thought.

His *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) is one of his significant critical texts in which he deliberates on the notion of "culture" in detail. Here he defines "culture" and affirms the need for "culture" in a modern industrial

society devoted to mechanism and profit. He calls culture "*a study of perfection"*. According to Arnold, culture has an intellectual and an ethical end to meet. The aims of culture are identical with those of religion. Arnold calls "culture" to be "the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself" while he conceives religion as the "voice of the deepest human experience". So, what they have in common is the cultivation of inwardness: religion preaches that "The Kingdom of God is within you," and culture "places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality" But culture advances beyond religion, because through a "disinterested study of human nature," it fosters a "harmonious expansion of *all* the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature." Because culture represents for Arnold an inward condition of the mind, and not outward circumstances, he considers its function to be crucial in our modern civilization which is "mechanical and external" as well as strongly individualistic, specialized, and inflexible.



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Arnold sees "faith in machinery," as the "besetting danger" of modern civilization. The function of culture is to purge our minds of the effects of such material and narrow preoccupations, and to stem "the common tide of men's thoughts in a wealthy and industrial community". Without this purging, Arnold warns, the future as well as the present "would inevitably belong to the Philistines," those who are devoted to the pursuit of wealth. The task of both criticism and culture, then, is to place the pragmatic bourgeois vision of life in a broader historical and international context. You should try to understand why Matthew Arnold was so vehemently against the Philistines.

His *Essays in Criticism* remains a significant influence on critics till this day. In one of his most famous essays entitled "The Study of Poetry" (1880), Arnold wrote: "Without poetry, our science will appear

incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry". He considered "high truth" and "high seriousness" to be the most important criteria to judge the value of a poem. By this standard, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* did not merit Arnold's approval. He also sought for literary criticism to remain disinterested, and said that the appreciation should be of "the object as in itself it really is." In Arnold's essay "The Study of Poetry", we find an even greater insistence on the notion of 'seriousness'. This essay, which is also one of the most influential texts of literary humanism, insists on the social and cultural functions of literature, its ability to civilize and to cultivate morality, as well as its provision against the mechanistic excesses of modern civilization. According to Arnold, the status of religion has been increasingly threatened by science, by the ideology of the "fact." Philosophy, too has been rendered powerless since it is hopelessly engaged with unresolved questions and problems. It is, he claims, to poetry that we must turn, not merely for spiritual and emotional support and consolation, but to interpret life for us. Therefore, he defines poetry as a criticism of life. Poetry's high function is actually to replace religion and philosophy. Implicit in his essay is also the notions of the classic and tradition, which will be further developed by writers such as T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis. Arnold suggests that, in the first place, we need to be sure that our estimate of poetry is "real" rather than historical or personal.

The emergence of the "Spasmodics", (a term coined by Charles Kingsley) the group of poets which included P. J. Bailey, Sydney Dobell, and Alexander Smith resulted in the production of a kind of poetry which held poetry to be the expression of "the state of one's own mind in striking language. Leading to utter dissatisfaction on the part of Arnold this newly emergent type of poetry gave birth to an extravagance of thought and emotion on the one hand, and to an excess of ornamentations on the other. In other words, it could be said that they simply expressed the 'doubts, disputes, distractions (and) fears' of their age in a bombastic language. It was in the context of combating this Spasmodic tendency to which Arnold himself had fallen a victim, that he

had felt the necessity of writing his "Preface to the Poems of 1853". Although widely read, the poem *Empedocles on Aetna* (1852) was omitted from his next edition of poems in 1853. In addition, in the Preface Arnold informs his readers why he had done that. According to Arnold, the hero Empedocles in the poem, who ends his life by jumping into the volcano Aetna, "*does nothing but suffer; and suffering that finds no vent in action is not a fit subject for poetry: for all art is dedicated to joy*" and to Arnold, the joy that poetry imparts is dependent on its subject. The Spasmodics believed that the classical subjects had little validity in the modern age and they need to be replaced by modern subjects and concerns. However, Arnold thought otherwise. He believed that "*the business of the poets is not to praise their age, but to afford to the men who live in it the highest pleasure they are capable of feeling.*" Perhaps, that is why, he expresses his indebtedness to the classical writers including Shakespeare.

Thus, you will find that Arnold's main concerns in most of his important critical works are marked by his views on poetry, criticism and culture.



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While acknowledging that the "critical faculty is lower than the inventive," and that the exercise of the "creative power…is the highest function of man," Arnold suggested that the conditions for a high creative genius can be realized in an atmosphere of appropriate criticism. The work of the literary genius, according to Arnold, is not like the philosopher whose job is to discover new ideas. A literary work needs to be inspired by "a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas." The aim of the literary work, according to Arnold, is to present these ideas "in the most effective and attractive combinations," in beautiful form.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How is Matthew Arnold connected to the 'Rise of English'?

Q 2: Which are the major critical texts of Arnold?

Q 3: How does Arnold define the term culture in his *Culture and Anarchy*?

Q 4: Discuss what Arnold means by the term 'philistine'.

12.4 READING THE TEXT

In this section, we shall try to discuss the main aspects of Arnold's essay. This essay mainly deals with his ideas of Creative and Critical faculty, his notion of disinterestedness, his idea of criticism and the role of the critic.

Arnold starts the essay with a discussion of the Creative faculty vs Critical faculty. However, he begins with a reference to his own translation of Homer in which he tried to put a proposition about criticism. As he states:

"Many objections have been made to a proposition which, in some remarks of mine on translating Homer, I ventured to put forth; a proposition about criticism, and its importance at the present day. I said: 'Of the literature of France and Germany, as of the intellect of Europe in general, the main effort, for now many years, has been a critical effort; the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is.' I added, that owing to the operation in English literature of certain causes, 'almost the last thing for which one would come to English literature is just that very thing which now Europe most desires,–criticism'; and that the power and value of English literature was thereby impaired. More than one rejoinder declared that the importance I here assigned to criticism was excessive, and asserted the inherent superiority of the creative effort of the human spirit over its critical effort."

The beginning of Arnold's essay sets the tone of the essay as being one of advocating the idea of criticism and the role of the critic more than anything else. He then refers to one of Wordsworth's comments and accuses him of holding the critical power very low. Arnold states:

"Without wasting time over the exaggeration which Wordsworth's judgment on criticism clearly contains, or over an attempt to trace the causes, not difficult, I think, to be traced, which may have led Wordsworth to this exaggeration, a critic may with advantage seize an occasion for trying his own conscience, and for asking himself of what real service at any given moment the practice of criticism either is or may be made to his own mind and spirit, and to the minds and spirits of others."

Arnold seems to argue that the critical power may be of lower rank than the creative. However, it is also undeniable, that men may exercise their creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature or art. Another argument that Arnold holds is that "the exercise of the creative power in the production of great works of literature or art,...is not at all epochs and under all conditions possible; and that therefore labour may be vainly spent in attempting it, which might with more fruit be used in preparing for it, in rendering it possible." To speak of literature, Arnold believed that **the grand work of the creative literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery**. That is why, the great creative epochs in literature are so rare, and there is so much that is unsatisfactory in the productions of many men of real genius. Then, Arnold argues for the need for the critical power, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is. Thus, this essay tends to refer to the intellectual conditions in which the creative power can profitably sustain itself. It should establish an order of ideas, so that the best ideas prevail.

Arnold calls the poetic endeavours of the Romantic poets premature, and this prematurity is the result of not having sufficient

materials to work with. In other words, the English poets of the first part of the 19th century, with plenty of energy and creative force, did not know enough. This makes Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth so wanting in completeness and variety. However, it was not the case with Greek Pinder and Sophocles or English Shakespeare. He states that Pindar and Sophocles had not read many books; or Shakespeare was not an avid reader. But, they lived in a current of ideas in the highest degree that animated and nourished the creative power. Their society was, in the fullest measure, permeated by fresh thoughts. Arnold cites this state of things to be the true basis for the creative power's exercise. He thus confirms that the creative power of poetry requires ideas and materials to provide it with inspiration for achieving success.

Then gradually, Arnold brings in his famous idea of **disinterestedness**. Arnold states that in order to produce fruit for the future, English literature ought to adopt disinterestedness. However, how is criticism to show disinterestedness? Arnold's view is that by keeping aloof from what is called "the practical view of things," a critic may maintain disinterestedness. Then, Arnold deals in greater detail about the business of criticism. According to him, the purpose of criticism is simply to know **"the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas."** However, it has to do it with inflexible honesty, with due ability. Otherwise, "criticism besides being really false to its own nature merely continues in the old rut which it has hitherto followed in England, and will certainly miss the chance now given to it." Arnold then questions the present status of criticism in England. Look at the lines quoted from the text:

"Our organs of criticism are organs of men and parties having practical ends to serve, and with them those practical ends are the first thing and the play of mind the second; so much play of mind as is compatible with the prosecution of those practical ends is all that is

wanted…But we have the ***Edinburgh Review***, existing as an organ of the old Whigs, and for as much play of the mind as may suit its being that; we have the ***Quarterly Review***, existing as an organ of the Tories, and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that; we have the ***British Quarterly Review***, existing as an organ of the political Dissenters, and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that; we have the ***Times*****,** existing as an organ of the common, satisfied, well-to-do Englishman, and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that. And so on through all the various fractions, political and religious, of our society; every fraction has, as such, its organ of criticism, but the notion of combining all fractions in the common pleasure of a free **disinterested** play of mind meets with no favour. Directly this play of mind wants to have more scope, and to forget the pressure of practical considerations a little, it is checked, it is made to feel the chain…The ***Dublin Review*** subordinates play of mind to the practical business of English and Irish Catholicism, and lives. It must needs be that men should act in sects and parties, that each of these sects and parties should have its organ, and should make this organ serve the interests of its action; but it would be well, too, **that there should be a criticism, not the minister of these interests, not their enemy, but absolutely and entirely independent of them**. No other criticism will ever attain any real authority or make any real way towards its end,–the creating a current of true and fresh ideas."

In this quotation, Arnold is perhaps trying to mean how intellectual pursuits of the writers cannot be free from the politics of the country. However, Arnold is also hinting at the actual role of criticism. According to him, criticism has so little kept in the pure intellectual sphere, has so little detached itself from practice, has been so directly polemical and controversial, that it has so ill accomplished. It has failed to keep man from a self-satisfaction, which is retarding and vulgarizing, to lead him towards perfection, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in

itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things. A polemical practical criticism makes men blind even to the ideal imperfection of their practice, makes them willingly assert its ideal perfection, in order the better to secure it against attack: and clearly this is narrowing and baneful for them.



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Thus, you will find that according to Arnold the business of criticism is to know the best that is known and thought in the world. Moreover, it should spread knowledge to create a flow of new and fresh ideas. Its business is to practise the function with strict honesty and sense of duty. He opposes the flexible honest in criticism. Arnold sees that practical considerations hinder faithful criticism and suffocates it. Criticism should be free of these considerations. It should firstly be a free play of mind. The free play of mind is much more important than any practical ends.

After deliberating on the role of criticism, Arnold goes on to discuss the role of the critic. By remaining 'detached' the critic should show the society the right path, to help them chose what is just. Then he urges his readers to start a social movement, start a new party unlike the Whigs and Tories to pursue truth and new thought. They should call it ***the liberal party***, it should let them stick to each other, and back each other up, it should let them have no nonsense about independent criticism, and intellectual delicacy. They should not be troubled by foreign thoughts; they should invent the whole thing for themselves. As he says: "If one of us speaks well, applaud him; if one of us speaks ill, applaud him too; we are all in the same movement, we are all liberals, we are all in pursuit of truth." In this way, the pursuit of truth in the hands of Arnold becomes really a social, practical, pleasurable affair.

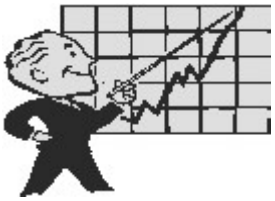
Arnold then tries to discuss what he takes criticism to be as we find the following in the text:

"I am bound by my own definition of **criticism; *a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.*** How much of current English literature comes into this "best that is known and thought in the world"? Not very much I fear; certainly less, at this moment, than of the current literature of France or Germany. Well, then, am I to alter my definition of criticism, in order to meet the requirements of a number of practising English critics, who, after all, are free in their choice of a business? That would be making criticism lend itself just to one of those alien practical considerations, which, I have said, are so fatal to it. One may say, indeed, to those who have to deal with the mass–so much better disregarded–of current English literature, that they may at all events endeavour, in dealing with this, to try it, so far as they can, by the standard of the best that is known and thought in the world; one may say, that to get anywhere near this standard, every critic should try and possess one great literature, at least, besides his own; and the more unlike his own, the better. But, after all, the criticism I am really concerned with,–the criticism which alone can much help us for the future, the criticism which, throughout Europe, is at the present day meant, when so much stress is laid on the importance of criticism and the critical spirit,–is a criticism which regards Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working to a common result; and whose members have, for their proper outfit, a knowledge of Greek, Roman, and Eastern antiquity, and of one another. Special, local, and temporary advantages being put out of account, that modern nation will in the intellectual and spiritual sphere make most progress, which most thoroughly carries out this program. And what is that but saying that we too, all of us, as individuals, the more thoroughly we carry it out, shall make the more progress?"

Arnold concludes the essay by stating that **"creative activity is the great happiness and the great proof of being alive, and it is not denied to criticism to have it; but then criticism must be sincere,**

simple, flexible, ardent, ever widening its knowledge. Then it may have, in no contemptible measure, a joyful sense of creative activity; a sense which a man of insight and conscience will prefer to what he might derive from a poor, starved, fragmentary, inadequate creation. In addition, at some epochs no other creation is possible. Still, in full measure, the sense of creative activity belongs only to genuine creation; in literature, we must never forget that.

Therefore, according to Matthew Arnold, criticism has social function to play—that is to protect man from a self-satisfaction that holds him back. It lends him to perfection by introducing his mind to excellent ideas, beauty and fitness. Non-objective practical criticism makes man blind to shortcomings and faults in their practice. This will lead to narrow-mindedness. Hence, Arnold specifies certain activity for criticism which should refrain itself from the sphere of practical life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Mention the grounds on which Arnold criticise the Romantic poets.

Q 6: What, according to Arnold, is the true business of criticism?

Q 7: How does Matthew Arnold visualise the role of criticism?

12.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

The important concepts of the text are as follows:

Creative Faculty vs Critical Faculty:

According to Arnold, the creative power of poetry requires ideas and material for inspiration and success. Because, these ideas nourish the creative power. The critical faculties create cultural environment rich with ideas. He goes on to equate the experience of writing criticism with the experience of writing creative work to undermine typical opinion against criticism. He defends criticism against the opinion that it serves no purpose and that those who criticize cannot write something creative themselves. To illustrate this he compares

Goethe with Byron. Arnold opines that both of them had a great productive power, but Goethe was nourished by great critical effort that provided the required material for his work. Lord Byron possessed the same gift but was less productive because he found no rich cultural background and material to work with. Byron lacked critical efforts. Thus, he sees that the poet should understand the world about which he writes. Understanding the world needs critical effort and analysis. Arnold argues that real criticism is essentially the exercise of curiosity, which is the disinterested endeavour to know. It is an instinct that urges man to seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge. The creative activity must be preceded by criticism because it paves the way for creative activity.

Disinterestedness:

Arnold considers disinterestedness indispensable in English criticism. It also means independence of judgment. How can criticism show disinterestedness? Arnold opines that criticism should follow the law of its own nature, which is freedom. Criticism should be a free activity, which is not subject to any external influence. It should refuse to submit to political or practical consideration. Thus, according to Arnold, Criticism should serve nothing but itself. Arnold brings in his famous idea of **disinterestedness** by stating that in order to avail it of the field opening to it, and to produce fruit for the future, English criticism ought to adopt disinterestedness. However, how is criticism to show disinterestedness? Arnold states three ways to maintain disinterestedness.

a. By keeping aloof from what is called "the practical view of things",

b. By resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches,

c. By steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them, which in this country at any rate are certain to be attached to them quite sufficiently, but which criticism has really nothing to do with.

The idea of Literary Criticism:

Arnold defines literary criticism as "**the idea of a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and**

thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." However, Arnold feels that much of the best that is known and thought in the world cannot be of English origin and growth alone. By the nature of things, they must be foreign. The English critic of literature, therefore, must dwell on foreign thought. Again, judging is often spoken of as the critic's own business. However, the judgment, which almost insensibly forms itself in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge, is the valuable one. Thus knowledge, or fresh knowledge, must be the critic's great concern. In addition, it is by communicating fresh knowledge, and letting his own judgment pass along with it that the critic will generally do most good to his readers. Sometimes for the sake of establishing an author's place in literature and his relation to a central standard, criticism may also have to deal with a subject matter so familiar that fresh knowledge is out of the question, and then it must be all judgment; an enunciation and detailed application of principles. In that case, the great safeguard is never to let oneself become abstract, and always to retain an intimate and lively consciousness of the truth of what one is saying. The moment this fails us, we must be sure that something is wrong.

The Role of the Critic:

According to Arnold, a critic should be detached. He states: "The mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will always satisfy them. The rush and roar of practical life will always have an effect upon the most collected spectator. However, it is only by remaining collected, and refusing to lend himself to the point of view of the so-called practical man, that the critic can render great service to the practical man, and it is only by the greatest sincerity in pursuing his own course, that he can escape misunderstandings, which perpetually threaten him. Then again he states that the "practical man is not apt for fine distinctions, and yet in these distinctions truth and the highest culture greatly find their account. However, it is not easy to lead a practical man. Then he calls the British Constitution itself, 'a magnificent organ of progress and virtue' is also a

'colossal machine' for the manufacture of philistines. Therefore, a critic will still remain exposed to frequent misunderstandings, and nowhere so much as in this country.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What do you mean by disinterestedness? State the ways through which disinterestedness can be understood.

Q 9: Mention the major aspects in the essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Times".

Q 10: State what Arnold has to say about the role of a critic in the essay.

12.6 ARNOLD AS A VICTORIAN CRITIC

Lionel Trilling opined that Matthew Arnold is "virtually the founding father of modern criticism in the English-speaking world." Citing "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1865), Trilling quoted Arnold's famous injunction that the critic should strive to "see the object as in itself it really is" and his celebrated definition of criticism as the "disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." These statements, according to Trilling, gave later scholars and teachers their inspiration and interpretive mission. Arnold provided literary criticism with an important social function and paved the way for its "institutionalisation" in the academy. He regarded the pursuit of literature as urgent activities in the world, insisting "that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, to the question: How to live." Serious criticism, he believed, was responsible for generating and maintaining the proper context of ideas and high standards that the production of literature required. Furthermore, criticism for Arnold meant an engagement with history, education, politics, religion, philosophy and other subjects and concerns.

Rene Wellek views Arnold as a historical critic working with a historical scheme in his mind. Wellek is right when he states that Arnold "almost single handedly pulled English criticism out of the doldrums into which it had fallen after the great Romantic Age." While critics like Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and their followers used Arnolds Hellenism, his plea for "disinterestedness", "antipathy" for "Philistinism" as the sanction to withdraw from the practical world to a world of aesthetic sensibility.

T.S. Eliot's biased view of Arnold and the views of I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis and Lionel Trilling add to the critical receptions surrounding Arnold. The relationship with Arnold resulted in Leavis's great emphasis on the moral force of literature, and I.A. Richards also responded to Arnold's doctrines of psychological criticism. Lionel Trilling carried on Arnold's moral social concerns to the modern context. Arnold's desire to represent an ideal of cultural and literary humanism coupled with the 'institutionalisation' of literacy criticism in the academy make him "virtually the founding father of modern criticism in the English speaking world". (According to Lionel Trilling).

Arnold continues today to represent an ideal of literary and cultural humanism that many critics honour. However, this same ideal is one that radical critics and contemporary literary theorists have sought to complicate or undermine. As the scholar Joseph Carroll has noted, his key term "disinterestedness" is "now the most violently disputed word in the Arnoldian lexicon," and many theorists from the today have launched their proposals by taking issue with Arnold's and his followers' account of the critic's role and procedures. For example, Stanley Fish's Reader Response criticism denies the possibility of "disinterested" objective perception, and the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton emphasises Arnold's alignment with state power and the privileged classes in his stress on "timeless truths."

However, it is not so difficult to identify Arnold's limitations. Because, he is mainly interested in the personality and moral tone of the author, not, in the resources of language or the unfolding meanings of literary works themselves; he does not devote much attention to specific

texts. Lines that he does quote typically function for him as "touchstones" which are the "specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality" that "save us from fallacious estimates of value" and that seem to beg the very question of "greatness" that they are meant to answer. Arnold assumed that his readers would know these authors and texts and their contexts, and that the "touchstones" would be recognized by all as profound and memorable.



12.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have realised that central to Arnold's literary criticism is the problem of living adequately in late industrial society. Arnold is deeply humanist, and he writes in the tradition of humanism that can be stated to have started with figures such as F. R. Leavis. Arnold's central terms and phrases – "sweetness and light," "perfection," "inwardness," "the best that has been thought and said" – all derive ultimately from his analysis of the malaise of modern culture. He sees the human being in industrial society as mechanised, as wholly given to "external" pursuits, as stunted in his spiritual and moral sensibility. Arnold was somewhat obsessed with the narrow moralism and mercantilism of the bourgeoisie, whom he termed philistines. His essay "The Function of Criticism" is concerned to counteract the philistinism of the world as defined by the English bourgeoisie, enshrined in the restrictive obsession of this class with practicality, utility, and reason: in a phrase, with the imperatives of the immediate present.



12.8 FURTHER READING

Arnold, Matthew. "Function of Criticism at the Present Times" in Das & Mohanty. (eds.) (1985). *Literary Criticism: A Reading.* Oxford University Press.

Habib, M.A.R. (2005). *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*. Malden: Blackwell.

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

Wellek, Rene. (1983). *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950: Volume 1, The Later Eighteenth Century.* Cambridge University Press.



12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: As an Inspector of the schools, Arnold expressed his views about the English pedagogical systems… …his educational writings are marked by a strong sense of discipline and affected the "Rise of English"… …the great literary heritage of the English writers was used as the model for 'Culture' while Arnold addressed the issue of 'Englishness'.

Ans to Q 2: *Preface to the Poems of 1853… … On Translating Homer… … The Study of Celtic Literature… …Essays in Criticism* in two series (1865 and 1888).. …*Culture and Anarchy* (1869).

Ans to Q 3: In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) Arnold views culture as "*a study of perfection"*. … …it has an intellectual and an ethical end to meet… …Arnold calls "culture" as "the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself"… …it advances beyond religion, because through a "disinterested study of human nature," it fosters a "harmonious expansion of *all* the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature."

Ans to Q 4: Philistines are people devoted to the pursuit of wealth… …the function of culture is to purge the minds of the effects of such material and narrow preoccupations… …. the task of both criticism and culture, then, is to place the pragmatic vision of life in a broader historical and cultural context.

Ans to Q 5: Arnold calls the poetic endeavours of the Romantics poets premature without sufficient materials to work with… …Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth so wanting in

completeness and variety… …but it was not the case with Greek Pinder and Sophocles or English Shakespeare… …Arnold cites the state of things to be the true basis for the creative power's exercise.

Ans to Q 6: The business of criticism is to know the best that is known and thought in the world… …it should spread knowledge to create a flow of new and fresh ideas… …its business is to practise the function with honesty and sense of duty… …by remaining 'detached' the critic should show the society what is right and just… …thus, the pursuit of truth becomes the main business of criticism.

Ans to Q 7: True criticism must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims… …it must not hurry on to the goal because of its practical importance… …it must be patient, and flexible, and know how to attach itself to things and how to withdraw from them… …it must be apt to discern the spiritual shortcomings or illusions of powers that in the practical sphere may be beneficent.

Ans to Q 8: Disinterestedness, is indispensable a rule of English criticism because it helps create objectivity… …It also means independence of judgment… …three ways to maintain disinterestedness… …a. By keeping aloof from what is called "the practical view of things… …b. By resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches… …c. By steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas.

Ans to Q 9: Creative Faculty vs Critical Faculty… …Disinterestedness… …The idea of Literary Criticism… …The Role of the Critic.

Ans to Q 10: The critic has to remain collected and refuse to lend himself to the point of view of the so called practical man… …the critic should pursue his own course with greatest sincerity… … but he should remain exposed to frequent misunderstandings.



12.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Criticism is 'a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world'. Discuss with reference to Matthew Arnold's "Function of Criticism in Present Times".

Q 2: Discuss the concept of disinterestedness. Why does the idea of disinterestedness remain so prominent in Arnold's criticism?

Q 3: How does Arnold react to the changing Victorian ethos of art and morality? Elaborate.

Q 4: From the reading of Arnold's text, provide a detailed discussion of creative faculty vs critical faculty as the most dominant mode in Arnoldian criticism.

Q 5: **"**Creative activity is the great happiness and the great proof of being alive, and it is not denied to criticism to have it; but then criticism must be sincere, simple, flexible, ardent, ever widening its knowledge". Discuss with reference to Arnold's interpretation of the creative activity and criticism.

Q 6: Which are the four main issues taken up by Matthew Arnold in his essay? Illustrate with reference from the original text. (Hints: Arnold's ideas of Creative and Critical faculty, his notion of disinterestedness, the idea of criticism and the role of the critic)

Q 7: Provide a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Matthew Arnold as a critic. Do you think that he had succeeded in his effort to instruct his contemporaries regarding how to become a critic?

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UNIT 13: INTRODUCTION TO NEW CRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE:

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 History of New Criticism

13.4 New Criticism Vs Russian Formalism

13.5 Key Figures of New Criticism

13.6 Important Concepts in New Criticism

13.7 Let us Sum up

13.8 Further Reading

13.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

13.10 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- familiarise yourself with the historical background and philosophical heritage of New Criticism
- discuss how the movement is continuous with or departs from critical tendencies and theorisation prevalent in earlier times
- find out the important critics and literary scholars associated with New Criticism
- explain the ideas and concepts central to New Criticism.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

New criticism was an influential critical movement in the course of modern literary criticism. If it is in some ways aligned with Structuralism and Russian Formalism, more recent trends such as Marxism, Post-structuralism, Feminist or Neo-historicism developed as reaction against the New-Critical ethos. The term 'New Criticism' appears in John Crowe Ransom's book entitled *The New Criticism,* published in 1941. As a critical trend, it implies a form of critical practice that was gradually

becoming dominant in Anglo-American literary criticism in-between 1940s and 1960s. You should note that *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), *Practical Criticism* (1929), and *Understanding Poetry* (1938) are the three important works that served as the foundational text of the new critical movement. Many of the critical essays of the poet T.S. Eliot also paved the way for the development of New Criticism. New Criticism is a reaction against some of the important critical insights and tendencies of the Romantics. In this unit, we shall discuss the history of New Criticism with reference to the major exponents as well as the important concepts in New Criticism.

13.3 HISTORY OF NEW CRITICISM

Perhaps you remember that the dominant tendency of the Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge was to see the value and significance of literary work as the result of authorial intention or the 'expression' of the intention of the authors. Thus, it was believed that the root of literary truth could be traced in the sincerity of emotions and feelings experienced by the author. New Criticism dispensed with the idea of an author while assessing a work of art. Secondly, it is a reaction against the historical and philological approaches to literature. For example, John Crowe Ransom, the Carnegie Professor of Poetry at Kenyon College, regularly organised academic discussions pleading for a 'pure' criticism that could overthrow historical, philological, and biographical scholarship then in vogue in the universities. Subsequently, he opted for exclusive focus on literary techniques rather than on biography, morality, psychology, and sought to replace 'extrinsic' criticism with the 'intrinsic'. Thirdly, with the advent of the New Critical trends, criticism became a self-contained academic discipline. From the 1920s, there started a sudden vogue in academic institutions of critical interpretation, which included analysis, and introduction of evaluative judgment of literary works.

The key thinkers and critics associated with this school had their own individual agendas and propositions. Despite having differences and

disagreements among themselves, they all seemed to agree on the question of the text as the main object of literary criticism. The basic assumption was that reading a text in terms of authorial intention, effect on the reader, or its historical context could not do justice to the text, which is a texture of variously patterned linguistic elements. The text is an autonomous, self-contained entity, and is itself the proper object of criticism. A text must be studied in its own terms and extra-textual yardsticks should not be brought to bear upon it. Hence, the New Critics called for 'Close Reading' of texts.

Is New Criticism just a method of reading or does it also embody a distinctive ideology are some other related issues to be discussed. In subsequent critical trends, with the advent of a variety of 'political reading' of literary works, the New Critics are accused of a certain snobbery because of their exclusive focus on a clearly demarcated text, alienated from its various contexts. You should however understand that such a separation of the text from history as well as the circumstances of its production could also imply a 'closure' of reading rather than opening up of the text to diverse possibilities of meaning. Critics like Terry Eagleton, Frank Lentriccia critiqued New Criticism for this kind of conservatism. In America, the 'little magazine' *The Fugitive* formed a group of critics that included Allan Tate, John Crowe Ransom and Austin Warren. Although the group disappeared by 1937, Ransom, Tate, Warren and Brooks turned to literary criticism and the conservative political background inspired them to uphold a formalist poetics.



LET US KNOW

Although the New Critics reacted against some of the important critical insights and tendencies of the Romantics like the 'authorial intention' or the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' of the author, there also seems to be some affinities between Romantic criticism and New Criticism. For example, in chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria,* Coleridge offers a theory of poetry and its relation to the poet.

Poetry, to Coleridge, is not just an outward expression of a poet's inner feelings because imagination plays a creative and transformative role. Imagination, Coleridge states: "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate". Besides, imagination fuses the opposites…". This accounts for the organic unity of poetry, the interrelationships of poetic elements and their inseparability from the whole seems to be an important antecedent to the New Critical concept of literary work as a self-contained whole. Of course, the pervasive insistence of the Romantics on the link between the poet and the poem, the cause and the effect, the literary phenomenon and its subjective origin did not find any importance among the New Critics. The New Critical ethos goes against the dominant Romantic concept of the origin of any literary phenomenon. Again, Keats's idea of the relation between a poet and his/her poem greatly departs from the expresser's notion of art, and is more attuned towards the New Critical ethos. Wimsatt and Beardsley in *The Intentional Fallacy* declare that the biographical account of the poet is irrelevant to the reading of the poem. Keats too was dismissive of Romantic subjectivism. In a letter to Sir Richard Woodhouse, he stated: "The poetical character… is not itself, it has no self, it is everything and nothing, it has no character…a poet is the most un-poetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity- he is continually in for and filling some other body**".** The implication is important, as knowledge about the poet does not help in the reading of the poem. Therefore, an understanding of this type of a background should surely help you to comprehend the ideas of New Criticism in detail.

The next point to be discussed is the connection between New Criticism and Empiricism. Because, discussing a literary text as the object of literary study is not the only purpose of New criticism. It also dwells extensively on the 'nature' of 'textual experience'. 'Experience' thus becomes a key word because critics see literature and more specifically poetry as an embodied experience, which cannot be reduced to a set of

principles or propositional truth. Philosophically the term 'experience' refers to empiricism, and you should note that the philosophical origin of New Criticism is Empiricism. According to the New Critics, any reference to context, either historical or biographical, or understanding of how a text affects a reader does not help us in this regard. The only way to acquire the experience of the text itself is through 'close-reading' of the text. Reading itself is an experience, which is the authentic source of truth and knowledge. Empiricism is based on the assumption that all knowledge is derived from experience. The mind, according to the Empiricists, is capable of organising experience and that there is no 'innate' idea, as ideas are impressed upon the human mind by experience itself. There are two ways in which knowledge-formation is possible- (i) perception and (ii) reflection of the mind. You should not, however confuse poetic experience with scientific and practical knowledge. New Critics were assertive of the distinctive character of literary knowledge, which greatly differed from scientific knowledge.

New Criticism had many things in common with Formalism. Both unanimously fixed the text to be object of investigation, both employed a mode of 'intrinsic' criticism, brushing aside the 'extrinsic' elements from the scene, and both shared a pervasive concern for 'form'. Therefore, a discussion of the convergence between the two becomes yet another necessity. New Criticism and Russian Formalism is that both regard literature as a self-contained verbal entity. They both insist on the autonomy of the literary text. One important offshoot of such an assumption is that they promote a mode of intrinsic criticism, and, they reject extra-literary criteria to judge literary texts. Both schools dwell on the specific nature of literary language. Whereas New Critics hold literary language in opposition to the language of science and of practical discourse, Formalists like Roman Jacobson defines 'literariness' by insisting on the poetic function of language. However, as M H Abrams points out, Formalists rely more on overarching organisational principles such as fabula, syuzhet, metaphor, metonymy or on specific modes of literary representation, which they tend to call defamiliarisation. On the

other hand, “the principles of the New Criticism are basically verbal. That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language…and the explicative procedure is to analyse the meanings and interactions of words, figures of speech, and symbols. However, whether or not one dwells on the ‘origin’ of meaning or exploration of meaning through interrelationship of verbal entities that constitute the text, one must invariably seal off experiences of the external world, and read the text itself carefully. Hence, both groups adopt a habit of ‘close reading’”.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who, for the first time, had used the term New Criticism? Name some of the foundational New Critical texts?

Q 2: In what ways would you like to state that New Criticism is ‘new’?

Q 3: What is so common to all the New Critics?

13.4 NEW CRITICISM VS RUSSIAN FORMALISM:

An important point of convergence between New Criticism and Russian Formalism is that both regard literature as a self-contained verbal entity. They insist on the autonomy of the literary text. One important offshoot of such an assumption is that they promote a mode of intrinsic criticism and reject extra-literary criteria to judge literary texts. Let us, in this context, quote from Hans Bertens: “Although Eliot is obviously very much interested in poetic technique and in the form of specific poems, an interest that would be worked out by a group of American poets and critics, the so-called New Critics – he is ultimately more interested in a poem’s meaning. Poetry should convey complex meanings in which attitudes that might easily be seen as contradictory are fused and which allow us to see things that we otherwise would not see. Our job, then, is to interpret poems after which we can pass judgment on them; that is, establish how well they succeed in creating

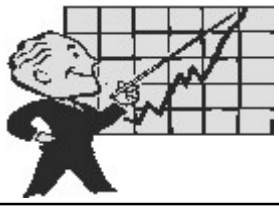
and conveying the complexity of meaning that we expect from them…the idea that we read poems, and literature in general, because they contain meaning, is obvious. This search for the meaning of poems, novels, plays and other works of literature has from the 1920s well into the 1970s absolutely dominated English and American literary studies and still constituted one of their important activities." To the Formalists, however, literary investigation should not be directed at the meaning *per se* but to the discovery of form, that makes meaning possible.

Both schools dwell on the specific nature of literary language. Whereas New Critics hold literary language in opposition to the language of science and of practical discourse, Formalists like Roman Jakobson define 'literariness' by insisting on the poetic function of language. However, Formalists rely more on overarching organizational principles such as fabula, syuzhet, metaphor, and metonymy or on specific modes of literary representation–defamiliarisation. On the other hand, "the principles of the New Criticism are basically verbal. That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language…and the explicative procedure is to analyse the meanings and interactions of words, figures of speech, and symbols".*(A Glossary of literary Terms)*

However, whether or not one dwells on the 'origin' of meaning or exploration of meaning through interrelationship of verbal entities that constitute the text, one must invariably seal off experiences of the external world, and read the text itself carefully. Hence, both groups adopt a habit of 'close reading'.

We must also note that the Formalists, unlike the New Critics, confer a greater amount of scientificity to the study of literature. This can be better understood when we read M. H. Abrams. He says: "Unlike the European Formalists…the New Critics did not apply the science of linguistics to poetry' and their emphasis was not on a work as constituted by linguistic devices for achieving specifically literary effects, but on the complex interplay within a work of ironic, paradoxical, and metaphoric meanings around a humanly important theme."

The basic theoretical premises of this school have been variously contested in subsequent periods. New Criticism's implicit assumption about the high cultural values embedded in English literary culture was debunked with 'Culture studies' emerging as a new discipline along with the advent of post-modernism, where moral and ethical barriers are sought to be resolved, hierarchies of aesthetic works are destabilised, in order to pave the way for an open study of multifarious cultural phenomenon. For example, New Historicism, which opts for the historical and social elements as important source of literary speculation, is in sharp reaction to the insular and textual reading upheld by New Criticism. New Historicism insists on a dynamic text, context and dialogue in the production of meaning and value of literature. In fact, the theoretical movements such as Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Deconstruction. Post colonialism, Feminism, Cultural Studies and New Historicism that started from the 1960s onwards began as a reaction against the basic principles and ideas of New Criticism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention the similarities between New Criticism and Russian Formalism.

13.5 KEY FIGURES OF NEW CRITICISM

The key figurers of New Criticism are John Crowe Ransom, I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, William Empson, W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley among others. To be more precise, New Criticism denotes a practice of reading evolved by I.A. Richards. In fact, it was 'practical criticism' initiated by Richards that was carried forward by the New Critics, and its impact can be seen in their exclusive textual orientation. Following is a list of the most important New Critics.

John Crowe Ransom: (1888-1974)

Ransom was a pioneering figure of New Criticism in America. To Ransom, the function of criticism is the elucidation of literary works. Most

notable among his critical works are *The New Criticism* and *The World as Body* both of which contain important aspects of New Criticism. In an essay titled "Criticism, Inc.", he states certain basic principles of this school, and expresses his aim to make literary criticism "more scientific or precise and systematic". He underlines the importance of a critical shift from historicism to aesthetic appreciation. Historical and biographical information is not irrelevant either, but they must help to define the 'aesthetic' of literature. Ransom mentions some normative principles characteristic of New Criticism. For him, criticism should exclude—Personal impressions, Synopsis and paraphrase, Historical studies, Linguistic studies (involving allusion, word-meaning etc.), Moral content. Ransom further asserts that poetry is ontologically different and hence irreducible to prose meaning.

Ransom had a remarkable influence on contemporary American critics through the literary journal *Kenyon Review* (He was the editor of *Kenyon Review* for 20 years.) His view of the distinctive nature of poetic experience can also be understood through the distinction he made between 'Texture' and 'Structure' of a poem. 'Structure' is the argument of the poem seen as a whole. While 'Texture' is constituted by elements that have local value and affect the overall shape of the poem. The 'Texture' does not easily give rise to the 'Structure', but rather impedes it. It complicates whatever argument the poet is going to establish. As a result, "in the end we have our logic but only after a lively reminder of the aspects of reality with which logic cannot cope." The term 'Texture' is actually derived from the plastic arts, which denotes the surface quality of a work, as opposed to its shape and structure. As applied in modern literary criticism, it thus designates the concrete qualities of a poem as opposed to its idea.

I. A. Richards: (1893-1979)

I.A. Richards was an extraordinary English literary critic and rhetorician. He is known mostly for his experimental 'practical' criticism. Once, he distributed in the classroom some papers containing poems (where the names of the poets were withheld) and asked students to

critically evaluate them. Such an undertaking might seem commonplace to you, but it was indeed a formidable task then because it inspired a direct, 'unmediated' encounter between the literary text and the critical reader. It was principally because of I.A. Richards that scientific objectivity became the hallmark of New Criticism. You will like to know that C. K. Ogden was his main collaborator throughout his intellectual pursuits. Richards, Ogden and James Wood co-authored *Foundations of Aesthetics*, where they mapped the principles of aesthetic reception. Another outstanding work by Richards and Ogden was *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language and of the Science of Symbolism.* The earlier phase of his critical works focused on meaning, comprehension and communication.

Principles of Literary Criticism by Richards is a reaction against a time when there was nothing but "an echo of critical theories". The book is an expression of the enthusiasm he felt for science and the scientific mode of enquiry. *Practical Criticism,* another work by Richards, had a pedagogic necessity as it promoted a particular method of teaching literature in many Anglo-American universities, and inspired the practice of 'close-reading' in subsequent critical developments. Richards, who is today considered to be the founder of New Criticism, contributed a good number of terms to the field of literary criticism such as 'stock responses', 'pseudo-statements', 'bogus entities', distinction between 'tenor' and 'vehicle', terms like 'referential', 'referent', 'ambiguity', etc. The term 'ambiguity' was a negative marker, and was used in a pejorative sense in earlier criticism. It was Richards who put it to use in a non-pejorative way, asserting that ambiguity is a basic trait of language itself. William Empson, who was a student of Richards, expounded the term in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

Cleanth Brooks: (1906-1994)

Cleanth Brook was an influential American literary critic and professor. He is best known for his contributions to New Criticism in the mid-20th century and for revolutionising the teaching of poetry in American

higher education. His most important works are *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939). Such works express the centrality of ambiguity and paradox as a way of understanding poetry. With his writings, Brooks helped to formulate formalist criticism, emphasising "the interior life of a poem" and codifying the principles of close reading. Brooks was also the preeminent critic of Southern literature, writing classic texts on William Faulkner, and co-founder of the influential journal *The Southern Review* with Robert Penn Warren.

Allen Tate: (1899-1979)

Allen Tate belongs to the Southern group of American critics. He distinguishes between scientific and literary discourses, which may also explain the distinction between New Criticism and Russian Formalism. If both schools share the view that a literary work is the proper object of study, the Russian Formalists' scientific study of literature goes against the New Critics' insistence on the irreducible and ontologically different experience of literature. In one sense, Tate's criticism is eclectic, and he reconciles Richards, Cleanth Brooks and R.P. Warren. For example, he draws on Richards's ideas of reconciliation, Brooks' concept of irony, and Warren's view that a poetic proposition has nothing to do with intellectual and rational scrutiny.

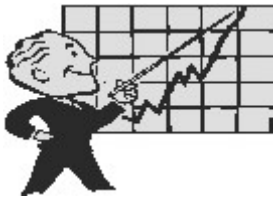
William Empson: (1906-1984)

Empson, the English literary critic, is perhaps the first analytical critic to consistently apply the principles of I.A. Richards on the nature and function of language. He emphasised a linguistic analysis of literary texts. He maintained that a particular word does not have a single meaning but a cluster of meanings. His *Seven Types of Ambiguity* shows careful analysis of small units of a text (word, line, sentence, etc.). Empson insisted on alternative readings and stated that ambiguity is characteristic of poetic and literary language. He meticulously probes texts like *Othello* and *Paradise Lost,* and explores multiple meanings of



Eliot's "objective correlative" predates "Affective Fallacy". According to it, emotions are externalised into a poem not as emotions but in the form of some events and situation, specific to the emotion, because judging a poem from emotion results in impressionism.

certain key words found in the text. I.A. Richards' principles regarding the nature and function of criticism, was first applied to poetry by Empson. In the *English Critical Tradition,* he is regarded as one of the sharpest and the most sensitive of modern critics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Mention the names of some of the important New Critics and their specific critical works.

Q 6: Explain the meaning of the terms 'texture' and 'structure'.

13.6 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS IN NEW CRITICISM

Autonomy of the Text

The New Critics were oriented towards "close-reading" or 'practical reading' on the lines laid down by I. A. Richards. They believed that a text, being constituted by a unique system of language, is itself a source of its meaning and value, and is thus distinguished from other texts or other uses of language. A poem is an embodied experience inextricably bound up with language, and hence its meaning cannot be conveyed by prose paraphrases. In the Romantic period, it is the poet who is the locus of meaning and significance, as one can remember from Wordsworth's famous dictum that poetry is the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. However, following New Criticism, poetry is said to have its own territory, its own unique mode of existence. New Critics see the poem as a self-contained, self-sustaining entity. The poem, and not its relation to the external world, should be the focus and object of criticism, as the new Critics sought to establish.

Intentional Fallacy and Affective Fallacy

"The Intentional Fallacy" by W K Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley is a foundational text of New Criticism, which states that 'intention' should not be brought to bear upon the analysis of the literary

text. Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that knowledge of an author's original intention is neither integral to, nor essential in the critical analysis of, a work. One can interpret a text without any reference to 'authorial intention'. Their claim here is two-fold: First, authorial intentions are not available in the text; second, the notion of authorial intention dismantles the integrity of a literary work.

On the other hand, the term "Affective Fallacy" used by Wimsatt and Beardsley (*The Verbal Icon*, 1954), connotes 'a confusion between the poem and its result (what it is and what it does)'. Judgment of a literary text should not rest upon the effect it has on the readers. 'Affective fallacy' is thus a confusion between a poem and its "affect" on readers. A text, however emotive its context might be, must nevertheless be judged as a text, or a self-sufficient entity. It must be seen as a system of language. Therefore, evaluating a work of art in terms of its results in the mind of the readers is supposed to be a critical error. In the subsequent unit, you will read about these concepts in detail.

Irony and Paradox:

In general terms irony refers to a subtly humorous perception of inconsistency in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance. Irony also indicates a 'verbal situation' where the expressed meaning differs from its implied meaning. Some New Critics used this term to provide a general criterion of affixing literary value to a work of art. I.A. Richards, for example, contends that in any aesthetic experience, the rivalry of conflicting impulses is avoided as they are given autonomy. He also distinguishes between 'exclusion' and 'inclusion' in poetry, defining irony as a 'touchstone' for the poetry of exclusion. As he states: "Irony consists in bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses; that is why poetry which is exposed to it is not of the highest order, and why irony itself is so constantly a characteristic of poetry". (*Literary Criticism: A Short History*).

Cleanth Brooks further elaborates Richards' idea in his essay "Irony as a Principle of Structure". He opines that poetic statements can



Denotation and Connotation:

Denotation is the most literal meaning of a word, regardless of what one feels about it or the various ideas and suggestions it connotes. For example, the word apartheid denotes a certain form of political, social, and racial regime. However, it *connotes* much more than that. Connotation refers to the suggestions and implications evoked by a word or a phrase.

aspire for musicality only through particular and concrete details. In poetry, general meaning is qualified by the particular "the concrete particular with which the poet loads himself seems to deny the universal to which he aspires." (*The English Critical Tradition,* 472). Brooks would even like to suggest that the 'language of poetry is the language of paradox'. This idea has been persuasively elaborated in his book *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947), which is devoted to close reading of poems by John Donne, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, Eliot and a few others. Brooks tried to argue that the poems are meant to be "the concrete examples on which generalizations are to be based." Thus, the poetic language may be seen as "The Language of Paradox." Because, it is a language in which connotations play an equally important part along with denotations.

Ambiguity

Ambiguity usually refers to openness to different interpretations, or an instance in which some use of language may be understood in diverse ways. Sometimes known as 'plurisignation' or 'multiple meaning', ambiguity became a central concept in the interpretation of poetry in William Empson's book *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), which is a fundamental text of New Criticism. The basic argument is that because of its unique organization of language, poetry can cover an indecision, which finds an echo in the mind of the reader. Such indecision stems from the reconciliation of contradictory impulses. Although Empson offers a classification of ambiguity into seven types, his actual contributions can be traced not in his classification, but in the way he offers a close and acute analysis of the linguistic elements of language. In view of the multiple meanings, Empson states that a reader must know the forces that work in the mind of the author, or how those forces appear to its first readers. So, knowledge of the history of language, the author's conscious or unconscious intentions as well as the reactions of the first readers—are all keys to an understanding of ambiguity.

Metaphorical Meaning:

I.A. Richards has it that meaning originates from a specific context within a text. However, contrary to this, metaphor exemplifies how the

contexts merge. Metaphorical meaning is therefore not a version of literal meaning or "simply a prettified version of an already stated meaning" (*Literary Criticism: A Short History,* 644), but that which occupies a new, distinctive ground, adding to the richness of poetry. Richards introduced the terms 'tenor' and 'vehicle', 'tenor' indicating the subject and 'vehicle', the metaphorical term linked to the 'tenor'. However, metaphor does not mean either 'tenor' or 'vehicle', but a third entity that stems from their link. Resisting traditional notions of the 'displacement of words', Richards sees metaphor as a transaction of two contexts, and its value is thus, never ornamental.



13.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that New Criticism institutionalised the study of literature and established it as a self-sufficient academic discipline. You have learnt that New Criticism is a movement in American literary criticism from around 1930s to 1960s that concentrated on the verbal complexities and ambiguities of short poems considered as self-sufficient objects without attention to their origins or effects. John Crowe Ransom (*The New Criticism* 1941), I. A. Richards, William Empson are the most important New Critics. Ransom called for a more 'objective' criticism so that one could focus on the intrinsic qualities of a work rather than on its biographical or historical context; and Ransom's students Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren had already provided a very influential model of such an approach in their college textbook *Understanding Poetry* (1938). This intellectual background made New Criticism the academic orthodoxy for the next twenty years. The names of the other New Critics include Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, W. K. Wimsatt Jr, and Kenneth Burke. You have learnt that I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929), William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), Cleanth Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947), and Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon* (1954) are the outstanding works of New Criticism. New Criticism also promoted a particular reading practice—the habit of "close reading."



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13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: John Crowe Ransom in his book *The New Criticism* which (1941) used the term for the first time… …*Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), *Practical Criticism* (1929), and *Understanding Poetry* (1938) are the three other important books that served as the foundational texts of the New Critical movement.

Ans to Q 2: Because it is a reaction against some of the important critical insights and tendencies of the Romantics (mainly their advocacy of authorial intention or 'expression' of their intention)… …because it is a reaction against the historical and philological

approaches to literature…. …with New criticism, criticism became a self-contained academic discipline.

Ans to Q 3: They all agreed to accept the text as the object of literary criticism… …they held that the text is an autonomous, self-contained entity and is itself the proper object of criticism… …they all agreed with 'Close Reading'.

Ans to Q 4: Both fixed the text to be object of investigation… … both employed a mode of 'intrinsic' criticism, brushing aside the 'extrinsic' elements from the scene… …both shared a pervasive concern for 'form'… …both schools dwelled on the specific nature of literary language… …both adopted a habit of 'close reading'.

Ans to Q 5: John Crowe Ransom (*The New Criticism* and *The World as Body*)… …I.A. Richards (*Principles of Literary Criticism and Practical Criticism… …*Cleanth Brooks (*The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*)… William Empson (*English Critical Tradition & Seven Types of Ambiguity)… …* W. K. Wimsatt & Monroe C. Beardsley (*The Verbal Icon*) and so on.

Ans to Q 6: According to John Crowe Ransom, the distinctive nature of poetic experience can be understood through the distinction he makes between 'texture' and 'structure' of a poem… …the structure is the argument of the poem seen as a whole… …'texture' is constituted by elements that have local value and affect the overall shape of the poem.



13.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Outline the main concerns of the New Critical advocacy of textual "close reading".

Q 2: Highlight the extent of the similarities between New Criticism and the Formalists. In what sense are both schools proponents of the 'poem'? In what way do they differ?

Q 3: How did New Criticism evolve as a dominant critical mode in the beginning of the 20th century? Discuss.

Q 4: What are the important concepts under New Criticism? Discuss their role in the intellectual contexts of New Criticism.

Q 5: "New Criticism institutionalised the study of literature and established it as a self-sufficient academic discipline." Justify your views.

Q 6: Make a list of the important New Critics and describe their contributions with particular reference to their works.

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UNIT 14: W. K. WIMSATT AND M. C. BEARDSLEY: "THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY" (1946) & "THE AFFECTIVE FALLACY" (1949)

UNIT STRUCTURE:

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley: The New Critics

14.4 Reading the Texts

14.5 Important Concepts

14.6 Wimsatt and Beardsley as New Critics

14.7 Let us Sum up

14.8 Further Reading

14.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.10 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the importance of new critical formulations of critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley
- explain the contextual significance of the two texts "The Intentional Fallacy" & "The Affective Fallacy"
- explain the different aspects of "The Intentional Fallacy" & "The Affective Fallacy" as two seminal texts in New Criticism
- discuss the importance of Wimsatt and Beardsley among the New Critics whose critical views changed the course of modern criticism in the 20th century

14.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to two important New Critical texts namely—"The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) and "The Affective Fallacy" (1949), co-authored by William Kurtz Wimsatt Jr. (1907-1975) and Monroe C. Beardsley (1915-1985). These two essays are important position papers in 20th century



A ***fallacy*** is the use of invalid or otherwise faulty reasoning.

criticism. Neither of them presents an argument that is wholly original, but each codifies a crucial tenet of the Anglo American New Critical orthodoxy. In "The Intentional Fallacy" Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that we cannot use the author's intention to judge a literary work, because the work is a public utterance, not a private one that depends for its meaning on the intent or design of its author. In the later piece, "The Affective Fallacy", Wimsatt and Beardsley emphasise that the meaning of a literary work is not equivalent to its effects, especially its emotional impact, on the reader. This unit introduces you to the New Critical school of thought, but the main thrust will be on Wimsatt and Beardsley's formalist view that critical analysis must centre on the text itself and a critic is to examine the linguistic structure and the aesthetic unity of the text as an autonomous object.

14.3 W. K. WIMSATT AND M. C. BEARDSLEY: THE NEW CRITICS

W. K. Wimsatt (1907-1975) was an American literary critic and theorist. Born in Washington D C, he later attended Georgetown University, and then Yale University from which he received his Ph.D. In 1939, he became a member of Yale's English department, and soon won wide acclaim for his work in eighteenth-century studies. His books in that field include *The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson* (I941) and *Philosophic Wards: A Study of Style and Meaning in the "Rambler" and "Dictionary" of Samuel Johnson* (1948). However, he is best known for his literary theory and criticism, notably *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954), *Hateful Contraries: Studies in Literature and Criticism* (I965), *Day of the Leopards: Essays in Defense of the Poem* (1976), and with Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957). Written as a series of independent essays between 1941 and 1952, *Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* was finally published as a cohesive work in 1954. Probably his most influential work, *Verbal Icon* contains two of Wimsatt's most important essays, "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy" co-authored with Monroe Beardsley.

Paul de Man in *Blindness and Insight* offers a significant critique of Wimsatt's texts, taken as an example of the understanding of the notion of 'autonomy' in New Criticism. While his *Hateful Contraries: Studies in Literature and Criticism* (1965) is concerned with the influence of what he calls "Amateur Criticism". This book was written as a way to "distinguish what [he] consider[s] an inevitable and proper literary interest in the contraries" Through studies of works by T. S. Eliot as well as discussions of topics such as "The Augustan Mode in English Poetry" and "The Criticism of Comedy", Wimsatt attempted to add to the efforts to justify and improve literary criticism. *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957) was written along with Cleanth Brooks. It was intended as "a history of ideas about verbal art and about its elucidation and criticism." Both attempted to contribute to the "intelligibility in the history of literary argument" which, they state, is a necessary part of any historical literary studies.

In this context, let us also have a brief look at M. C. Beardsley (1915-1985). Beardsley was an American philosopher of art. A native of Connecticut, he received his *BA* and PhD from Yale University, and held a position in the Philosophy department there before entering Mount Holyoke College in 1944. He later taught at Swarthmore College and at Temple University, focusing on literary criticism and aesthetics. His work in aesthetics is best known for its championing of the instrumentalist theory of art and the concept of aesthetic experience. Beardsley was elected president of the American Society for Aesthetics in 1956. He also wrote an introductory text on aesthetics and edited a well-regarded survey anthology of philosophy. Among literary critics, Beardsley is known for two essays written with W.K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy", both key texts of New Criticism. His other works include—*Practical Logic* (1950), *Aesthetics* (1958), and *Aesthetics: A Short History* (1966). He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1976.

14.4 READING THE TEXTS

The following shall help you to understand the texts better.

"The Intentional Fallacy" (1946)

Wimsatt and Beardsley begin the essay with a discussion of the author's "intention" upon the critic's judgment, which, they claim, had been challenged in a number of recent discussions, notably in the debate entitled *The Personal Heresy,* between Professors Lewis and Tillyard, as well as in periodical essays like the "Symposiums" of 1940 in the *Southern* and *Kenyan Reviews.* They refer to their own discussion of "Intention" for a *Dictionary* of literary criticism in which they raised the issue but were unable to pursue its implications at any length. They argued that the **"design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art,** and it seemed to them that this is a principle which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes. It is a principle entailing many specific truths about inspiration, authenticity, biography, literary history and scholarship, and about some trends of contemporary poetry, especially its allusiveness. There is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic's approach will not be qualified by his view of "intention". Then, they proceed to explain what they think of Intention. They write that the term corresponds to **what is intended** in a formula, which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance. In order to judge the poet's performance, one must know what he intended. Therefore, intention is the design or plan in the author's mind. It is connected with the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write.

Then they provide a series of certain important propositions, which hold tremendous significance in the discussions of New Criticism. Some of them are as the following.

1. A poem does not come into existence by accident. Although Professor Stoll would like to remark that, it comes out of a head, not out of a hat, yet to insist on the designing intellect, as a *cause* of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a standard.
2. One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about 'intention'. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And, if the poet did not succeed then the poem is not

adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem.

3. Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. It is only because an artefact works when we can infer the intention of an artificer. "A poem should not mean but be." A poem can *be* only through its *meaning* since its medium is words-yet it *is,* simply *is,* in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. Poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful, if and only if we correctly infer the intention. They are more abstract than poetry.
4. The meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one, in the sense that a poem expresses a personality or state of soul rather than a physical object like an apple. However, even a short lyric poem is dramatic, the response of a speaker to a situation. We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic *speaker,* and the author is implied only by a 'biographical act of inference.

They again refer to Professor Stoll who had asked if the critic is not a judge who does not explore his own consciousness but determines the author's meaning or intention. Therefore, the poem is not the critic's own property. Contradicting such a remark made by Stoll, they argue that the poem is neither of the critic's own nor of the author's. It is detached from the author at birth. For example, the poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language under the peculiar possession of the public. Then they mention I. A. Richards and Rene Wellek and what they had to say about a poet. I. A. Richards called the poem *"a* class of experiences which do not differ in any character more than a certain amount…from a standard experience". Professor Wellek on the other hand, objected to Richards and preferred to call the poem "a system of norms," "extracted from every individual experience." However, in doing that, he was never wishing to make the poet (outside the poem) an authority.

What Wimsatt and Beardsley are opposing here is what they tend to call a Romantic intentional fallacy: the Romantic idea, expressed in ancient

times by Longinus and more recently, by figures such as the great German writer Goethe and the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, that a poem echoes the soul of its author, that it embodies his intentions or psychological circumstances. The most influential recent statement of intentionalism, according to the authors of this essay, is I. A. Richards' fourfold characterisation of meaning as "sense," "feeling," "tone," and "intention." The passwords of the intentional school are Romantic words such as "spontaneity," "sincerity," "authenticity," and "originality." These need to be replaced, say the authors, with terms of analysis such as "integrity," "relevance," "unity," and "function". Like Ransom, Wimsatt and Beardsley are concerned to exclude from criticism certain related studies such as author psychology, biography, and history. They in fact make a distinction between "internal" and "external" evidence for the meaning of a poem. Internal evidence is public, is internal to the poem itself, and is discovered through the poem's semantics, syntax, and the knowledge of how these operate within the larger context of language and culture. External evidence is private or idiosyncratic: it is evidence gleaned from outside the poem, and may include diaries, journals, letters, and reported conversations. Wimsatt and Beardsley acknowledge that there may be a third kind of evidence, which is "intermediate": evidence about an author's character, or semi-private meanings attached to words and concepts by the author and his circle.

The arguments of this essay are subject to many of the same criticisms that have been levelled against the writers' positions in "The Intentional Fallacy". Perhaps, the most fundamental objection is the impossibility and artificiality of treating literature as a self-contained object which is not somehow realised in its performance, in interaction with readers who legitimately bring to the texts their own cultural backgrounds, interests, and assumptions. Moreover, the insistence that the text is an isolated object in itself effectively represents a philosophical regression to a world conceived as composed of separate and independent objects; despite its persistence on many levels of ideology and politics. It is a view that has been discredited by many thinkers, from Hegel and Marx, through Bergson, Sartre, and Derrida.



LET US KNOW

"The Intentional Fallacy" is a powerful polemic, but somewhat confusing as critics have pointed out. How convincing, for example, is the distinction that an author draws between the inside and the outside of a text? They insist that a poem is a public utterance and hence cannot depend for its success on personal or private knowledge about the author, whether deliberately revealed or unearthed by literary historians and biographers. However, one could reply that what an author says and the information that a scholar brings forward are public as well. As is common with many key New Critical precepts, the concept of "the intentional fallacy" is pedagogical. A teacher and class can concentrate on the text at hand without feeling that the students' interpretive work needs the support of information about the author and the· historical period when the text was composed.

"Affective Fallacy" (1949)

As used by Wimsatt and Beardsley (*The Verbal Icon*, 1954), this term connotes 'a confusion between the poem and its result (what it is and what it does)'. Judgment of a literary text should not rest upon the effect it has on the readers. 'Affective fallacy' is thus a confusion between a poem and its "effect" on readers. A text, however emotive its context might be, must nevertheless be judged as a text, or a self-sufficient entity. It must be seen as a system of language. Therefore, evaluating a work of art in terms of its results in the mind of the readers is supposed to be a critical error. Eliot's "objective correlative" predates this principle. According to it, emotions are externalised into a poem not as emotions but in the form of some events and situation, specific to the emotion, because judging a poem from emotion results in impressionism.

Affective Fallacy is an answer to the idea of Impressionistic criticism, which is based on the idea that the reader's response to a poem is the ultimate indication of its value. It is the antithesis of affective criticism, which is the practice of evaluating the effect that a literary work has on its reader

or audience. Therefore, Wimsatt used the term to refer to all forms of criticism that understood a text's effect upon the reader to be the primary route to analysing the importance and success of that text. For Wimsatt, the fallacy led to a number of potential errors, most of them related to emotional relativism. According to Wimsatt, a view of literature based on its putative emotional effects will always be vulnerable to mystification and subjectivity, and he points out that the belletristic tradition exemplified by critics such as Arthur Quiller Couch and George Saintsbury as an instance of a type of criticism that relies on subjective impressions and is thus unrepeatable and unreliable. For Wimsatt such impressionistic approaches pose both practical and theoretical problems. In practical terms, it makes reliable comparisons of different critics difficult, if not irrelevant.

Affective Fallacy was controversial and although influential, it was never accepted wholly by a great number of critics. For example, the New Historicist critics repudiated the New Critical rejection of historical context. Similarly, reader-response criticism denied that a text could have a quantifiable significance outside its being read and experienced by particular readers at particular moments. These critics rejected the idea of text as icon, focusing instead on the ramifications of the interaction between text and reader.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you understand by the expression "Intentional Fallacy"? What is the main objection against "Intentional Fallacy"?

Q 2: Do you agree that "Affective Fallacy" is significant as a critical essay?

14.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

The following are the important concepts available in the texts we are discussing in these units.

Intentionality:

"The Intentional Fallacy" by W. K. Wimsatt Jr. & Monroe C. Beardsley is a foundational text of New Criticism, which states that 'intention' should not be brought to bear upon the analysis of the literary text. The authors state, "intention, as we shall use the term, corresponds to what he intended in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance…In order to judge the poem's performance, we must know what he intended. Intention is designed or planned in the author's mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write."

Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that knowledge of an author's original intention is neither integral to, nor essential in the critical analysis of a work. One can interpret a text without any reference to 'authorial intention'. Their claim here is two-fold:

- Authorial intentions are not available in the text.
- Notion of authorial intention dismantles the integrity of a literary work.

However, 'intention' cannot be so easily dispensed with. Have the authors completely denied the very notion of "authorial intention"? We must know that they distinguished between the intention realised in the text and that, which is supposed to exist prior to the existence of the text. When intention is realized, it is useless to consult the author because "Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle". Again, 'intention' cannot be the standard for critical evaluation of a text. Meaning can be deciphered only through a 'close' analysis of the text, attending to its linguistic as well as rhetorical components. Of course, not all meanings can be said to be free from authorial intention. In conversation, for instance, what the speaker intends prior to his utterance is crucial to meaning of the utterance. Literary meaning resists such dependence on the psychology of the author. "The Intentional Fallacy" also contends that a text can have meanings unacknowledged by the author. Hence, the author cannot be a guide to interpretation of a text because interpretation must be justified textually. There is both external and internal evidence for a work's meaning. Internal evidence can be found in "the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, diction, and all

the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture". External evidence is private, and not part of the work and it comes from journals, letters, conversation etc. However, Wimsatt and Beardsley could not sharply demarcate these two kinds of evidence, because the author's expressed meaning and intention can get incorporated into the text through its linguistic texture.

Intentional Fallacy:

It signifies what is claimed to be the error in interpreting and evaluating a literary work by reference to evidence outside the text itself. Wimsatt and Beardsley asserted that an author's intended aims and meanings in writing a literary work—whether these are asserted by the author or merely inferred from our knowledge of the author's life and opinions—are irrelevant to the literary critic, because the meaning, structure, and value of a text are inherent within the finished, freestanding, and public work of literature itself. Reference to the author's supposed purposes, or else to the author's personal situation and state of mind in writing a text, is held to be a harmful mistake, because it diverts our attention to such "external" matters as the author's biography, or psychological condition, or creative process, which we substitute for the proper critical concern with the "internal" constitution and inherent value of the literary product. This claim, which was central in the *New Criticism,* has been strenuously debated, and was reformulated by both of its original proponents.

Affective Fallacy:

W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley defined Affective Fallacy as the error of evaluating a poem by its effects—especially its emotional effects—upon the reader. As a result of this fallacy "the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear," so that criticism "ends in impressionism and relativism." The two critics wrote in direct reaction to the view of I. A. Richards, in his influential *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1923), that the value of a poem can be measured by the psychological responses it incites in its readers. Beardsley has since modified the earlier claim by the admission that "it does not appear that critical evaluation can be done at all except in relation to certain types of effect that aesthetic

objects have upon their perceivers." So modified, the doctrine becomes a claim for *objective criticism,* in which the critic, instead of describing the effects of a work, focuses on the features, devices, and form of the work by which such effects are achieved. An extreme reaction against the doctrine of the affective fallacy was manifested during the 1970s in the development of Reader-Response criticism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How is the term 'intention' used in New Criticism?

Q 4: What is meant by the term 'intentional fallacy'?

Q 5: Briefly explain the main idea behind what is called 'Affective Fallacy.'

14.6 WIMSATT AND BEARDSLEY AS NEW CRITICS

It has been stated already that in their critique of intention, Wimsatt and Beardsley aimed at the Romantic idea of poetry as the expression of a writer's soul or personality. Influenced by T. S. Eliot, as well as by New Critics such as—John Crowe Ransom, Brooks, and others. Wimsatt and Beardsley sought to define poetry as an impersonal art by stating 'what matters is the text itself'. They also challenge literary historians who mistakenly believe that when evaluating a poem, one must know its biographical and historical origins. For Wimsatt and Beardsley, one must attend only to the organization of the words on the page and the coherence that the words do or do not possess. They affirm that, "the poem itself is what the poet is trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem."

During the late 1960s and 1970s, a new movement in criticism, backed by Reader-Response theory, drew on the insights about the reading process that Richards and others had advanced or implied in formulating their text-cantered approaches. One of its most important members, Stanley Fish in his essay "Literature in the Reader" (I970), explicitly invoked Wimsatt

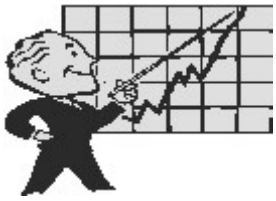
and Beardsley's arguments. For Fish, criticism should be concerned with the "analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time." Other critics and theorists during this same period challenged and complicated Wimsatt and Beardsley's rejection of the author. For example, Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt are too opposed to the Romantic conception of the author as were Wimsatt and Beardsley. However, they re-imagined and reconfigured the author to be a focal point for literary investigation and analysis. Thus, in "What Is an Author?" (1969), Foucault considers not the author as such but rather the historical "author-function," a "mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society." For Wimsatt and Beardsley, and for those they influenced, this position takes us too far from the specific text, the self-contained poem. Studying literature in a disciplined way means directly examining literary artefacts, not authors or readers or social contexts.

There are many possible objections to Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument. To begin with, it presupposes that we can treat the poem as an isolated artefact, torn from all of its contexts, including the circumstances of its reading or reception. Clearly, the distinction between internal and external evidence cannot be absolute and will vary according to the reader's knowledge and literary education. Moreover, many interpretative disputes arise not from questions of content but rather from questions of form and tone. For example, Horace's famous "Ode to Pyrrha" could be translated in a tone of polite urbanity or one of crude sarcasm. Broad considerations of the intention behind the poem may legitimately help us clarify such issues. Many poems, such as satires or mock-heroic poems, presuppose a reader's prior acquaintance with certain literary traditions and conventions: it is important to acknowledge, for example, that Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is intended to employ epic conventions for the purpose of satire. Recourse to intention can yield necessary insight into the relations between form and content, as well as relations between an artist and his audience. Moreover, given that the same statement made by different speakers in differing contexts could have vastly divergent meanings, it seems implausible to attribute autonomy to any statement or group of words, whether embodied

in poetic language or not.

Wimsatt and Beardsley's later essay "The Affective Fallacy" is motivated by the same presupposition, namely, that literature or poetry is an autonomous object, independent not only of author psychology, biography, and history but also of the reader or audience that consumes it. The word "affection" is used by philosophers to refer to emotion, mental state, or disposition. Hence, the "affective fallacy" occurs, according to Wimsatt and Beardsley, when we attempt to explicate or interpret a poem through recourse to the emotions or mental state produced in the reader or hearer.

As these authors put it, just as the intentional fallacy "is a confusion between the poem and its origins," so the affective fallacy "is a confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*)." Again, part of their problem with using the reader's response as a criterion of interpretation is that it makes criticism a subjective rather than objective activity, a discourse about the subject (the reader) rather than the object (the text). An affective reading of a poem "begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome of the Fallacy, the Intentional or the Affective, is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Why did Wimsatt and Beardsley challenge the literary historians?

Q 7: How did a Neo-historicist like Stanley Fish react to the ideas of Wimsatt and Beardsley?

Q 8: What are some of the objections to the arguments provided by Wimsatt and Beardsley?



14.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have understood that "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy" are very important documents in the theory and practice of New Criticism, the dominant mode of American academic

criticism during the first half of the 20th century. The most notable contributions of both critics are found in essays titled "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy" which are prescribed for you. These were controversial papers, which elaborated a basic tenet of New Criticism: the issue of authorial intention and effect on the reader. 'Intention' and 'Affect' must be avoided in criticism because they are not implicated in the text itself. If a poem expresses certain thoughts and attitudes, they can be ascribed to the 'dramatic speaker' or 'persona' of the poem and not to the biographical author. Therefore, in critical discourse, terms such as sincerity, authenticity, originality need to be replaced by terms like integrity, relevance, unity, function because it is the literary work, which is the sole object of critical scrutiny.



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14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that the "design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art hence the fallacy… …as a principle it rejected ideas of both classical "imitation" as well as romantic expression… … the most fundamental objection is the impossibility and artificiality of treating literature as a self-contained object.

Ans to Q 2: Yes… … Affective Fallacy is an answer to the idea of impressionistic criticism, which argues that the reader's response to a poem is the ultimate indication of its value…. …But this is a fallacy because it is based on the practice of evaluating the effect that a literary work has on its reader or audience.

Ans to Q 3: "intention, as we shall use the term, corresponds to what he intended in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance…In order to judge the poem's performance, we must know what he intended. Intention is designed or planned in the author's mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write."

Ans to Q 4: Intentional Fallacy signifies an error in interpreting and evaluating a literary work by reference to evidence outside the text itself… …that an author's intended aims and meanings in writing a literary work are irrelevant to the literary critic… …because the meaning, structure, and value of a text are inherent within the finished, freestanding, and public work of literature itself.

Ans to Q 5: Affective Fallacy is the error of evaluating a poem by its effects—especially its emotional effects—upon the reader, as a result of which "the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear."

Ans to Q 6: They challenged literary historians as they mistakenly believed that when evaluating a poem, one must know its biographical and historical origins. For them, one must attend only to the organization of the words on the page and the coherence that the words do or do

not possess… …they sought to define poetry as an impersonal art by stating 'what matters is the text itself'.

Ans to Q 7: Stanley Fish in his essay "Literature in the Reader" (I970), explicitly invoked Wimsatt and Beardsley's arguments… …for him, criticism should be concerned with the "analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time."

Ans to Q 8: One of the objections is against the presupposition that we can treat the poem as an isolated artefact, torn from all of its contexts, including the circumstances of its reading or reception… …but the distinction between internal and external evidence cannot be absolute and will vary according to the reader's knowledge and literary education… … Another objection is that many interpretative disputes arise not from questions of content but rather from questions of form and tone.



14.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Outline the main concerns of the New Critics, with special reference to textual "close reading".

Q 2: How would you name the 'authorial intention' behind any poem you have read? Would this 'intention' help you to understand the poem later?

Q 3: Is New Criticism just a method of reading or does it also embody a distinctive ideology? Discuss with reference to the context of criticism in the early 20th century.

Q 4: What are the major propositions provided by Wimsatt and Brooks in their essay "Intentional Fallacy" and "Affective Fallacy"?

Q 5: Discuss how the critical essays like "Intentional Fallacy" or "Affective Fallacy" hint at many of the significant turns that were taking place in the critical field during the early part of the 20th century?

Q 6: How has the issue of 'intentionality' been viewed by the critics? Discuss.

Q 7: Provide a critical reception of the two essays "Intentional Fallacy" and "Affective Fallacy" by Wimsatt and Beardsley.

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UNIT 15: F. R. LEAVIS: "LINE OF WIT"

UNIT STRUCTURE:

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 F. R. Leavis: The Critic

15.4 Reading the Text "Line of Wit"

15.5 Leavis as a New Critic

15.6 Let us Sum up

15.7 Further Reading

15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

15.9 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- read Leavis as one of the leading English literary critics of the 20th century
- gain a clear idea of his views on literature especially poetry and fiction
- locate the significant issues in Leavisite criticism
- grasp the significance of the essay "Line of Wit" as a seminal text of English criticism

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the course. In this unit, we shall discuss the essay "Line of Wit" in by F. R. Leavis. Leavis was an English literary critic of early-to-mid-20th century. He taught for much of his career at Downing College, Cambridge and later at the University of York. The students of literature often read Leavis as one of the most influential figures in 20th century English literary criticism, as he introduced a new "seriousness" into the field of English studies. Throughout his entire career as a critic, Leavis took 'evaluation' as the principal concern of criticism, which had the power to shape contemporary sensibility. He further insisted that the

preoccupation with form on the part of the great English novelists was a matter of responsibility towards a rich moral interest, and that works of art with a limited formal concern would always be of lesser quality. In that respect, it is believed, Leavis differed substantially from his contemporaries, the New Critics, with which we often tend to identify him. In this unit, you will get an opportunity to discuss F. R. Leavis and judge for yourself his relative significance in the English critical scenario of the 20th century through a discussion of his essay “Line of Wit.”

15.3 F. R. LEAVIS: THE CRITIC

Frank Raymond Leavis was born in Cambridge, England, on July 14th 1895. His father Harry Leavis sold pianos and other musical instruments near Cambridge. Leavis was educated at a local private school whose headmaster Dr. W. H. D. Rouse was a classicist and was highly praised for his ‘direct method’, a practice done by teachers to carry on classroom conversations with their pupils in Latin and classical Greek. He was just 19 years old when the war between Britain and Germany broke out in 1914 during World War I. He took part in the war as a stretcher-bearer, working with the Friends’ Ambulance unit. However, the experience of the war had a lasting effect on Leavis as he later suffered from insomnia and intermittent nightmares. It took time for Leavis to recover from the experience of the War.

He had then won a scholarship from the Perse School, and in 1919, he began to study history. In his second year, he changed to English and became a pupil at the newly founded English School at Cambridge. But, despite a first-class Honours in History, Leavis was never considered a strong candidate for a research fellowship. In 1924, Leavis presented a thesis on ‘The Relationship of Journalism to Literature on the Rise and Development of the Press in England’. This work became the stepping-stone for his future development as a thinker and critic. In 1927, Leavis was appointed a probationary lecturer for the university, and his substantial publications left clear marks of influence from the demands of his own teaching. In 1929, he married one of his students, Queenie Roth. Their

union resulted in a productive very collaboration. When Leavis published *New Bearings in English Poetry*, his wife published *Fiction and the Reading Public*, and both became instrumental in publication of the quarterly journal *Scrutiny.* In 1930, F. R. Leavis was appointed director of studies in English at Downing College where he taught for the next thirty years.

Being students of literature, you must try to know about the journal *Scrutiny.* F. R. Leavis founded scrutiny, a Quarterly Review and a literature journal, in 1932. The first issue of May 1932 was limited to only 100 copies. Gradually, the circulation grew leading to 750 copies in the later part of 1930s and 1000 copies in the later part of 1940s. During 1950s only 1500 copies, were made but most of them were held by colleges and academic libraries for circulation. Leavis remained its principal editor of the journal until the final issue in 1953. During that time, he used it as a vehicle for the new Cambridge criticism, upholding rigorous intellectual standards and attacking the dilettante elitism, which he believed, characterised the Bloomsbury Group. *Scrutiny* provided a forum for identifying important contemporary works and for reviewing the traditional canon. This criticism was informed by a teacher's concern to present the essentials to students.

New Bearings in English Poetry was his first major breakthrough in the field of criticism. He was also associated with the American New Critics, who emphasised 'close reading' and detailed textual analysis of poetry over an interest in the mind and personality of the poet, sources, the history of ideas and political and social implications. Although there are similarities between Leavis' approach to criticism and that of the New Critics, Leavis differs from them in not considering the theory of the work of art as a self-contained and self-sufficient aesthetic, and as a formal artifact isolated from the society, culture and tradition from which it emerged. *New Bearings*, devoted principally to Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot and Pound, was an attempt to identify certain new achievements brought by these poets into the field of modern poetry.

In 1933, Leavis published a collection called *For Continuity*, based on some of his *Scrutiny* essays. His other book *Culture and the Environment*



Cavalier Poets

It refers to the group of English poets during the reign of Charles I (1625-49). This group includes Richard Lovelace, Sir John Suckling, Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew and Edmuns Waller. These poets virtually abandoned the sonnet form which had been the most chosen and favoured contemporary medium for love poems. Their lyrical poems are usually light, witty, elegant, and for most part, concerned with love.

stressed the importance of the presence of informed and highly trained intellectual elite whose existence within university English departments could preserve the cultural continuity of English life and literature. In *Education and the University* (1943), Leavis argued that “there is a prior cultural achievement of language; language is not a detachable instrument of thought and communication. It is the historical embodiment of its community’s assumptions and aspirations at levels which are so subliminal much of the time that language is their only index.”

In around 1948, Leavis focused mostly on fiction, and made his general statement on fiction in *The Great Tradition* by stressing an English tradition through Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. Leavis purposely excluded major authors such as Sterne and Hardy, but eventually changed his position on Dickens, and later published *Dickens the Novelist* in 1970. In 1950, in the introduction to *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, Leavis set out the historical importance of utilitarian thought. In 1952, was published another collection of essays from *Scrutiny* under the title *The Common Pursuit*. This is one of Leavis’ best-known and most influential works. A decade later, Leavis became controversial when he delivered his Richmond lecture, “Two cultures? The significance of C. P. Snow” at Downing College vigorously attacking Snow’s suggestion that practitioners of the scientific and humanistic disciplines should have some significant understanding of each other, and that a lack of knowledge of 20th century physics was comparable to an ignorance of Shakespeare. Leavis’ attacks on Snow were widely decried in the British press by public figures such as Lord Boothby and Lionel Trilling. Leavis introduced the idea of the ‘third realm’ as a name for the method of existence of literature.

In 1962, his readership and fellowship at Downing were terminated; however, he took up Visiting Professorships at the University of Bristol, the University of Wales and the University of York. His final volumes of criticism include *Nor Shall My Sword* (1972), *The Living Principle* (1975) and *Thought, Words and Creativity* (1976).



LET US KNOW

In his *Living Principle,* F. R. Leavis said that collaboration is essential as any work of art can exist only in what he calls the "third realm"—the realm of that which is neither public in the ordinary sense or merely private. This collaborative nature of criticism is continually underlined in Leavis' own practice. Examples can be cited of his collaboration with his wife, Queenie Dorothy Leavis, in *Lectures in America* and *Dickens the Novelist.* Another example of collaboration was with his students at Downing who introduced his methods and principles in schools and universities where they subsequently taught. Moreover, the subsequent emergence of the journal "Scrutiny" provided as well as accommodated wide range of critical comments on diverse topics. (Irena R. Makaryk, p. 401).

Leavis' preferred method of analysis–displayed to best advantage in his studies of poetry—is a 'close reading' of short passages and he was happiest when working in a classroom with an open text before him. Like the theorists of practical criticism, he held that literary analysis should contain nothing that cannot be produced from, or related back to, the text itself. In a discussion of philosophy and criticism, he argued that the critic must guard against extrapolating from the text under analysis, and refrain from all premature or irrelevant generalizations. His refusal to theorise or philosophise about what he is doing is based on the conviction that the authority of the mature and experienced critic or reader is based on an immediate sense of values instilled by training in the labour of reading.

Leavis' importance in the development of literary criticism in England in the mid 20th-century lay in his unceasing insistence on the priority of practice over theory and the centrality of evaluation within the critical process. Ramaswami S. & V. S. Sethuraman have stated: "Leavis' *Revaluations* is an attempt at rewriting the history of English poetry in the light of Eliot's observation that 'Donne, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert and Lord Herbert, Marvell, King, and Cowley at best are in the direct current of English poetry,

and that their faults should be reprimanded by this standard rather than coddled by antiquarian affection' ('The Metaphysical Poets'). Like its counterpart, Leavis' *The Great Tradition*, which attempts to rewrite the history of fiction, *Revaluation* reflects, as much in its inclusions as in its omissions, the critical preferences and prejudices of F.R. Leavis. Leavis is nothing if not normative in his approach and he is not ashamed of his literary judgments which are always based on a deep commitment to life." (Ramaswami S. & V.S. Sethuraman, p. 693). In *Revaluations,* he argued that the critic should 'say nothing that cannot be related immediately to judgments about producible texts.' On the other hand, he also argued that mature literary discussion could manifest itself only within an informed human community.

Although it is difficult to classify Leavis' criticism, an attempt can be made to group it into four chronological stages. The first is that of his early publications and essays which include *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) and *Revaluation* (1936). Here he was concerned primarily with reexamining poetry from the 17th to the 20th centuries, and this was accomplished under the strong influence of T.S. Eliot. In addition, during this early period Leavis sketched out his views about university education. Then he turned to fiction and the novel, producing *The Great Tradition* (1948) and *D.H. Lawrence, Novelist* (1955). Following this period, Leavis pursued an increasingly complex treatment of myriad literary, educational and social issues.

In two of his last publications were embodied the critical sentiments of his final years including *The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought* (1975), and *Thought, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in Lawrence* (1976). One noticeable point in him is that unlike in his early phase of carrier, his criticism in later part became progressively philosophical in nature.

F.R. Leavis died at the age of eighty-two on the 14th April 1978 having been made a Companion of Honour in the New Year. His wife Q.D. Leavis died in 1981.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How will you understand Leavis' 'third realm'? Is this a legitimate critical concept?

Q 2: Explain the significance of the journal 'Scrutiny'.

Q 3: What were Leavis' suggestions for the critics?

15.4 READING THE TEXT "LINE OF WIT"

In the preface to his seminal book on English Poetry, *Revaluations* (1936) F.R. Leavis defines the task and duty of the critic to be the perceiver of himself so that he/she can make the finest and sharpest discriminations possible and state his/her findings as responsibly, clearly and forcibly as he/she can. In 1932, Q. D. Leavis criticises Charlotte Brontë for her indulgence in undisciplined emotion that makes her a 'schoolgirl of genius' and very unfavourably compares her genius with the 'well-regulated minds' of Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, while F. R. Leavis (1936) complains that Milton's habit of writing Latin verse forces him to exhibit in *Samson Agonistes* a loss of 'all feelings for his native English'.

Seen in the context of such discussions, we can comprehend the significance of this essay "Line of Wit", which is also the opening chapter in his book *Revaluations* (1936), is an attempt to define the main line of the English poetic tradition. This essay is also a celebration of T. S. Eliot's work on the Metaphysical poets, as Leavis says: "Mr. Eliot's achievement is a matter for academic evaluation, his poetry is accepted, and his early observations on the Metaphysicals and on Marvell provide currency for university lectures and undergraduate exercise."

Moreover, the appearance of the *Oxford Book of Seventeenth-Century Verse* also offered scope for surveying and reconsidering the poetry of the great Metaphysicals like Donne whose 'extraordinary force of originality' made him 'so potent an influence in the seventeenth century'. Leavis then states that a poem like "The Good Morrow" with its most appealing beginning: *"I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I/Did, till we lov'd?"* enables Donne to show his originality by deviating from the old

‘musical’ tradition of poetry and by using “in complete dissociation from music a stanza-form that proclaims the union of poetry and music”. This dissociation is positive; and the utterance, movement and intonation are those of the controlling and ‘talking’ voice. Moreover, Donne’s verse which had turned acutely dramatic presents a technique, a spirit in which the sinew and living nerve of English are used—”suggests an appropriate development of impressions that his ear might have recorded in the theatre”. This also refers to Donne’s characteristics like presentation of situations, the liveliness of enactments, which are aptly justified by the inclusion of his poem “Satyre (iii)” in the *Oxford Book.*

Leavis discusses how the characteristics of Donne’s poetry such as presentations of situations, liveliness of enactment could be called dramatic. For example, one of Donne’s poems in the *Oxford Book* namely “Satyre (iii)” reminds the readers of dramatic blank verses. The elements of play with sense movements across rimes, the control in tone and stresses found in this poem, provide affinities with Shakespeare. Yet Donne was writing something very original and quite different from blank verse. According to Leavis, “Enough illustration (out of an embarrassment of choice) has been given to bring home how dramatic Donne’s use of his medium can be, how subtly; in a consummately managed verse he can exploit the strength of spoken English.” Leavis was perhaps trying to hint at the ‘colloquial’ elements in Donne’s verse which made his poetry so memorable.

Referring to the influence of Donne on the Cavalier poets like Thomas Carew, Leavis states that Carew: “exemplifies Donne’s part in a mode or tradition (or whatever other term may fitly describe that which makes the Court poets a community)…To say this is not to stress any remarkable originality in his talent; his strength is representative, and he has individual force enough to be representative with unusual vitality.” This can be best seen in his poem “Know, Celia” where he represents a court culture—an element of the tradition of chivalry, which meaningfully showed the contemporary life and manners. Leavis then makes a reference to Prof. Grierson’s *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* where he is seen to have shown Carew’s indebtedness to Donne.

However, Carew's achievements also lead us back to influences other than that of Donne's. For example, Ben Jonson, whose 'classical' endeavours remind us that there are 'ways of being classical'. But, the idiomatic quality of the Caroline poetry, its relation to the spoken language makes another significant point about Jonson's influence on his successors. Jonson's effort was to cultivate an English mode that could express a sense of contemporaneity with the classical masters like Horace and Juvenal. This mode, as seen through a large number of his poems, can be described as 'consciously urbane, mature and civilized.' The assertive force of Jonson's genius, his native robustness, his interest in man and manners and his views on literature and poetic art, could clearly be seen in his poems included in the *Oxford Book.* Leavis argues: "Ben Jonson's powerful genius to initiate the tradition, the common heritage, into which a line of later poets could enter and by which a very great Augustan poet was to profit long after civilization and literary fashions had been transformed." One may use the term 'wit' to emphasise the remoteness of Johnson's art from the 19th century notion of the 'lyrical'.

LET US KNOW



Wit

In the Middle Ages, then term wit used to mean 'sense' or 'the five senses': thus 'common sense'. During the Renaissance, however, it came to mean 'intelligence' or 'wisdom'; thus intellectual capacity. During the neo-classical age, Dryden, Cowley and Pope held wit as primarily a matter of propriety. As Pope started in his famous *Essay on Criticism*: "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed." William Hazlitt later distinguished between wit and imagination: wit being artificial and imagination being valid for him. During the 19th century when the term imagination was used to designate the ability to invent, wit was associated with levity. Matthew Arnold dismissed Chaucer and Pope from his list of great poets because of their wittiness, and 'lack of high seriousness'. Eliot, however, hailed metaphysical poets like Donne and Marvell for their peculiar ability to combine wit with seriousness.

The "Line of Wit" begins with Ben Jonson and Donne, through Carew and Marvell to Pope. Leavis argues that Pope has certain qualities that relate him to Marvell: "The affinity with the mode of Marvell's *Dialogue* should be fairly obvious. The weight behind that concluding passage of the *Dunciad* is greater than Marvell could supply and the urbanity has a different inflection, but the relation between wit and solemnity is essentially that of the *Dialogue*." But, according to Leavis, such a line should also include Cowley who seems to be another significant figure and more representative than Marvell. Because, in a poem like "Of Wit", Cowley "discusses and expounds wit in a manner and spirit quite out of resonance with the Metaphysical mode—quite alien and uncongenial to it; with a reasonableness that has little to do with the 'tough reasonableness' underlying Marvell's lyric grace…It is a spirit of good sense, of common sense; appealing to criteria that the coming age will refine into 'Reason, Truth and Nature'."

Then, he goes on to analyse the relative significance of the neo-classical poets like Dryden and Pope. Leavis states that Dryden's genius and his strength of native English led Hopkins in the 20th century to praise him as 'the most masculine of our poets, in his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of our own literature…'But when compared to Pope, Dryden becomes inferior. Pope's greater strictness of versification means greater autonomy manifesting greater fineness and profundity of organization suggesting a much greater intensity of art. However, such a comparison is erroneous. Because, Dryden's effects are all for the public ear and his pamphleteering verse as well as the blank verse in a poem like "All for Love" could be appreciated on a first hearing. Therefore, Dryden's verses were effective for satiric purposes and could be read in the appropriate spirit. This is what is perhaps missing in Pope. So, the greatness of Dryden can be compared to that of Ben Jonson. The community to which Jonson belonged as a poet was predominantly ideal but the community to which Dryden belonged was one in which he actually lived and moved. His complete involvement with the Augustan life could make one call him a great representative poet rather than a great poet. However, Leavis says that he may be a greater poet than Marvell, but he did not write any poetry as indubitably

great as Marvell's best. Instead, Pope was a complete Augustan and explored through his poetry the strength of his own civilization and achieved a kind of strength so closely related to Marvell's.

In this context, Leavis' reference to Eliot's idea of 'dissociation of sensibility' becomes significant as he puts the phrase into currency, and ascribes the kind of dissociation largely to the influence of Dryden and Pope. This directly brings us back to the discussion of the changes that took place over English cilvilisation in the 17th century leading to the appearance of modern English prose during the early part of the Restoration. Other influential factors leading to the 'changes' included—economic and socio-political history, the emergence of the Royal Society and various intellectual and cultural developments. But, the decay of the Courtly culture due to 'disruptions', 'exile' and 'travels', can be best identified in the lyrical tradition of the Restoration. As for the tradition of wit and grace in lyric is concerned, it died into modes, into conventions of sentiments and expressions of a new age. However, the impression of the period was incomparably rich with the contributions of Donne, Ben Jonson, Herbert, Milton, Marvell and Dryden. Each poet was practising an art having important social functions.

The essay "Line of Wit" finally comes to an end with references to Carew, Cowley and Herrick. Leavis once again says that 'the line of wit', then, runs from Ben Jonson (and Donne) through Carew and Marvell to Pope'. Carew's "The Inscription on the Tombe of the Lady Mary Wentworth" neatly justifies this line. His wit is in the pure Augustan mode. On the other hand, the wit in Cowley's "Of Wit" exhibits a curious instability. While Herrick's poem "The Funeral Rites of the Rose" when compared to Marvell's "And Sleeps so too" can be discussed by the underlying urbane wit.

From your reading of this unit on Leavis' essay "Line of Wit" you must have understood that 'Moral Seriousness', according to Leavis, is the hallmark of criticism. Besides, like Matthew Arnold, he viewed 'Reading' as a defence against the mass-culture born out of heavy industrialisation. As David Macey observes—although such criticism is quite open about its attachment to a high culture, it also made the study of popular culture an institutionalized practice which had a direct impact on the early developments

in cultural studies. As one of the most influential figures in 20th century English literary criticism, Leavis introduced a kind of 'seriousness' into English studies, and the modern university subject on criticism has been shaped very much by Leavis' examples.

Leavis held the view that an 'organic' or 'common culture' had been lost because of industrialization. Therefore, his preservation of tradition goes hand in hand with his celebration of the life-force that once sustained the sturdy communities of 16th century, and which survives in the capacity of experience, the reverent openness towards life and the moral seriousness that typify the great novelists. However, you will note that Leavis' idea of tradition depends on his views of literature. He further opined that the educated public must maintain a kind of cultural continuity. Because, a living culture draws upon the best from the past, adapting it to new situations and needs, and the educated public can uphold standards that have been established in the past.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How does Leavis define the task and duty of a critic in the Preface to his *Revaluations*?

Q 5: How has the term 'Wit' been viewed throughout the ages?

Q 6: On what grounds, Leavis compared Dryden with Pope in his essay "Line of Wit"?

Q 7: What does Leavis have to state about 'moral seriousness'?

15.5 LEAVIS AS A NEW CRITIC

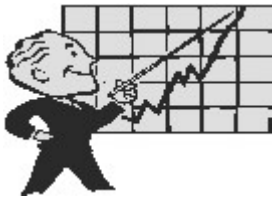
The influence of the Leavises on the development of English as an academic discipline has been so strong that anyone studying English literature in Britain during their time could be called an unwitting Leavisite. David Macey writes "Together with the 'Practical Criticism' of I. A. Richards and William Empson's practice of 'Close Reading', the Leavises' recommendation of attention to the 'text', played an immensely important role in turning English into a serious and disciplined mode of study rather

than a 'gentlemanly' conversation about books. The network of connections cantered on the journal *Scrutiny* extended their influence through schools and colleges and shaped the literary education of more than one generation of students, whilst the insistence from the 1930s to the 1970s on the distinctive discipline of university English is the major single factor that has made English literature the hegemonic discipline within the English education system. In major studies like *Of Both Poetry* (1936) and *General Studies of Prose* (1948, 1952), as well as of individual novelists such as *Lawrence* (1955) and *Dickens* (1970), the Leavises helped to shape the modern canon of English Literature." (Macey, 225).

F. R. Leavis possessed a very clear idea of literary criticism and he was well-known for his decisive and often provocative judgements. Leavis insisted that evaluation was the principal concern of criticism, and that it must ensure that English literature should be a living reality operating as an informing spirit in society, and that criticism should involve the shaping of contemporary sensibility. The attention paid by other critics to Leavis was never free from controversies. Although his ideas superficially resembled those of the New Critics of the United States, he was never an anti-historicist. Leavis firmly believed that literature and life are closely connected and that a work of art cannot be separated from the culture that produced it.

It can be argued that Leavis' achievements as a critic of poetry have always been so impressive. But, Leavis is widely accepted to have been a better critic of fiction and the novel than of poetry. Much of this is due to the fact that a large portion of what he had to say about poetry had already been said by his contemporaries. For example, in *New Bearings in English Poetry,* Leavis attacked the Victorian poetical ideal, suggesting that 19th century poetry rejected the 'poetical' and instead showed a separation of thought and feeling and a divorce from the real world. The influence of T. S. Eliot is easily identifiable in his criticism of Victorian poetry, as he acknowledged in *The Common Pursuit* that, 'It was Mr. Eliot who made us fully conscious of the weakness of that tradition'. In his later publication

Revaluations, the dependence on Eliot was still very much present, but Leavis also demonstrated an individual critical sense operating in such a way as to place him among the distinguished modern critics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: In what ways, does David Macey see Leavis as a New Critic?



15.6 LET US SUM UP

You have, from this unit, learnt that Leavis' criticism falls into two phases. In the first place, influenced by T.S. Eliot, he devoted his attention to English verse. In *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), he attacked Victorian poetry and proclaimed the importance of the work of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, emphasizing wit and the play of intellect rather than late-Romantic sensuousness. In *Revaluations: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936), on the other hand, he extended his survey of English poetry back to the 17th century. In *Revaluations*, Leavis was able to provide a fuller analysis of the poets like Eliot and others. Leavis opens the first chapter "Line of Wit" of Revaluations by remarking that Eliot's achievement is a matter of academic evaluation, his poetry is accepted and his early observations on the metaphysical and on Marvell provide currency for University lectures. Although Leavis follows Eliot in describing the line of wit, he also has some disagreements about the lack of the quality of wit in Colwley and in Milton's *Comus* as can be found from the essay "Line of Wit".



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Web Resources:

http://www.artandpopularculture.com/F._R._Leavis

http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/334127/F-R-Leavis

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrutiny_(journal)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F._R._Leavis

15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Leavis took collaboration as very essential as any work of art can exist only in what he calls the "third realm"—the realm of that which is neither public in the ordinary sense or merely private… …This collaborative nature of criticism is continually underlined in Leavis' own practice such as his collaboration with wife Queenie Dorothy Leavis, in *Lectures in America* and *Dickens the Novelist… …*Another example is the journal "Scrutiny".

Ans to Q 2: Leavis remained the principal editor of the journal "Scrutiny" until the final issue in 1953… …he used the journal as a vehicle for the new Cambridge criticism, upholding rigorous intellectual standards and attacking the dilettante elitism which he believed, characterised the Bloomsbury Group… … "scrutiny" provided a

forum for identifying important contemporary works and for reviewing the traditional canon.

Ans to Q 3: Leavis argued that the critic must guard against extrapolating from the text under analysis, and refrain from all premature or irrelevant generalizations… …his conviction was that the authority of the mature and experienced critic or reader is based on an immediate sense of values instilled by training in the labour of reading.

Ans to Q 4: A critic should be the perceiver of himself so that he/she can make the finest and sharpest discriminations possible and state his/her findings as responsibly, clearly and forcibly as he/she can.

Ans to Q 5: In the Middle Ages, the term wit meant 'sense' or 'the five senses'… …during the Renaissance, it came to mean 'intelligence' or 'wisdom'… …in the neo-classical age, Dryden, Cowley and Pope held wit as primarily a matter of propriety… …in his famous *Essay on Criticism* Pope stated: "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed."… …in the 19th century wit was associated with levity… …When Matthew Arnold dismissed Chaucer and Pope from his list of great poets because of their wittiness and lack of 'high seriousness', T. S. Eliot, hailed the metaphysical poets for their ability to combine wit with seriousness.

Ans to Q 6: Leavis states that Dryden's genius and his strength of native English led Hopkins in the 20th century to praise him as 'the most masculine of our poets, in his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of our own literature…'… …But when compared to Pope, Dryden becomes inferior. Pope's greater strictness of versification means greater autonomy manifesting greater fineness and profundity of organization suggesting a much greater intensity of art. However, such a comparison is erroneous.

Ans to Q 7: Leavis viewed 'Moral Seriousness', as the hallmark of criticism… …Like Matthew Arnold, he too viewed 'Reading' as a defence against the onslaught of Industrialism born mass culture… …Leavis introduced a kind of 'seriousness' into English studies in the early part of the 20th

century, and the modern university subject of criticism has been shaped very much by Leavis' examples.

Ans to Q 8: David Macey states that like other New Critics such as I. A. Richards and William Empson, both F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis focussed on the 'text'… …this method played an immensely important role in turning English into a serious and disciplined mode of study… …the journal *Scrutiny* extended influence through schools and colleges and shaped the literary education of more than one generation of students.



15.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Provide an appraisal of F. R. Leavis' achievement as a literary critic. What is the nature of Leavis' critical method?

Q 2: Do you think that F. R. Leavis' critical practice was influenced by T. S. Eliot's discussion of the Metaphysical poets? Discuss with reference to the essay "Line of Wit."

Q 3: Discuss Leavis' stand on the English poetic traditions in connection with the poets he mentions in the essay "Line of Wit".

Q 4: Discuss how Leavis accords Donne a special poetic significance in the text "Line of Wit."

Q 5: Explain how or why Leavis sees the 'line of wit' running through specific poets whom he mentions.

Q 6: What are the important premises of Leavis' New Criticism? Assess the significance of Leavis as a New Critic.

* * *

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