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KARAIKUDI – 630 003



# ONLINE PROGRAMMES

**M.A. [English]**

**I - Semester**

**205214**

# LITERARY CRITICISM

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## INTRODUCTION

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Literary criticism articulates what we bring to literature, which presumably determines what we get out of it. It attempts to examine the types of questions that should be raised by us while going through a piece of literary work. It examines and critically analyses society and culture, drawing from knowledge across the social science and humanities.

Until well into the 20th century, much of literary study was based on the assumption that one needs to understand the author's social background to be able to understand a work; that knowledge of the author's life, his ideas, ideas doing the rounds at that time, the other works that were popular at that age, etc. was essential.

However, what most students of literature would agree, valuable literature is that which speaks the truth about the period in which they were created or produced. This approach gives students an overview of human nature or the world in general from an author's individual perspective.

This book, *Literary Criticism*, covers the breadth of criticism from Aristotle to Derrida to Hutcheon. In a strict sense, literary criticism and theory is the systematic study of the nature of literature, its analytical methods and repercussions. Of late, this spectrum has been expanded to include history, moral philosophy, social prophecy and other interdisciplinary themes which are and continue to remain relevant to the ways in which meaning is generated. This is a practice that goes as far back to ancient Greece. Gaining new perspectives through the eighteenth century, theory and criticism of literature are closely tied to the history of literature. The modern sense of literary theory, however, dates only to approximately the 1950s, when Structuralist Linguistics developed by Ferdinand de Saussure began strongly influencing the English language. The New Critics and various European-influenced formalists had described some of their more abstract efforts as 'theoretical' as well. But it was not until the broad impact of structuralism that began to be felt in the English-speaking academic world, that literary theory was thought of as a unified domain.

This book, *Literary Criticism*, is written with the distance learning student in mind. It is presented in a user-friendly format using a clear, lucid language. Each unit contains an Introduction and a list of Objectives to prepare the student for what to expect in the text. At the end of each unit are a Summary and a list of Key Words, to aid in recollection of concepts learnt. All units contain Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises, and strategically placed Check Your Progress questions so the student can keep track of what has been discussed.



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**BLOCK - I**
**CRITICISM I - IV**


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**UNIT 1 ARISTOTLE**


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**Structure**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 An Introduction to Aristotle's *Poetics*
- 1.3 Tragedy – The Six Elements
- 1.4 Critical Analysis
- 1.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**


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Inherent in any literary criticism are assumptions about the nature of language, the problematic of how and what is literature, and about what constitutes its valid interpretation. The Homeric poems already reveal a society grappling with interpretative problems, and pious Greeks, Socrates, the best among them as seen in Plato's *Apology*, felt that oracles don't lie. The sophists of the fifth century – the itinerant between that they were – further complicated things in opening up epistemological questions. In short, in the second half of the fifth century a crisis had been created in philosophy and public life of the Greeks. The situation was ominous for literary criticism as well, in that the traditionally accepted terms of reference – especially moral or evaluative terms – could be extended to cover almost any kind of self-interested behavior. In this state of dry despair, it was Socrates who made a new beginning with his consistent demand for definition – Plato joined the Socratic circle around the age of twenty. Later, the disciple of Plato, Aristotle, at the age of seventeen joined Plato's Academy and enriched the Greek philosophical and literary critical tradition with his incisive critique of Plato.

In the Academy, Aristotle learnt that 'knowledge must be systematic and unified. Its structure is given by logic, and its unity rests at bottom on ontology. It is essentially explanatory. It pours deep philosophical problems.' And thus he divided knowledge into three major categories – [a] productive knowledge which is concerned with making things such as Rhetoric and Poetics, [b] practical knowledge/science which is focused on action, as

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Politics and Ethics, [c] theoretical science whose function is to explore truths like Philosophy or Theology, Mathematics, Physics. Aristotle's *Poetics* deals primarily with the Productive knowledge, as well as that of the Theoretical as it is also deals with epistemological questions. In this unit, we will learn about Aristotle's Poetics.

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### 1.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the Greek Classical criticism in relation to Aristotle's *Poetics*
- Examine Aristotle's view of mimesis (imitation) and difference from Plato
- Explain Aristotle's notion of Tragedy
- Critically appreciate the concepts of Catharsis or the Purgation of the emotions of pity and fear.

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### 1.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*

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'Aristotle bestrode antiquity like an intellectual colossus. No man before him had contributed as much to learning. No man after him could hope to rival his achievement.'

-J. S. Barnes,

From the point of view of dramatic theory, Aristotle's *Poetics* consists of four distinct elements

- The concept of Mimesis
- Different Genres – epic, tragedy and comedy
- The division of tragedy into six elements – plot (mythos), character (ethos), thought (dianoia), language (lexis), music (melopolia) and spectacle (opsis)
- Catharsis

We will delve into the discussion of these essential attributes of Aristotle's *Poetics*, but before that let us have a brief conceptual clarity of the chapterization of Aristotle's Poetics, with the broad themes that are dealt in these chapters –

1. Art in general as imitation and how different forms of art differ in means of imitation
2. Difference in Object of Imitation
3. Difference in manner of imitation

4. Lyrical poetry and tragedy
5. Comedy and Epic poetry
6. Tragedy and its parts
7. Plot – Beginning, middle and end; Magnitude and Organic wholeness of plot
8. Unity of Subject
9. Poetry is imitation of what ought to be
10. Simple and Complex Plots
11. Elements of Complex Plot – Peripety, Discovery and Suffering
12. Divisions of Tragedy
13. The Protagonist or the Tragic Hero – his Misfortune and Change of Fortune
14. Effect of Tragedy – Catharsis – Purgation of the feelings of Pity and Fear
15. Character – requirement: Good, Consistent, Life like, Consistent.
16. Discovery
17. Construction of Plot and Diction
18. Complication and Denouement
19. Diction and Thought -- Rhetoric
20. Diction – Parts of Speech
21. Diction – Metaphor
22. Qualities of Diction – Clarity, Distinction etc.
23. Epic – what is common with tragedy; Superiority of Homer
24. Epic – same divisions as Tragedy
25. Nature of Representation of Reality and Evaluation of the Poetic art
26. Comparison of Epic and Tragedy.

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### Box 1.1 What is Literary Criticism?

Literary criticism can be said to a field of study which tries to look at the merit of literary composition(s), tries to look at the individuality, beauty, symmetry, and uniqueness of a piece of literary creation in terms of its style, content, form etc. Literary criticism also tries to place the literary text in the proper time and place and tries to analyse it. But while saying this, one should keep in mind that the critical function is very different from the function that a usual reader performs while he or she goes through a text.

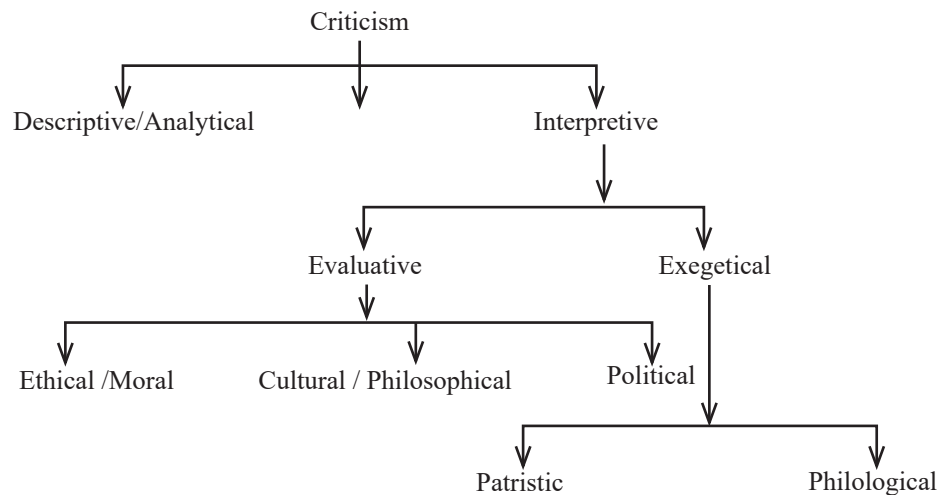
A literary creation goes through three processes – creation, reading and analysis or criticism. The first function is that of the author who writes the text. The second is that of the reader who reads and enjoys the literature. And the third is

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that of the critic who tries to analyse it. (Traditionally the critical function and the creative function were quite different, but in the present age we see that the line between the two has got blurred, which we will deal with when we come to twentieth century criticism and literary theory).

But when we come to the reader's function and that of the critic we find a whole lot of a difference. (One should keep in mind here that the critic is also a reader first.) The reader is quite instinctual, spontaneous in his reading of the literary creation as his or her primary aim is to get entertained, (There are two functions of literature – to entertain and to instruct, and the primary aim of literature is to entertain. If a literary text is entertaining then only the reader reads it and in the process gets certain instruction.) But the critic reads the text with the aim of analysis – with pedagogic aim, with the aim of social good etc. therefore some are of the opinion that the critic murders the enjoyment of the text as the critic tries to dissect the literary creation to analyse it, to put the text in proper perspective.

Kapil Kapoor and Ranga Kapoor in their book *Canonical Texts of English Literary Criticism* (page 28) make the following classification of literary criticism –



It is not that this is a water-tight classification of literary criticism. Many other such classifications exist. But what this and other classifications point out is that the function of criticism is varied and each kind of criticism is done with a particular goal or aim in mind and therefore they use different strategies or methodologies to interpret or analyse text(s). T. S. Eliot in *The Function of Criticism* (1933) & *The Frontiers of Criticism* (1956) emphasized on the function of criticism in terms of –

- (a) To teach the poet / writer to write – in terms of what and how
- (b) To teach the readers what constitutes good taste and proper judgement?
- (c) To promote a general discriminating faculty amongst the mass so that the cultural and the social values can be preserved.

Though these can be said to be the general aim of criticism but these aims are not sacrosanct, as they can be debated. In terms of the first function of 'teaching poet and writer' – does it mean that a writer or a poet or a dramatist first needs to learn from the critic about how to write and what to write about?

Does that mean that the writer has no choice or freedom to write about whatever he feels like and the way he or she feels like? About the second function, mentioned above, it can be said that the critic is given the role of judging for the readers or the mass about what is good or bad for them. For example, F. R. Leavis in his book *The Great Tradition* points out the novelists which he thinks belong to the great tradition of English literature. Now according to him the other novelists are not worth reading. The question is who F. R. Leavis is to decide what the readers should choose to read. The third function of the critic or criticism as mentioned earlier is a corollary of the second one which says that the critics' role is to point out what to read and what not to read so the social and cultural values of the society or a nation can be preserved. It seems as if the critics are given the duty of the preservation of the culture.

Or in other words, the critics' role is to decide that this is 'culture' or 'cultured' and the other is not. The question comes to the notion of culture – in terms of whether culture simply meant the culture of the elites (the ideal) or does culture mean “a way of life” (as said by Raymond Williams). If we take culture as a way of life (in terms of working class also having a culture, woman having their culture, students having their own culture etc.) then the critics are no one to decide what culture is and what is not. Each text is a representation of a particular culture. Therefore, if culture simply is not that of the elites, but the popular culture or the mass culture is also taken into account by us then we will figure out that the task of the critic is not preservation of culture or to tell the readers about what constitutes proper judgement, but the role of the critic is make the readers truly enjoy a literary creation.

Let's have a look at certain sections from the book *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present* by M. A. R. Habib (Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford, 2005)

Our English word “criticism” derives from the ancient Greek term *krites*, meaning “judge.” Perhaps the first type of criticism was that which occurred in the process of poetic creation itself: in composing his poetry, a poet would have made certain “judgments” about the themes and techniques to be used in his verse, about what his audience was likely to approve, and about his own relationship to his predecessors in the oral or literary tradition. Hence, the creative act itself was also a critical act, involving not just inspiration but some kind of self-assessment, reflection, and judgment. Moreover, in ancient Greece, the art of the “rhapsode” or professional singer involved an element of interpretation: a rhapsode would usually perform verse that he himself had not composed, and his art must have been a highly self-conscious and interpretative one, just as the performance of a Shakespeare play is effectively an interpretation of it. In the written text of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the character of the Jewish moneylender Shylock has conventionally been seen as domineering, greedy, and vindictive. Yet our perception of his character and his situation can be transformed by a performance where we see him kneeling, surrounded by aggressively self-righteous Christian adversaries. In the same way, different performances of Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey* might have had very different effects. One can imagine Achilles presented as the archetypal Greek hero, valiant and (almost) invincible; but also as cruel, childish, and selfish. There are many incidents and situations in Homer – such as King Priam's entreaty to Achilles or Odysseus' confronting of the suitors – which must have yielded a rich range of interpretative and performative possibilities. Even performances of lyric poetry must have shared this potential for diverse interpretation, a potential

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which has remained alive through the centuries. An ode of Sappho, a sonnet by Shakespeare, Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," Eliot's "Prufrock," or the verse of a contemporary Israeli or Palestinian poet can each be "performed" or read aloud in a variety of ways and with vastly differing effects. In each case, the performance must be somewhat self-conscious and informed by critical judgment. (P. 9)

### **A Brief History of Criticism of Classical Greece, Roman and English Tradition:**

Literature is as old as human civilization and thoughts about literature or literary discourse is similarly old. In the western civilization the first instance of discussion on literature or art can be found in Plato's dialogues. As Plato was opposed to poetry and art therefore, his discourse on poetry and art is not manifested in a single text but scattered over many of his writings. The first coherent formal discourse on literature or poetry in the western canon is that of Aristotle – *Poetics*.

Whereas Plato in his dialogues posited various important questions regarding the nature of reality, the nature of representation in art and literature, the nature and process of artistic creativity, status of literature vis-à-vis philosophy and history, the state of the poets in the society etc. All these reflections of Plato regarding literature and art is based on Plato's thoughts about reality. For Plato, literature or poetry is all about lies, which the poets write under some 'divine frenzy' or divine inspiration. In his dialogues he tries to prove that poets are not aware of the things that they talk about. For example, Homer can write the epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in which he presents the heroism of the Greeks but does that mean that Homer himself was heroic in terms of having martial knowledge to win wars. If he did not have the martial knowledge, then how come he is able to represent the heroism in his epics? Plato is of the opinion that the poets write under some divine inspiration and have no knowledge of what they talk about in their writings. Therefore, Plato is of the opinion that literature or art cannot be a valid means of knowledge. He moreover thought that the poets should be banished from society.

If Plato thought in such manner about literature and art (or about poets), then his disciple Aristotle thought in just the opposite manner – as for Aristotle, literature or art is more valid epistemology than philosophy or history. For Aristotle, literature is not about 'what is' or 'what was' but it is about 'what should be' (that is the ideal). Thus literary representations or artistic renditions do not offer mankind the just representation of the reality as it exists but tries to present the world with something that is better than the reality in which we are living in. we can say that for Aristotle the reality about literature or art is very different from the reality of literature. (P. B. Shelley later in his writing praised the poets saying that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.' What he means is that the poets create a reality far different from the reality which we are accustomed to, a reality superior to ours. As we common human beings do not understand the nature of that idealistic reality therefore we do not acknowledge the poets as 'legislators' as Plato did not).

Aristotle thus was the first person in the western canon to think of literature or art as something to be taken seriously. Following Aristotelian parameter, the Roman scholars Horace, in his *Ars Poetica* and Longinus in his essay 'On the Sublime' similarly reinstated the belief that literature or art is a valid means of attaining knowledge and to be studied seriously. Though Horace and Longinus spoke in favour of art or literature, it does not mean that literary discourse of

the romans was all in favour of art. Whereas Plato dismissed art or literature on moral grounds, the Romans objected to it on material grounds – that is, poetry or art does not being any material success.

Thus, if the Classical Greek scholars were varied in their opinion on poetry or art, though they moreover focused on the issue of the nature of poetry/art and poetic creativity; the Romans phase was more focused on Rhetoric and with the language of literature. This roman preoccupation with the language of literature also remained very significant in the Middle Ages, though in the middle age, the literary scholars also focused on the nature or reality which constitutes what is beautiful. Thus, aesthetics became the concern of the medieval scholars. St. Augustine, Plotinus and Thomas Aquinas – all three Christian Theologians examined the relationship between the universe and the divine in terms of what is ‘beauty’; what is ‘order’ and ‘symmetry’?

With the coming of the Renaissance (the revival of classical) the focus of literature shifted to vernacular. In other words, writing in vernacular language became the fashion during the age of renaissance. For example, before renaissance in England, the major works of fashionable literary circle was written in Latin. Only in the age of Renaissance the focus shifted to English as a medium of writing literature. Though Chaucer wrote in English, but he was not given so much of importance by the fashionable higher class of the society in the medieval age as he is given now simply because writing in English was not considered to be artistic in the medieval age.

As soon as English was established as a language of literary writing in England in the sixteenth century we see the first critical text dealing with literature in the age of Renaissance itself – Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poesie (or An Apology for Poetry)*. Sometimes Sidney is therefore considered as the father of English literary criticism. Sidney in *Defence of Poesie* tried to counter the Puritan belief which tried to defame poetry and theatre and ban it. *Defence of Poesie* is not only an answer to the puritan’s objections against poetry and theatre; but at the same time Sidney tried to deal with the general objections against poetry and reaffirm the status of literature or art in the society. Sidney thus is the first person in the English critical tradition to establish the status of literature and art and set the critical tradition right.

Rhymer once commented about the English tradition that ‘England is as empty of critics as of wolves.’ This may be true if one thinks of England before the sixteenth century. But sixteenth century onwards, as there was an immense rise of English literature, similarly there was a steady growth of literary discourse. Francis Bacon, the famous essayist of England, in *The Advancement of Learning (1605)* emphasized on the need of critical tradition in England so that the nation can prosper in the right direction. What he meant by critical function is –

- (a) Correction of authors
- (b) Exposition and explication of authors
- (c) True interpretation
- (d) Judgment of authors etc.

Thus, criticism as a tool was firmly established in England or the English tradition from the renaissance onwards, though the poet critic John Dryden was the first person in the English tradition to use the word ‘criticism.’ From then onwards till today, we find the English critical thought developed in a direction which positively provided certain direction to literary studies.

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If one ponders over the English critical tradition one could figure out that till the beginning of the twentieth century (the age with which we are dealing with in his paper) the English criticism is primarily descriptive with some theoretical aspects. In Sidney, as mentioned earlier, we will see how he defended poetry and drama against the onslaught of the Puritans and the general objections against poetry. But at the same time he also tried to valorize the poets such as Chaucer, Earl of Surrey to defend their poetry. John Dryden, who is truly considered to be the father of English literary criticism, in his critical works, tried to defend the native literary writing. In the essay of Dryden we have in our course we will find out how he compares the English tradition with that of the classical writers, with the French to prove that English tradition is the best.

Moreover, he champions the greatest dramatist that England has produced: William Shakespeare. Samuel Johnson in 'The Preface to Shakespeare' similarly praises Shakespeare for his greatness. But at the same time he also points out the fault of the dramatist to evaluate his works in a true fashion. Samuel Johnson's 'Preface to Shakespeare' can be said to be the first work of English critical tradition to be truly evaluative.

When we come to the Romantic period, the poets like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley made significant contributions to the English critical tradition. Whereas, William Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* changed the course of English poetry to significantly pointing out that the language and theme of poetry should be that of the common man. Wordsworth is prescriptive in his Preface as he points out that the English poetry should follow a particular path if it had to connect to the mass. This change in the course of poetry is resulted by certain socio-political and cultural changes such as the French Revolution (which championed the rights of the man and brought common man to the forefront), the printing press (which made it possible for the poets and the writers to break free from the clutches of patronage and write what they wish to and what mass wanted), the industrial revolution, etc.

Whereas, William Wordsworth made it prescriptive in his critical work, Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* made significant contribution by not only making a significant statement on Wordsworth's theory of poetry but at the same time elaborated on his own poetic or creative process by elaborating on the significant feature of romantics – Imagination. Percy Bysshe Shelley's noteworthy contribution to the English critical tradition is in the form of *Defence of Poetry*, where he defended the poets and emphasized on the substantial role of the poets in the society.

In the Victorian era, which saw tremendous tumult in the socio-political, economic and religious situation of England (due to the industrialization, loss of faith, different legislations, Utilitarian theory and practice etc.) many significant contribution was done by the critics of England. The most noteworthy among them is that of poet-critic Mathew Arnold, who through his various critical writings made England not only aware of the major literary and social issues that were significant of the age.

In the Twentieth Century, moreover in the beginning of the twentieth century we figure out that a host of literary critics made havoc in the critical tradition of England. The most significant among them are T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, F. R. Leavis, I. A. Richards. Their contribution to literary studies and criticism is such that the whole of the course of looking at literature and art was changed in the beginning of the twentieth century.



## The Concept of Mimesis

*Poetics* opens with Aristotle's views on mimesis (literal translation Imitation), where he differs much from his teacher Plato, who regarded art to be 'thrice removed from reality' and can be in no way a valid means to attain knowledge. For Plato, art merely waters the emotional selves, therefore he thought that the poets should be banished from the society, as they write under some kind of 'divine madness' and know not what they are talking about in their creative output. Where Plato thought that the poets are of no use to the societal good, Aristotle regarded them very highly, as the poets as per him in their imitation of the reality do not denigrating reality, but are trying to incorporate the universal aspect. Poetry from Aristotelian point of view is not about 'what was' or 'what is' but about 'what ought to be'. In that sense, for Aristotle, poetry or art aspires to capture that aspect of nature in its imitation which is idealistic, a better version than what exists in this world. Thus imitation or mimesis is not demeaning, as it only through imitation that human beings learn; and moreover, human beings love to imitate – as Aristotle states in *Poetics* –

Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature. First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. We have evidence of this in the facts of experience. Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies. The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he.' For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, the coloring, or some such other cause. Imitation, then, is one instinct of our nature. (8)

Therefore, if imitation is an innate fact of nature, then the poets are not liars, (Plato claimed poets to be liars as they have no knowledge of what they write about). Moreover, poets' works point to Truth. Thus, Aristotle upheld art and celebrated it (as against Plato) by pointing out that 'Art imitates nature and at the same time presents the ideal. ('The artist may imitate things as they ought to be.' (*Poetics* 1))

## Different Genres – Epic, Tragedy and Comedy

Aristotle begins his *Poetics* by straightaway stating that different art forms are only different modes of imitation, and they differ from each other in almost three parameters: means (i.e. language, for literature), objects (actions with agents) and manner (i.e. dramatic or narrative). It is often thought that Aristotle's *Poetics*, as a text available to us, is not complete. There may be

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chapters on Comedy and Satire which are missing. Assuming the kind of thoroughness that Aristotle has in his writing, it is impossible to think that he merely talked about Tragedy in *Poetics* and left other genres of drama untouched. When, comparing tragedy and comedy, Aristotle says that tragedy is inclined to imitate people above the level of our world, comedy does imitate people below our level.

He further compares tragedy with epic and sees Tragedy to be a much better form of art than the epic. Tragedy is for common audience who feels restless for gross desires/ dull wits, while epic poetry is addressed to an educated and enlightened audience – the epic ‘addresses a cultivated audience, which does not need the accompaniment of gesture.’ Yet Aristotle points out tragedy to be superior to epic for the following reasons –

- a) Aristotle says that performance does not censure the tragic poet. If a tragedy can be spoiled in performance, similarly an epic can also be spoiled in its recitation. Tragedy like epic does not depend on performance for its full effect.
- b) Tragedy has all the elements of epic. Furthermore, it has two more elements—a greater economy and concentration of effect.
- c) The tragic poet requires less space for the attainment of its end. Therefore, tragedy has greater economy as well as a more concentrated effect.

#### Check Your Progress

1. What is theoretical science?
2. State the counts on which different art forms differ from each other as per Aristotle.

### 1.3 TRAGEDY – THE SIX ELEMENTS

Ancient Greek theatre was religious in nature, as plays were usually performed during religious festivals when the Greeks used to communicate with Gods and ancestors. During the worshipping of gods and ancestors intense emotions were evoked which is the basis of the aesthetic value of *catharsis* in Greek tragedy. Even music and dance is retained in the Greek theatre as major activities. In *Poetics*, Aristotle points out that there are six essential elements in a tragedy – Plot (mythos), Character (ethos), Thought (dianoia), Language (lexis), Music (melopoiea) and Spectacle (opsis).

These six elements of tragedy are inseparable as they together form an organic whole, but for the sake of better understanding of the nature of tragedy, Aristotle divided the six elements in two groups –

- Internal – that is, subjective – Plot, Character and Thought
- External – Diction (Language), Music and Spectacle

### I. Plot (Mythos)

Myth or mythos, in Greek simply meant story, (loose English translation would be ‘Plot’) is described by Aristotle as ‘the soul of tragedy’ (though Aristotle points out that the other elements are not less essential). The myth is the most significant as it binds together the other elements of the tragedy.

The aim of a tragedy, according to Aristotle, is to present the journey of the protagonist from one state of being to another through a series of episodes focusing on an action. Plot should be an organic whole, having magnitude – ‘Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well-constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.’ (*Poetics*, Chapter VII, 15)

Thus, without a proper beginning, a middle and an end, Tragedy would not achieve the desired effect on the audience. Moreover, tragedy should imitate action that has certain magnitude as it is the magnitude of the action that provides beauty to the artistic rendition of the action – ‘a beautiful object, whether it be a living organism or any whole composed of parts, must not only have an orderly arrangement of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude; for beauty depends on magnitude and order.’ (*Poetics*, Chapter VII, 15)

Action having magnitude, if presented with wholeness (in the sense of completeness – having a beginning, a middle, and an end) would provide unity of action to the plot, which according to Aristotle, is a must for a tragedy. Therefore, he thought that dramatist has the liberty to make changes in the chronology of events as he is not merely chronicling history, neither is he a maker of verses, but a constructor of plot or myth. According to Aristotle, there are two kinds of plots –

- Simple (*aploi*)
- Complex (*peplegmenoi*)

Simple plot is without *peripetia* (reversal of fortune) and *agagnorisis* (recognition of the past act or identity or person), the complex plot would have both *peripetia* and *agagnorisis*.

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Thus, according to Aristotle, the essential elements of a tragic plot are:

- **Completeness** – an action which has a proper beginning, a middle and an end. An ideal beginning is that which does not follow anything but leads to something that comes after it. Middle is the casual outcome of the beginning and the potential cause of the end. The end, in turn, should be one which rounds up the whole action and gives the impression of completeness. It ties all the threads of action.
- **Magnitude** – ‘proper size, proportion and symmetry’: The length should be retained in memory – external compulsions, length in accordance with the inner demands of the plot. The protagonist’s reversal to probable.
- **Unity of action** – an imitation of single unified action
- **Necessity and Probability** – Necessity is concerned with a strict causal relationship between the incidents of plot. Probability means that events must have a connection which makes their sequence likely. No tragic writer can sacrifice probability.
- **Peripeteia and Anagnorsis (Reversal and Discovery)** – Reversal is a change in the course of the action from one state to the opposite, involving the fortunes of the protagonist, from happiness to misery, or from adversity to prosperity.
- **Discovery or Recognition** – It means a character’s sudden coming to know of another’s true identity, a knowledge which brings about a reversal in the entire situation.

## II. Character or Ethos

According to Aristotle, tragedy is meant to imitate people above the level of our world and comedy below it. In the sense that tragedy presents action of men having magnitude or greatness, whereas comedy and satire deals with ‘mean persons.’ To understand the nature of the character or protagonist of a good tragedy, Aristotle, in *Poetics*, mentions the following characteristics of the tragic protagonist or the tragic hero –

- **Goodness** – a person who is better than average, but not perfectly virtuous or just one who should be transported in the course of the plot from a state of happiness to that of adversity through his own Hamartia or tragic error.
- **Lifelikeness** – the tragic hero should be ‘recognizably human’ and should not change traits which a character from myth or legend has been endowed.
- **Appropriateness** – truthfulness to or representation of the class or profession to which a character belongs. Characters should be

universal rather than individual. In the sense that a king should be kingly, woman womanly, a scholar scholarly.

- Consistency – The traits of a character should not be changed within the same play without any rhyme or reason. If a character is shown to be inconsistent then he should always be shown so.
- Characters should appear true to life and yet be better than what they are.

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### Hamartia or the Tragic Error

Aristotle in *Poetics* uses the word ‘hamartia’ to mean an ‘error’ or ‘false step’. Butcher translates the word a ‘frailty’; Bywater calls it ‘an error of judgment’ which the tragic protagonist commits without any evil intention. According to Aristotle, the tragic protagonist must have nobility. He must be better than ourselves but at the same time he must also have a defect – ‘...The intermediate kind of personage, a man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity, but by some error of judgment ...’. It should be noted that hamartia cannot be a moral flaw. Sir Philip Sidney, the first critic of England, says that tragedy ‘openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue, that maketh kings fear to be tyrants and the tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours ...’

### III. Thought or Dianoia

In *Poetics*, Aristotle, while defining Dianoia, says –

Third in order is Thought- that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances. In the case of oratory, this is the function of the political art and of the art of rhetoric: and so indeed the older poets make their characters speak the language of civic life; the poets of our time, the language of the rhetoricians. Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids. Speeches, therefore, which do not make this manifest, or in which the speaker does not choose or avoid anything whatever, are not expressive of character. Thought, on the other hand, is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated. (*Poetics* VI: 16)

The inner questioning that goes on in the mind of a character and makes him choose one way or another is called dianoia. The ability to choose, the moral fibre or the courage to choose, is the ethos, but the ferment of thoughts that leads to the point of choice is known as dianoia. This thought process often becomes part of the dialogue when a character bevails his/her plight and speculates on the nature of things. For this reason, Aristotle insists that dianoia be regarded as an essential element of tragedy.

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### IV. Lexis

Lexis or the language in theatre is one of the most important elements in drama, though in *Poetics*, Aristotle did not provide so much space to this element as it is too obvious. Lexis can be divided into two parts – (i) the spoken word in the form of natural conversational speech and (ii) the sung word or the fully embellished song.

### V. Melopolia or the Musical Element

The Greek chorus and actors were free to use all the prevalent musical forms in the drama as was the ritual even during the early stage when it was performed as part of religious festival. Aristotle argues that the Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor; choral odes should not be ‘mere interludes,’ but should contribute to the unity of the plot.

### VI. Opsis or the Visual Element or Spectacle

Opsis or the Visual Element or Spectacle has the least importance in Aristotelian scheme of tragedy. Although Aristotle recognizes the emotional attraction of spectacle, he says that superior poets rely on the mythos or the plot of the play rather than opsis or the spectacle to arouse pity and fear; the dramatists who rely heavily on spectacle ‘create a sense, not of the terrible, but only of the monstrous.’

### Catharsis

In the famous definition of ‘Tragedy’ by Aristotle, Catharsis is regarded as the prime objective of a tragic play. Aristotle defines tragedy as –

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (p.12)

In *Poetics*, Aristotle also talks about the pleasure that is derived from the tragedy. Pleasure proper to tragedy can be derived from the play for three reasons –

- (i) tragedy should derive pleasure which is proper to tragedy as it is a kind of pleasure which cannot be derived from any other form of drama whether comedy or tragedy,
- (ii) the pleasure is to be derived from the completeness and organic wholeness of the action of the plot,
- (iii) pleasure may also be derived as a result of the musical and spectacular elements of the play.

Catharsis is a term borrowed by Aristotle from the medical terminology which means the removal or purgation of the afflictions or emotional excesses.

Though the term is borrowed from medical term, Aristotle does not use the term in exactly the same fashion as it is used in the field of medicine, as Butcher points out – ‘But the word, as taken up by Aristotle into the terminology of art, has probably a further meaning. It expresses not only a fact of psychology or of pathology, but a principle of art.’ Thus, Catharsis may mean the emotional satisfaction that the audience experiences when he/ she watches a tragedy, which the play does by evoking two feelings of ‘pity’ and ‘fear’ as pointed out by Aristotle. These two emotions of pity and fear are evoked while watching a tragedy as the spectators or the audience perceives the tragic protagonist’s change of fortune. Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of James Joyce’s *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* defines pity and fear as –

pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with the secret cause.

Thus, a tragedy involves the double vision of the human sufferer (the tragic protagonist who suffers because of his tragic flaw of character or Hamartia) and the secret cause (the Fate).

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## 1.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Gilbert Murray in the Introduction of Ingram Bywater’s translation of Aristotle’s *On the Art of Poetry* writes –

In the tenth book of the Republic ... Plato has completed his final burning denunciation of poetry ... Aristotle certainly knew the passage, and it looks as if his treatise on poetry was an answer to Plato’s challenge.

Plato and Aristotle are the two founding fathers of western metaphysics. If Plato is transcendental and abstract, Aristotle is biological and concrete. Though these two classical philosophers may differ in their worldviews, yet it is the Plato-Aristotelian framework which dominated the western mode of thinking till about twentieth century.

Aristotle is also significant for his interpretation of art and literature and primary the genre of tragedy. Based on the practitioners of Classical Greek tragedy, Aristotle developed his theory of tragedy in which he not only prescribes what tragedy should be but provides a detailed recommendation on what would make a great tragedy. According to him, tragedy is the greatest form of art, even better than the epic. Therefore, Aristotle discusses various elements of tragedy in detail, which would lead to the purgation of the feelings of pity and fear (catharsis). But what remains at the base of his analysis of tragedy is that the audience identifies with the tragic protagonist in his change of fortune as he is basically a good man having a tragic flaw. In the tragic protagonist’s rise and fall the audience recognizes himself in the hero and consequently in his fall, the audience experiences an emotional turmoil.

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The Marxist critics think that this identification with the hero and the consequent emotional experience that the audience or the readers go through while watching or reading a play according to the Aristotelian norms makes the readers or the audience go through an experience which is not going to help them see reality in its proper perspective. The Marxists think that Aristotelian norms are bourgeoisie in terms of literature or art being an escape from reality. Therefore, in twentieth century, dramatists like Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and others wrote plays that is anti-Aristotelian in nature as for them the objective of art is not merely to give the readers an experience which will merely provide them with pleasure, but will make them think and act. From that perspective Aristotle has been critiqued by the Marxists scholars as they are of the opinion that the role of literature as a bearer of ideology is not merely to provide consent for the ruling class or to critique the way the ruling class tries to represent reality, but also to provide the readers a perspective which will help them understand the social formations.

In conclusion, it can be said that Aristotle, the Greek philosopher in his famous book *Poetics* not only talks about the importance of art/ literature in opposition to Plato's view of discarding the poets and their works but provides a detailed discussion on Tragedy and compares it with other genres of literature, such as comedy and epic. For Aristotle, there are six essential elements in a tragedy – Plot (mythos), Character (ethos), Thought (dianoia), Language (lexis) Music (melopoiea) and Spectacle (opsis), amongst which Plot or mythos is the most important as it holds the other elements of a tragedy together. These six elements present the change of fortune of the tragic protagonist which evokes the feelings of pity and fear (Catharsis), which according to Aristotle is the ultimate end of tragedy.

**Check Your Progress**

3. How does Aristotle categorizes the six elements of Tragedy?
4. State Aristotle's view on Chorus as a part of a play.
5. Differentiate between ethos and dianoia.
6. What remains at the base of Aristotle's analysis of tragedy?

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## **1.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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1. Theoretical science is the science whose function is to explore truths like Philosophy or Theology, Mathematics, Physics.
2. Aristotle believes that different art forms differ from each other in three parameters: means (i.e. language, for literature), objects (actions with agents) and manner (i.e. dramatic or narrative).



3. Aristotle divided the six elements of tragedy in two groups –
  - Internal – that is, subjective – Plot, Character and Thought
  - External – Diction (Language), Music and Spectacle
4. Aristotle argues that the Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor; choral odes should not be ‘mere interludes,’ but should contribute to the unity of the plot.
5. The ability to choose, the moral fibre or the courage to choose, is the ethos, but the ferment of thoughts that leads to the point of choice is known as *dianoia*.
6. What remains at the base of Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy is that the audience identifies with the tragic protagonist in his change of fortune as he is basically a good man having a tragic flaw.

## NOTES

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### 1.6 SUMMARY

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- Inherent in any literary criticism are assumptions about the nature of language, the problematic of how and what is literature, and about what constitutes its valid interpretation.
- It was Socrates who made a new beginning with his consistent demand for definition – Plato joined the Socratic circle around the age of twenty. Later, the disciple of Plato, Aristotle, at the age of seventeen joined Plato’s Academy and enriched the Greek philosophical and literary critical tradition with his incisive critique of Plato.
- Aristotle divided knowledge into three major categories – [a] productive knowledge which is concerned with making things such as Rhetoric and Poetics, [b] practical knowledge/science which is focused on action, as Politics and Ethics, [c] theoretical science whose function is to explore truths like Philosophy or Theology, Mathematics, Physics.
- From the point of view of dramatic theory, Aristotle’s *Poetics* consists of four distinct elements: The concept of Mimesis; Different Genres – epic, tragedy and comedy; The division of tragedy into six elements – plot (*mythos*), character (*ethos*), thought (*dianoia*), language (*lexis*), music (*melopolia*) and spectacle (*opsis*) and; Catharsis.
- *Poetics* opens with Aristotle’s views on mimesis (literal translation Imitation), where he differs much from his teacher Plato, who regarded art to be ‘thrice removed from reality’ and can be in no way a valid means to attain knowledge.
- Poetry from Aristotelian point of view is not about ‘what was’ or ‘what is’ but about ‘what ought to be’. In that sense, for Aristotle, poetry or art aspires to capture that aspect of nature in its imitation which is idealistic, a better version than what exists in this world.

## NOTES

- Aristotle begins his *Poetics* straightaway, stating that different art forms are only different modes of imitation, and they differ from each other in almost three parameters: means (i.e. language, for literature), objects (actions with agents) and manner (i.e. dramatic or narrative).
- Aristotle points out that there are six essential elements in a tragedy – Plot (mythos), Character (ethos), Thought (dianoia), Language (lexis), Music (melopoiea) and Spectacle (opsis).
- Catharsis may mean the emotional satisfaction that the audience experiences when he/ she watches a tragedy, which the play does by evoking two feelings of ‘pity’ and ‘fear’ as pointed out by Aristotle
- Plato and Aristotle are the two founding fathers of western metaphysics. If Plato is transcendental and abstract, Aristotle is biological and concrete. Though these two classical philosophers may differ in their worldviews, yet it is the Plato-Aristotelian framework which dominated the western mode of thinking till about twentieth century.
- Aristotle is also significant for his interpretation of art and literature and primary the genre of tragedy. Based on the practitioners of Classical Greek tragedy, Aristotle developed his theory of tragedy in which he not only prescribes what tragedy should be but provides a detailed recommendation on what would make a great tragedy.
- The Marxist critics think that this identification with the hero and the consequent emotional experience that the audience or the readers go through while watching or reading a play according to the Aristotelian norms makes the readers or the audience go through an experience which is not going to help them see reality in its proper perspective.

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### 1.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Literary criticism:** It refers to a field of study which tries to look at the merit of literary composition(s), tries to look at the individuality, beauty, symmetry, and uniqueness of a piece of literary creation in terms of its style, content, form etc.
- **Hamartia:** Aristotle in *Poetics* uses the word ‘hamartia’ to mean an ‘error’ or ‘false step’.
- **Dianoia:** It refers to the inner questioning that goes on in the mind of a character and makes him choose one way or another.
- **Catharsis:** It refers to the emotional satisfaction that the audience experiences when he/ she watches a tragedy, which the play does by evoking two feelings of ‘pity’ and ‘fear’ as pointed out by Aristotle.

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## 1.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. How does Aristotle make a distinction between different genres of art?
2. State the major categories of knowledge as per Aristotle.
3. How does Aristotle differ from Plato in his views on mimesis?
4. What according to Aristotle are the essential elements of a tragedy?
5. Why does Aristotle think that mythos or plot as the soul of tragedy?
6. What are the essential features of a tragic hero, according to Aristotle?

### Long Answer Questions

1. What do you think is the purpose of Aristotle in defining tragedy?
2. Discuss the six elements of tragedy as mentioned by Aristotle? Does Aristotle give same importance to all of them?
3. What is hamartia? How far is hamartia important in the effect of a tragedy?
4. Explain the following terms:
  - (a) Hamartia
  - (b) Anagnorisis
  - (c) Peripetia
  - (d) Magnitude
  - (e) Mythos
5. Define Catharsis. Is Catharsis the only effect of a tragedy on the audience? Give a reasoned answer.
6. What does Aristotle mean by ‘pleasure proper to tragedy’? By what elements of the tragedy is it brought about?
7. Why is there so much importance of emotional experience in classical aesthetics, especially in Aristotle’s *Poetics*?
8. What, according to Aristotle, is superior – Epic or Tragedy? Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.

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## 1.9 FURTHER READINGS

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### NOTES

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## UNIT 2 PHILIP SIDNEY

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### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 An Introduction to Sir Philip Sidney
- 2.3 Commentary: Issues and Assumptions
- 2.4 Review: Sir Philip Sidney as a Critic
- 2.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.6 Summary
- 2.7 Key Words
- 2.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.9 Further Readings

### NOTES

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## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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Sir Philip Sidney wrote ‘An Apology for Poetry’ (also known as *The Defence of Poesy*) in approximately 1579, though it was published in 1595, after his death. ‘An Apology for Poetry’ is considered as the first work of literary criticism in English and often many scholars term him as the father of English literary criticism, though some are of the opinion that John Dryden in the true sense is the father of English Critical discourse. Barring this debate about who is the father of criticism in England, it can be said that Sir Philip Sidney is the first scholar of the English Tradition to argue in favour of literature and art. His ‘An Apology for Poetry’ is the first text of English Literary discourse which champions the native literary tradition of England. In this unit, we will learn about the important arguments raised by Sidney in defence of poetry in the essay ‘An Apology for Poetry’.

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## 2.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss Sir Philip Sidney as a poet and a critic of the Renaissance
- Examine Sidney’s ‘An Apology for Poetry’ as the first critical work of the English tradition
- Explain the book’s backdrop and reason of such a critical work at that time
- Critically analyse how Sidney’s literature in the context of Elizabethan Puritans
- Assess Sidney’s creation of a tradition of criticism or literary discourse

## 2.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

### NOTES

Sir Philip Sidney (1554 –1586) was an English poet, critic, courtier and soldier, and is still esteemed and remembered as one of the most prominent figures of the Renaissance or the Elizabethan Age. His important literary works include *Astrophil and Stella*, *The Defence of Poetry* (also known ‘An Apology for Poetry’), and *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*.

#### Box 2.1 Life of Sir Philip Sidney

Philip Sidney was born at Penshurst Place, Kent on 30 November 1554. He was the eldest son of Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Dudley. Sidney was educated at Shrewsbury School and Christ Church, Oxford. In 1572 he was elected to Parliament as Member of Parliament for Shrewsbury. He spent several years in Europe, traveling through France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary and Austria when he met a number of prominent European intellectuals and politicians.

Returning to England in 1575, Sidney met Penelope Devereux and got attracted to her (though she was later married to Lord Rich). She inspired his famous sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*. Her father, the Earl of Essex, is said to have planned to marry his daughter to Sidney, but he died in 1576.

In England, Sidney occupied himself with politics and art. In 1586, he joined in the Battle of Zutphen, where he was shot in the thigh and died twenty-six days later, at the age of 31. Sidney's body was returned to London and interred in St. Paul's Cathedral on 16 February 1587. Though Philip Sidney died young, yet in his short life span his achievements as a courtier, as a poet, as a critic was so vast that he is still remembered by all studying renaissance.

#### Box 2.2 Literary and Critical Writings of Sir Philip Sidney

During his absence from court, Sir Philip Sidney was a man of literary pursuit, as mentioned earlier. He not only wrote poetry but at the same time is the first Englishman to defend the ‘nobility’ of poetry. His famous works include –

*The Lady of May* – one of Philip Sidney’s lesser-known works, a masque written and performed for Queen Elizabeth in 1578 or 1579.

*Astrophel and Stella* – One of the early famous English sonnet sequences, *Astrophel and Stella* was probably composed in the early 1580s. The sonnets were well-circulated in manuscript before the first edition was printed in 1591; the authorized edition was published in 1598.

*The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* – The *Arcadia*, Sidney's most ambitious work, was as significant in its own way as his sonnets. It is a pastoral romance with a mood derived from the Hellenistic model of Heliodorus. Arcadia idealizes the shepherd's life with stories of jousts, political treachery, kidnappings, battles, and rapes. As published in the sixteenth century, the narrative follows the Greek model: stories are nested within each other, and different storylines are intertwined. The work enjoyed great popularity and still is studied as a famous tract of the Renaissance.

## ‘An Apology for Poetry’

Philip Sidney

It is usually thought that Sir Philip Sidney was to some extent motivated by Stephen Gosson, a famous pamphleteer of the sixteenth century, who dedicated his attack on the English stage, *The School of Abuse*, to Sidney in 1579. It is then considered that ‘An Apology for Poetry’ is an answer to Stephen Gosson’s tract *The School of Abuse*; but in *Apology*, Sidney addresses more general objections to poetry than those mentioned by Gosson.

The influence of ‘An Apology for Poetry’ can be felt throughout the subsequent history of English literary criticism. One of the most important examples is in the work of the Romantic poet and critic, Percy Bysshe Shelley’s ‘A Defense of Poetry’. Sidney’s influence on literary critics and poets is about his view of the status of poets in society. Sidney thought that poetry creates / constructs a separate reality which is different from the reality in which we live in. Consequently, Sidney views the poet as being separate from society. To Sidney the poet is not tied to any subjection / subjugation. The poet can invent, and thus in effect grows another nature.

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### Box 2.3 Some significant sections from ‘An Apology for Poetry’

- ‘The lawyer saith what men have determined; the historian what men have done. The grammarian speaketh only of the rules of speech; and the rhetorician and logician, considering what in nature will soonest persuade, thereon give artificial rules. . . Only the poet, disdain[ing] to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done. . . Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.’
- ‘[T]he skill of each artificer standeth in the idea or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that *idea* is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them. Which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative [i.e., fanciful], as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a [poetic character like the Persian conqueror] Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him’
- ‘Poetry is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis* – that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture--with this end, to teach and delight.’

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- The first kind of poets, like the psalmist, David, are divinely inspired, the second kind is philosophically inspired, and the third sort, ‘indeed right poets,’ must be distinguished from those inferior imitators whom Sidney compares to ‘the meaner sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them.’ These are inferior to ‘the more excellent, who having no law but wit, bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia, when she punished in herself another’s fault, wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue.’
- ‘[I]t is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet [ . . . ] But it is that feigning of notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by.’
- ‘[A]s Aristotle saith, it is not gnosis but praxis must be the fruit [of teaching]. And how praxis can be, without being moved to practice, it is no hard matter to consider. The philosopher showeth you the way . . . But this to no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive studious painfulness [ . . . ] Now therein of all sciences . . . is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect to the way, as will entice any man to enter into it. [ . . . ] He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margin with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness, but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the sweet enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. And, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue.’
- ‘The poet he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false. So as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies. But the poet (as I said before) never affirmeth. [ . . . so wise readers of poetry] will never give the lie to things not affirmatively but allegorically and figuratively written.’
- ‘But our comedians think there is no delight without laughter, which is very wrong, for though laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight [my emphasis]’ [ . . . ] Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present. Laughter hath only a scornful tickling.’
- ‘I conjure you all that have the evil luck to read this ink-wasting toy of mine, even in the name of the nine Muses, no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of poesy; no more to laugh at the name of poets, as though they were next inheritors to fools; no more to jest at the reverent title of rhymer; but to believe, with Aristotle, that they were the ancient treasurers of the Grecians’ divinity; to believe, with Bembo [Pietro Bembo], that they were first bringers-in of all civility, to believe with Scaliger, that no philosopher’s precepts can sooner make you an honest man than the reading of Virgil.’

### Box 2.4 Two Editions of Philip Sidney’s critical work

There are two editions of Philip Sidney’s ‘An Apology for Poetry’. The first edition (*editio princeps*), printed by Olney in 1595, was titled *An Apology for Poetrie*. In the same year, Ponsonby printed the same essay with the title *The Defense of Poesie*.



**Box 2.5 Title of Sidney's critical work**

Philip Sidney's 'An Apology for Poetry' has two titles which are printed in the two different editions. The first, *Defense of Poesy* uses 'poesy' in the sense of all literary forms (that is, lyric, drama, and prose etc.) The second, 'An Apology for Poetry', uses the word 'apology' in the sense of the Greek word 'apologia', or 'an argument in defense'. What is common in both the title is that in both cases Sidney advocates for all poets and imaginative and creative writers which is a vital point in the development of English literature and the development of English literature as a discipline much later. Sidney's 'An Apology for Poetry' comes as a major statement in the advocacy of poetry and literature and in emphasizing the native element of English Literary tradition.

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Philip Sidney's 'An Apology for Poetry' is in many ways a seminal work of literary criticism. It is generally believed that the ideas presented in 'An Apology for Poetry' are not original (in the sense that Sidney borrowed heavily from the classical thinkers) but it is considered to be the first work which tries to synthesize various strands and concerns of Renaissance literary criticism, heavily drawing upon Aristotle, Horace, Boccaccio and Julius Caesar, Scaliger and others. In the beginning of the 'An Apology for Poetry', Philip Sidney says that poetry has fallen from its high status (as it was considered to be 'the highest estimation of learning') to become 'the laughingstock of children.' Therefore, it becomes the duty of the poet-critic Philip Sidney to present arguments to defend poetry.

Philip Sidney argues that poetry was the initial form in which knowledge was expressed in the works of Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod, Livius, Ennius, Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. The Greek philosophers Thales, Empedocles, Parmenides, and Pythagoras also expressed their ideas in verse. Sidney also points out how even Plato used poetic devices to present his philosophy. Sidney points out that poetry was an essential prerequisite of knowledge in early days. In other words, he says that in the classical age, poetry was the medium through which scholars across different disciplines have expressed themselves.

Philip Sidney's next argument is what is called by M. A. R. Habib as the 'argument from tradition.' What M. A. R. Habib means by the phrase 'argument from tradition' is that Sidney borrowed ideas from Greek and Roman tradition about their views on poets to argue in favour of poetry and poets. The Roman term for the poet was '*vates*', meaning 'diviner, foreseer, or prophet ... so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge.' Sidney argues in favour of this definition of poetry. Sidney also reminds that the Greek origin of the English word 'poet' was the word *poiein*, meaning 'to make.' Thus in both the Greek and the Roman traditions, the poet was perceived as an extraordinary individual who has the power to create something new.

Every art, according to Sidney, has 'the works of Nature' for its 'principal object.' The astronomer observes the stars as ordered in nature;

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the geometrician and arithmetician examine quantities as ordered in nature; the natural philosopher examines physical nature, and the moral philosopher considers the natural virtues and vices; the grammarian, rhetorician, and logician expound respectively the rules of speech, persuasion, and reasoning as based on nature. Thus, for Sidney, all scholars study nature in its different forms. In other words, every art has the works of nature as its principal object and their studies primarily are explorations of nature in its different aspects. But the poet is above this as he is not subjected to the nature as it exists. Sidney says – ‘only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another Nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite a new forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heros, Demigods, Cyclops.’ For Sidney, the poet, unlike the other scholars who are constrained within the narrow range of nature, is free as the poet has the power of making something which is superior to nature. Sidney therefore is of the view that ‘Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry, as divers poets have done . . . Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.’

Sidney carefully situates poetry in the theological context as he draws an intrinsic connection between man’s ability to write poetry (in the sense of the poet being a ‘maker’ of a superior reality) and his status in relation to God. Man in writing poetry exalts him above the rest of nature is expressed above all in poetry. It is so because, for Sidney, poetry is not just an imitation of nature as it exists, but ‘is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture: with this end, to teach and delight.’

In defining poetry in such a fashion, Philip Sidney adapts certain elements from Aristotle and Horace, the Greek and Roman Philosophers respectively, to present to us a broader view of imitation. For Sidney there are three kinds of poetic imitation –

1. Poetry that ‘did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God,’ as in the various poetical portions of the Old Testament.
2. Poetry that deals with subjects whose scope is philosophical, historical, or scientific, such as the works of Cato, Lucretius, Manilius, or Lucan.
3. Poetry proposed by Sidney that lifts it free of the constraints imposed by Aristotle.

This third kind, says Sidney, is produced by ‘right poets . . . who having no law but wit, bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see.’ These are the poets who ‘most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate, borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be: but range only . . . into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be.’

Therefore, according to Philip Sidney, the poet is free from his dependence on nature in at least two ways –

- (i) The poet is not restricted to any given subject matter, any given sphere of nature.
- (ii) Poet's imitation does not actually reproduce anything in nature, since his concern is not with actuality but with portrayals of probability and of idealized situations.

The ultimate objective of this kind of poetry, as suggested by Sidney, is moral, that is, 'both to delight and teach.' Sidney is of the opinion that this is 'the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed.' Therefore, rhyming and versification are not as important for Sidney as there are mere ornaments. They do not produce what Sidney considers as a poet but, the poet becomes a poet only because of his power to create or make the 'feigning notable images of virtues, vices . . . with . . . delightful teaching.'

Sidney then goes on to compare the poets with philosophers and historians as he thinks that they are the poet's chief competitors in terms of discipline which has the potential of 'instruction.' The Philosopher claims that his path to virtue is the most direct, whereas the historian claims that the philosophers merely teach virtue 'by certain abstract considerations,' whereas, history deals with concrete examples. Sidney also mentions the lawyer who endeavours to make men good. Sidney summarizes the argument between the philosopher and the historian: 'the one giveth the precept, and the other the example.' In other words, what Sidney meant when he said this is that both the disciplines are lop-sided as one deals with the general and the abstract, whereas the other is 'captive to the truth of a foolish world.' Sidney then goes on to argue that the poets serve both the functions as 'he coupleth the general notion with the particular example.' The philosopher's ideas will not be graspable 'if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy.' Philosophy is dry and drab; it is only poetry which can make it interesting to the readers. Sidney says that the philosopher teaches 'obscurely', where as the 'poet is the food for the tenderest stomachs, the poet is indeed the right popular philosopher.'

While making a comparison between poetry and history, Sidney makes a reference to Aristotle to say that that poetry deals with the universal, whereas history concerns the particular. Moreover, as the historian is tied to reality, he has no freedom to represent the ideal pattern of people or events, whereas the poet can 'frame his example to that which is most reasonable.' Moreover, the poet is at liberty to make his work more delightful and more instructive by further beautifying it. Therefore, Sidney opines that the poets are better than the philosophers and historians.

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The function of poetry, for Sidney, is threefold:

- (i) to teach people the substance of virtue;
- (ii) to move people to virtuous action; and,
- (iii) to impress upon people the transitory and worthless nature of worldly affairs.

Sidney then goes on to address the specific charges against poetry –

- (i) ‘There are other kinds of knowledge more fruitful than poetry’. Sidney states that the greatest gifts bestowed upon human beings are speech and reason. It is poetry which polishes the gift of speech, and it ‘far exceedeth prose’ on two accounts: it engenders delight because of its meticulous ordering of words, and therefore it is memorable. Moreover, since poetry ‘teacheth and moveth to virtue,’ there can be no ‘more fruitful knowledge’ than this.
- (ii) The second charge is that poetry ‘is the mother of lies.’ Sidney’s famous retort is that ‘the poet . . . nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth.’ Unlike the historian, the poet does not claim to be telling the truth; he is not relating ‘what is, or is not, but what should or should not be.’ He is writing ‘not affirmatively, but allegorically, and figuratively.’
- (iii) The next objection to poetry is that it ‘abuseth men’s wit, training it to wanton sinfulness, and lustful love.’ The fault here, says Sidney, is with particular poets who have abused their art, not with the art itself. It is not that ‘poetry abuseth man’s wit, but that, man’s wit abuseth poetry.’ Even the word of God, says Sidney, when abused, can breed heresy and blasphemy.

The most serious charge that Sidney figures out against poetry is done by the Greek Philosopher, Plato, who banished poets from his ideal republic. But Sidney thinks that Plato was not so much opposed to poetry as the abuse of poetry. Sidney also points out that many great figures admired poetry, such as, Aristotle, Alexander, Plutarch, and Caesar.

Though after giving such arguments in favour of poetry by quoting and referring from the classical scholars, Philip Sidney ends ‘An Apology for Poetry’ with a lamentation for the impoverished state of poetry in England. The reason Sidney finds out for this state of poetry in England is because of the ‘base men, with servile wits’ who try to establish themselves as the poets. He is of the view that poetry is a ‘divine gift’, but that does not mean that would be poets do not need to learn the craft of writing poetry. According to him there are many mysteries contained in poetry which if not truly gained, will lead to the abuse of poetry by profane wits. The profane wits cannot lift themselves up from the baseness in which we live and are not able consequently to lift themselves up to the level of poetry. In other words, we can say that in Sidney, poetry is lifted to the status of sacredness and the

practitioners of poetry, if they have to live up to the nobility of poetry, have to reach that state if they want to create true poetry.

*Philip Sidney*

**Box 2.6 A Short Summary of Sidney's 'An Apology for Poetry'**

Sir Philip Sidney starts his defence of poetry by defining poet and poetry. Poetry, according to him, is the early medium through which knowledge was constructed and preserved by scholars, poets and philosophers, starting from classical Greece and Rome. Using Aristotelian arguments, he even justifies how poetry is superior to history and philosophy. Moreover, he points out how poetry is common to all cultures and poets are found among all peoples whether civilized or savage. While talking about the significance of the poets, he points out how the Romans quite significantly called the poet a prophet, while the Greeks called him a Maker. Poetry is an art of imitation (representation) which has twin function – to teach and to delight. Next, he goes into making a distinction between three kinds of poetry – religious, philosophic and creative – and specifies further subtypes of each. Metre, according to him, is not essential to poetry but is its fittest attire.

Next Philip Sidney takes up the question of the function of poetry. Poetry, he emphasizes, is an instrument of 'learning' / knowledge (which goes against the Platonic argument) and as such he considers (as mentioned earlier) poetry to be superior to both philosophy and history – for it is more philosophical and universal and more effective in moral teaching. He considers poetry as the noblest of all sciences. As different disciplines of sciences studies nature as it exists whereas the poet tries to create or make a new one through his unique ability.

Philip Sidney then goes into the technical subdivisions of poetry or literature. He subdivides them as:

- |                 |                    |                  |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| (a) mixed kind; | (b) the pastoral;  | (c) the elegiac; |
| (d) the iambic; | (e) the Satiric;   | (f) the comic;   |
| (g) the tragic; | (h) the lyric; and | (i) the epic.    |

He then takes up the charges made against poetry over the years. The major objections being:

- (a) there are many fruitful disciplines of knowledge than poetry;
- (b) poetry is the parent of lies;
- (c) poetry is the nurse of abuse; and
- (d) Plato condemned poetry.

Sidney tries to refute all these objections one by one. According to Sidney, as the poet does not affirm anything and therefore there cannot be any possibility of him lying in his creative art. Sidney then points out that the abuse of poetry cannot be taken as an argument against its right use. Plato, argues Sidney, condemned not the use but the abuse of poetry. Plato moreover points out the divine inspiration of the poet, which makes him write poetry.

Sidney then goes on to consider the state of English poetry, when he points out that it is unfortunate that the English poetry is despised in England. Therefore, he goes on to review English poetry and drama – the narrative (Chaucer), lyrical (Surrey) and pastoral poetry (Spenser) and the disregard of the three unities in English drama. He disapproves of the deviation from the classical norms of three unities as well as the intermingling of tragedy and comedy. Sidney also finds English comedy often farcical and immoral.

Finally, Sidney discusses the English language and the diction of English poetry. The diction he finds marked by affectation. But he is quite categorical about the fitness of English language as an apt medium for poetry and versification.

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NOTES

**Check Your Progress**

1. Whose work is said to have prompted Sidney to reply with ‘An Apology for Poetry’?
2. Name the thinkers whose strands of thought are thought to have been synthesized by Sidney in ‘An Apology for Poetry’.
3. What is the principal object of art as per Sidney?

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**2.3 COMMENTARY: ISSUES AND ASSUMPTIONS**

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Though Plato opposed poetry and, in his dialogues sought to banish poets from the Greek city states, yet the Greeks had high veneration for the poets and considered them as ‘makers.’ The poets are imitators, but they merely do not imitate the reality in which we live in but try to present to us a better world than that, as Aristotle says the objective of imitation is to give to the readers and spectators ‘what should be.’ All natural sciences have nature as their field of study. Sidney also highly estimates the poets in his ‘An Apology for Poetry’ and considers them as ‘makers’ as the poet does not only study ‘nature’ as it is, but ‘doth grow in fact another nature.’ Sidney emphasizes the poet’s power of making or idealizing, which puts him apart from other scholars as none achieve that.

According to Sidney, poetry is an art of imitation, ‘a representing, a counterfeiting or figuring forth.’ In saying this, Sidney is moreover following Aristotle’s notion of imitation, when he mentions in *Poetics* that it is through ‘imitation’ that the poets try to build a better world than this world. Moreover, imitation is nothing harmful, as human beings love to and learn through imitation.

Philip Sidney then goes into classifying poetry as religious, philosophical and true or creative poetry. This kind of classification is very different from the conventional classical division, where poetry is divided as lyrical, dramatic and narrative.

Philip Sidney then makes a comparison of poetry and philosophy and shows how poetry is superior to philosophy. While doing this Sidney definitely had Plato’s objections against poetry in mind, who tried to prove that philosophy or rational discourse is a valid means of attaining knowledge and is useful for the mankind, whereas poetry and art is detrimental as it merely waters the lower self of man, that is, the emotions. Sidney prefers poetry as it tries to present the philosophic precepts in concrete examples. Consequently, Sidney thinks that poetry has more power to teach than philosophy.

Sidney also makes a comparison between poetry and history and shows how poetic or creative art should be more esteemed than history. He argues that poetry deals with the universal, while history with the particular – ‘the historian being captive to the foolish world ...’ Unlike history, poetry supposedly takes the mind forward to better things. Here we are again reminded of Aristotle where he makes the distinction between “what is or was” and “what should be.” History is about “what was” and poetry about “what should be.” In that sense, poetry is far superior to history.

Then Sidney ponders over the question of the inferiority of the lyrical poetry. Aristotle, too thought in that manner as he was of the opinion that epic and tragedies are higher form of arts than lyrical poetry. But is it necessarily so? Is it always true that tragedy or epic poetry is better? If we look at the history of the English literature during the Elizabethan age, then we will figure out that, England during the Elizabethan age excelled in lyric poetry. This is to say that the mere opinion of classical theorists in a particular manner, does not mean that the classical theorists are always right.

Sidney, being a true Englishman and lover of English literature and art thought that it is very important to justify the native practise rather than praise the classical theory. Consequently, he justified the lyrical poetry of England. Sidney refers to the great emotional effect of the old song of Percy and Douglas. Sidney not only praises the English lyrical poetry but justifies it by showing how the lyrical poetry has been prevalent in other countries and cultures.

Sidney then talks about the major objections against poetry and he tries to defend poetry against those objections. While talking about Plato and his objection against poetry, Sidney says that Plato’s objections were not ‘in general of poets ... but only meant to drive out those wrong opinions of the deity.’ Plato, according to Sidney, has been misunderstood. Poetry, for Philip Sidney, is not ‘an art of lies, but of true doctrine.’ When he says this, he is trying to caution his readers against Aristotle who thought that Homer is the master of the art of framing lies in the right way literally. Sidney then recounts the way poetry is despised in England in his times by the puritans for which he finds no reasonable justifications.

‘An Apology for Poetry’ is not just a critical piece of writing which theoretically tries to defend poetry against the objections raised from generations after generations, but also is a piece of work which is critically evaluative of other writings. Sidney evaluates the English poets – Geoffrey Chaucer, Earl of Surrey and Edmund Spenser. He has admiration for Chaucer’s clarity of vision and Earl of Surrey’s nobility. However, he could not approve of Spenser’s ‘framing of his style to an old rustic language.’ But beyond these three, he does not see much poetry in England. According to him, the rest of poetry in England till then is either prosaic or ‘a confused mass of words.’

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Sidney while talking of the then English theatre criticizes the violations of unities in the English drama. He also thinks that the English drama failed in bringing about 'the difference between reporting and representing events.' He was even against the notion of tragi-comedy and referred them disparagingly as 'mongrel tragi-comedy.' He also finds English comedy coarse, focussing as it does on 'scornful matters.' For Sidney, comedy is often farcical or immoral. In other terms, we can say that, Sidney while judging the theatre of England was having a deeply classical outlook and thought that the English dramatists had much to learn from them. Throughout 'An Apology for Poetry', we figure out Sidney's affectation to the diction of English Poetry. He thought that the English language is favourable to poetry.

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### 2.4 REVIEW: SIR PHILIP SIDNEY AS A CRITIC

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The essay 'An Apology for Poetry' or 'The Defence of Poetry' is usually perceived as one of the first text of criticism and literary discourse in the history of English criticism. It can be said that Sidney's critical essay is to some extent a response to the invitation that Plato gives to the lovers of poetry to prove how poetry or art or literature is useful for the mankind. As we have seen in the Unit 1 on Aristotle that Plato thought that poetry is of no use to the mankind as poetry merely waters the emotional self of man and does not help man in gaining true knowledge. Moreover, Plato shows how the poets themselves do not know what they talk about in their poetry as they write under some kind of divine frenzy. The Puritans of the Elizabethan age similarly abused poetry for being detrimental for the society as a whole. Sir Philip Sidney's essay can be seen as a response to all these objections raised against poetry or art. It is a revolutionary writing and is representative of the main critical issues of the day. The issues that Sidney deals with in 'An Apology for Poetry' are—

- The Status and value of poetry
- Fitness of English language as a medium of literary expression
- English drama in comparison to classical theory.

As mentioned earlier, it is well-known fact that 'An Apology for Poetry' probably written as a response to Stephen Gosson's pamphlet 'Schoole of Abuse' (1579) which was 'a pleasant invective against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, and such like caterpillars of a commonwealth.' Sidney in his critical work defends the art of poetry.

In the Elizabethan age, literature and literary criticism faced three main challenges:



1. The Puritan and Reformation critics' objections against the art of poetry.
2. The justification of the new vernacular literature, that is, literature written in English.
3. The acceptance of classical forms and meters in English poetry.

Sir Philip Sidney responded to all these challenges. He has before him some kind of a parameter to challenge the objections against poetry – the arguments set forth by Aristotle in his works and the interpretations of Aristotelian arguments by the Roman scholar Scaliger. Using their arguments and moreover by interpreting for himself the role of poet and poetry in society Sidney in his seminal essay points out that the poet is a maker, that poetry is imitation but not something which makes an inferior version of what already exists but tries to create a new world altogether, and that the end of poetry or literature is both to teach and delight.

Though Aristotle and Scaliger are taken as a model by Philip Sidney often in 'An Apology for Poetry' but that does not mean that Sidney was a blind follower of the classical theorists and thought that they were always right. Instead, being a true scholar and having a mind of his own, he pointed out his difference with the classical theory. In his defence for the English lyrical poetry he disagreed with Aristotle who did not have any kind of value to the elegance of lyrical poetry. For Aristotle, epic and tragedy are the two forms of poetry which have excellence and gravity or 'superiority' which are missing in Lyrical poetry.

But in Sidney's England Lyrical poetry was prospering, therefore Sidney instead of going with the classical found it necessary to defend the native practice and to champion it. Though at the same time, we see his veneration for the classical theories as he believed that English poetry and drama shall gain from the classical models, especially in form and decorum. He is critical of violations of classical dicta in drama, but at heart, he is sympathetic to English genius and English literary practices. Above all, from 'An Apology for Poetry' it can be perceived that Sir Philip Sidney had a great faith in the potential of the English language as a fit medium for poetry and drama.

#### Check Your Progress

4. How does Sidney classify poetry?
5. Name the English poets that are evaluated by Sidney in 'An Apology for Poetry'.
6. List the three main challenges in front of literature and literary criticism in the Elizabethan Age.

#### NOTES

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## 2.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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### NOTES

1. It is usually thought that ‘An Apology for Poetry’ is an answer to Stephen Gosson’s tract *The School of Abuse*.
2. In ‘An Apology for Poetry’, Sidney tried to synthesize various strands and concerns of Renaissance literary criticism, heavily drawing upon Aristotle, Horace, Boccaccio and Julius Caesar, Scaliger and others.
3. Every art, according to Sidney, has ‘the works of Nature’ for its ‘principal object.’
4. Philip Sidney classifies poetry as religious, philosophical and true or creative poetry. This kind of classification is very different from the conventional classical division, where poetry is divided as lyrical, dramatic and narrative.
5. Sidney evaluates the English poets – Geoffrey Chaucer, Earl of Surrey and Edmund Spenser in his work ‘An Apology for Poetry’.
6. In the Elizabethan age, literature and literary criticism faced three main challenges:
  - The Puritan and Reformation critics’ objections against the art of poetry.
  - The justification of the new vernacular literature, that is, literature written in English.
  - The acceptance of classical forms and meters in English poetry

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## 2.6 SUMMARY

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- Sir Philip Sidney’s critical work ‘An Apology for Poetry,’ written in 1579 and published much later in 1595, is the first critical work of English, which as the title suggests is about defending poetry or literature.
- The reasons for writing ‘An Apology of Poetry’ is usually thought to be two – the immediate cause being Stephen Gosson’s ‘Schoole of Abuse’ which raised objections to poetry and the general antagonism of the Elizabethan Puritans against poetry and theatre, the larger cause being the general objections against poetry starting from Classical Greek philosopher, Plato.
- Sidney in ‘An Apology for Poetry’ does not only defend poetry and poets, but at the same time clearly tries to assert the elegance of the native poetry by championing the then English poetry. His work is also

evaluative in nature as it evaluates three poets – Geoffrey Chaucer, Earl of Surrey and Edmund Spenser.

- Sidney argues against the puritan’s hatred for poetry by emphasizing on the nobility of poetry. The significance of the nobility of poetry lies in its extraordinary capability to move the readers to virtuous action. More so, because it is thought by Sidney that poetry is much better than history or philosophy as a discipline to gain true knowledge as it delights while it instructs, thus evoking the interest of the reader.
- For Sidney, poetry not only delights the emotional self of the readers but at the same time teaches them to be virtuous. In an age, when the puritan belief in the corrupting influence of creative imaginative writing, especially poetry, was gaining more and more grounds, Sidney’s ‘An Apology for Poetry’ was a significant contribution to the genre of literary criticism.
- ‘An Apology for Poetry’ was England’s first philosophical and critical defense in which Philip Sidney describes poetry’s ancient and indispensable place in society, its mimetic nature, and its ethical function.
- During Renaissance or the Elizabethan days, anti-theatricality (that is, objections against theatre) was a growing concern, both as part of aesthetics and ideology.
- In ‘An Apology for Poetry’, Sidney critiques those who pay little attention to unity of place in drama. He more over points out how tragedy is not bound to history or the narrative but to ‘laws of poesy,’ having ‘liberty, either to feign a quite new matter or to frame the history to the most tragical conveniency.’

## NOTES

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### 2.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Comedy:** It refers to a work of art, primarily drama, where the primary concern of the author is to amuse the readers and audience. The characters and their discomfitures engage readers’ pleasurable attention rather than our profound concern.
- **Elizabethan Age:** It pertains to the time when Elizabeth I reigned as Queen of England. Elizabeth, born in 1533, reigned from 1558 until her death in 1603. *Elizabethan* may be used to describe the literature of the period or anything else associated with the age.
- **Lyric:** It is a song-like short poem written mainly to express the feelings of emotions or thought from a particular person, thus separating it from narrative poems.

## NOTES

- **Tragicomedy:** It is a genre of literature in which two genres, comedy and tragedy, are blended and mingled together to produce an effect which is supposedly similar to life as life is neither too comic nor too tragic in general.

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## 2.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Explain M.A.R Habib's comment 'argument from tradition' in the context of 'An Apology for Poetry'.
2. What does Sidney mean by the lines: 'Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry, as divers poets have done . . . Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.'?
3. State the three kinds of poetic imitations as per Sidney.
4. How has Sidney defined the functions of poetry in 'An Apology for Poetry'?
5. Why was Sidney against the notion of tragi-comedy?

### Long Answer Questions

1. According to Sidney on what terms the poet is better than other scholars of different disciplines?
2. In what ways, Sir Philip Sidney thinks that the poet is free from his dependence on nature?
3. Why does Sir Philip Sidney think that the poets are better than historians?
4. Review Sidney as a Critic in his essay 'An Apology for Poetry.'

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## 2.9 FURTHER READINGS

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## NOTES

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## UNIT 3 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objective
- 3.2 An Introduction to Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*
- 3.3 Issues
- 3.4 Review
- 3.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.6 Summary
- 3.7 Key Words
- 3.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.9 Further Readings

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### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

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William Wordsworth was a world-acclaimed English poet who was born on the 7 April 1770 in Cockerthorpe, Cumberland, in North-west England. Second of the five children to John Wordsworth and Ann Cookson, poetry was infused in him right from the beginning by his father. His mother taught him to read while he attended various local schools. He was also introduced to Milton, Shakespeare and Spenser through his father's library quite early in his life. Noted poet and diarist, Dorothy Wordsworth was his sister, younger to him by only a year.

In 1778, after the death of his mother, his father sent him to Hawkshead Grammar School in Lancashire. In 1787, he began attending the St. John's College in Cambridge from where he received his B.A. degree in 1791. By then, he had already started writing. His first publication was a sonnet in *The European Magazine* back in 1787.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850) brought a completely new approach to the writing of English poetry. The well-known characteristics of his revolutionary artistic achievements are his objections to an over-stylized poetic diction, his attitude to nature, his choice of simple incidents and humble people as subjects for his poetry. Poetry for him was primarily the record of a certain kind of state of mind, and the value of poetry for him lay in the value of the state of mind which the poem recorded. Keeping in theme with our syllabus, in this unit we will discuss Wordsworth's views on the art of poetry which was described by him in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

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### 3.1 OBJECTIVE

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

- Discuss the context of William Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads
- Describe Wordsworth's views on poetry and poetic diction
- Examine the Wordsworth's opinion in comparison to Neo-classical norms of poetry

### NOTES

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### 3.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO PREFACE TO *LYRICAL BALLADS*

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*Lyrical Ballads* was planned with Coleridge in 1797, when Wordsworth was living at Racedown with his sister. The volume appeared the following year, with four poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (including *The Ancient Mariner*) and nineteen by William Wordsworth. The materials of poetry can be found 'in every subject which can interest the human mind' and explained that these poems were experiments written chiefly 'to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.' Thus, Wordsworth, instead of following the tradition of the conventional poetic style of using diction, thought of creating poetry out of his personal experiences and emotions. It is not that *Lyrical Ballads* was Wordsworth's first publication; he has started publishing poetry from 1793 onwards. In the year 1793, Wordsworth's first published poetry with the collections *An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches*. Wordsworth's *The Prelude* is usually thought to be his magnum opus which is a semiautobiographical poem of his early years. He revised and expanded *The Prelude* a number of times. Wordsworth was Britain's Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850.

#### **Preface to *Lyrical Ballads***

*Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798, heralded a new era in the history of English literature and with the publication of this volume of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Romantic Era begins. These two poets met in 1795 and immediately recognized each other's caliber and joined hands to create something new in the field of literature. Their wishes came true with the publication of this volume of poetry *Lyrical Ballads*, which also had a short Foreword by William Wordsworth. The Second edition of the volume came out in 1800 with a Preface by Wordsworth. In 1802, another revised edition was published which had more significant additions.

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### 3.3 ISSUES

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#### NOTES

William Wordsworth in the very beginning of the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* points out four essential principles of poetry that are included in *Lyrical Ballads* and also propagates the reason for such poems –

- Themes from ordinary life;
- Expressed in the day to day language of ordinary men;
- Colored by Imagination;
- Through and in them the universal and primary laws of human nature be brought out

In Wordsworth's language, the principal object of the poems in the *Lyrical ballads* is:

to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature ...

Thus, the Preface is an epoch-making critical writing as it marks a definite break from the earlier poetry of the eighteenth century. In the Preface, the poet-critic Wordsworth discusses several issues related to poetry, which can be categorized under the following heads –

- Definition of Poetry
- Defining Poet
- Value of Poetry
- The nature of Poetic Diction

#### **Wordsworth's Definition of Poetry**

One of the key issues William Wordsworth deals with in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* is the notion of poetry. For Wordsworth:

... all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.



As the above quotation from the Preface suggests that emphasis of Wordsworth in composing good poetry is ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’; but at the same time the expression of the feelings is not as spontaneous as Wordsworth suggests that the poet had to think ‘long and deeply’ before he gives expression to his feelings.

Later in the Preface Wordsworth adds –

I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on ...

Thus, for Wordsworth, unlike the eighteenth-century poets whose emphasis is on the imitative rationalist aesthetic, poetry finds its origin from the emotions of the poet though it should have universal appeal, as that is the only way the poet can ensure that his creation is understood by his readers. Therefore, Wordsworth refers to Aristotle and says that:

Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature.

Thus, going along with the beliefs of the romantics, Wordsworth emphasized that the tendency of art or aesthetic object should be from the individual to the universal. ‘Poetry being the image of man and nature’ makes Wordsworth transcend the personal feelings in the process of creative expression to make it have an universal appeal.

### **Defining Poet**

Identifying the key issues of good poetry, Wordsworth shifts to what the poet should be and here he identifies three key features of a poet:

1. The poet should be exceptionally sensitive ‘endued with more than lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness ... a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind.’ This exceptional sensitivity of the poet makes him a perceiver who not only does feel his emotions strongly but feels for everything around him – man and nature. Thus, for Wordsworth, the poet is an extraordinary creature having the power of feeling more comprehensively than any other common human being.
2. The poet is ‘a man speaking to men.’ The poet’s role does not stop at the power to feel enthusiastically and sensitively, but the other greater role is to express those strongly felt emotions to his readers. In other words, the poet is not merely a self-indulgent creature seeking pleasure

### **NOTES**

## NOTES

in deep feelings but has a social responsibility. A great poet is a man of integrity who gives his readers the chance to rectify their feelings by his poetry. Therefore, Wordsworth adds, 'every great poet is a teacher. I wish either to be considered a teacher or as nothing.'

3. Wordsworth also endows the poet with a strong imaginative power – that is he has the power to perceive 'absent things as if they are present.' Romantics believe that it is through imagination that they can transcend the pains of this world and aspire for the ideal. Wordsworth, thinking along the similar line, asks the poets to be imaginative as it is this quality that distinguishes them from the commoners and makes them a poet. Percy B. Shelley significantly said 'the Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.' They are legislators as they provide the world with better or the idealistic version through their imagination; even though they live in the same world of flux, fever and fret.

### The Value of Poetry

Wordsworth attaches much importance to the language of poetry as it is the medium through which the poet communicates with his readers – '... the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected, is language; a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations. The genius of the poet melts down to these to his purpose.' Wordsworth thought, similar to others, that language is the most significant aspect of poetry as 'language and the human mind acts and react on each other.' Moreover, he thinks that with the growth of science, poetry has become more crucial as 'If the labours of the man of science should ever create a material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep than no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of objects of science itself.'

Comparing science with poetry, Wordsworth says –

The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of Science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow- beings. The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, "that he looks before and after." He is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying every where with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time.

## Poetic Diction

William Wordsworth

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, as put forward in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* invited a lot of controversy in the Romantic Age and afterwards. It is true that his views of poetic diction were not so much criticized as his practical application of the theory in his own poems. Wordsworth was against his predecessors, the eighteenth-century poets for their use of stylistic devices and figures of speech in particular and the poetic diction in general as he thought that neither does it suit their creative output nor does it suit the age in which one is writing.

Wordsworth is of the view that there can be no general poetic style that all the poets can follow, as every poet's mode of experience is peculiar to him and that experience should find expression in the language which is best suited to put forward that experience to the readers. The classical poets naturally wrote in a figurative language as it suited their themes and the age in which they were writing. But the eighteenth-century poets, according to Wordsworth, consciously imitated the classical model of writing and consequently there is artificiality in their diction. Therefore, Wordsworth rejected the stereotypical, artificial and stagnant poetic diction of his predecessors and asserted that his poetry will be in the language of men, the language of the rustic as their language, which is similar to their way of living, not artificial, and most natural. It is the language of the rustics which needs to be purified for the sake of poetic use –

Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation. (Coleridge makes a critique of Wordsworth's idea of using rustic's language as the medium of poetry in his famous critical writing *Biographia Literaria*)

## NOTES

## NOTES

Moreover, Wordsworth felt that the language of Poetry does not differ much from good prose as he says –

the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose, when prose is well written... the language of Prose may yet be well adapted to Poetry; and I have previously asserted that a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good Prose. I will go further. I do not doubt that it may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. (Coleridge again refuted this idea in *Biographia Literaria* saying that compositional language is necessarily different from the language of daily use.)

As the aim of poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with Pleasure the regularity provided by a particular rhythm functions to temper the feelings generated. Similarly, metre can also function to mitigate the more pathetic situations and sentiments Thus, Wordsworth expresses his reservations about the artificiality of metre and, particularly, of rhyme. They, however, temper and restrain ‘the passions’ and contribute to regularity of effect.

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### 3.4 REVIEW

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From about 1650 to 1770 was the period of the Neo-classicist dominance in English Literature. From 1770 onwards, the change began and in 1798, with the publication of William Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* the form and content of poetry changed altogether. The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* also marked the beginning of Romantic criticism. It was an end of the creed of authority as the canonical treatise on poetry dealt with the questions like, what is poetry, nature of poetry, creative process etc., in a newer way, a way which marks a definite break from the neo-classicist thought process.

Romantic theory of poetry, primarily that of William Wordsworth, attaches value to subjective experience, to personal feelings, emotions and passions. Reacting against the artificiality of 18th century poetry, Wordsworth promotes simplicity both in the theme and form of poetry. Wordsworth is of the opinion that the subject of poetry should be taken from the humble and rustic life and presented to the readers in the language of common men. Thus, the common man of humble and rustic origin is the chief concern of Wordsworth in his poems. The Preface is not merely a statement of the theme and nature of poetry, but Wordsworth in the Preface makes a declaration of the Romantic creed where ‘spontaneity’ is the key word. When Wordsworth defines poetry as ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings ... recollected in tranquility’; he is saying that poetry should not be pre-meditated, and in poetry emotion should be privileged over rationality.

For Wordsworth poetry is ‘the most philosophic of writing’ as in it the general truth and essential laws of the universe and human existence finds

its expression. Juxtaposing poetry opposite science, Wordsworth says that as against the matter of factness of science, poetry is an instrument of truth which does not need external validity, as it is its 'own testimony.' Wordsworth says –

Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony ... Poetry is the image of man and nature. ... The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things; between this, and the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand.

Thus, a poet for Wordsworth is a specially gifted individual, out of the ordinary in his perception and in his ability to feel – ‘... affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present ... and a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels...’ Thus for Wordsworth the poet is a genius, an extraordinary individual who has the capability in him to perceive the ideal, which the common people do not have. It is this characteristic of the poet which makes him experience extraordinariness in ordinary things and present it to the readers for their pleasure. T. S. Eliot vehemently criticizes this Wordsworthian theory of poetry and poet in his critical essay ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’ (We will discuss this in Unit 5 of this book).

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. Which literary era was started with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1789?
2. List the broad issues discussed by poet-critic Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.
3. Why was Wordsworth against his predecessors, the eighteenth-century poets?
4. State the chief concern of Wordsworth in his poems.

## 3.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798, heralded a new era in the history of English literature and with the publication of this volume of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Romantic Era begins.

## NOTES

2. The poet-critic Wordsworth discusses several issues related to poetry, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* which can be categorized under the following heads –
  - Definition of Poetry
  - Defining Poet
  - Value of Poetry
  - The nature of Poetic Diction
3. Wordsworth was against his predecessors, the eighteenth-century poets for their use of stylistic devices and figures of speech in particular and the poetic diction in general as he thought that neither does it suit their creative output nor does it suit the age in which one is writing.
4. The common man of humble and rustic origin is the chief concern of Wordsworth in his poems.

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### 3.6 SUMMARY

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- William Wordsworth (1770–1850) brought a completely new approach to the writing of English poetry. The well-known characteristics of his revolutionary artistic achievements are his objections to an over-stylized poetic diction, his attitude to nature, his choice of simple incidents and humble people as subjects for his poetry.
- *Lyrical Ballads* was planned with Coleridge in 1797, when Wordsworth was living at Racedown with his sister. The volume appeared the following year, with four poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (including *The Ancient Mariner*) and nineteen by William Wordsworth.
- It is not that *Lyrical Ballads* was Wordsworth's first publication; he has started publishing poetry from 1793 onwards. In the year 1793, Wordsworth's first published poetry with the collections *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*.
- Wordsworth's *The Prelude* is usually thought to be his magnum opus which is a semiautobiographical poem of his early years. He revised and expanded *The Prelude* a number of times. Wordsworth was Britain's Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850.
- *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798, heralded a new era in the history of English literature and with the publication of this volume of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Romantic Era begins.
- In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth ponders over some essential issues relating to poetry and creative process. They are the value of poetry in the age of science; the characteristic of a poet, the theme of poetry should be that of the common man expressed in the language of the rustic which needs to be purified of its vulgarity and

that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility.

- William Wordsworth in the very beginning of the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* points out four essential principles of poetry that are included in *Lyrical Ballads* and also propagates the reason for such poems –
  - o Themes from ordinary life;
  - o Expressed in the day to day language of ordinary men;
  - o Colored by Imagination;
  - o Through and in them the universal and primary laws of human nature be brought out
- In the Preface, the poet-critic Wordsworth discusses several issues related to poetry, which can be categorized under the following heads–
  - o Definition of Poetry
  - o Defining Poet
  - o Value of Poetry
  - o The nature of Poetic Diction
- The length of Wordsworth’s critical work is not too much, but within that short length the ideas that Wordsworth delineates is of extreme importance for romantic poetry in particular and poetry in general as it changed the course of English poetry.

## NOTES

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### 3.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Romanticism:** It was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century, which focussed on narrator’s emotion, nature beauty, imagination, etc.
- **Poetic diction:** It is the term used to refer to the linguistic style, the vocabulary, and the metaphors used in the writing of poetry.
- **Neoclassical Literature:** It refers to the literature written between the years 1660 and 1798 is often called Neoclassical literature. The literature was in the style of the classical literature that had come before.

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### 3.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Question

1. What are the main ideas professed by Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*?

## NOTES

2. What is Wordsworth's view about metre in poetry?
3. How does Wordsworth differ from his predecessors on the notion of Poetic diction?
4. Compare Aristotle and Wordsworth's view on poetry.
5. Write a short note on Wordsworth's view on poetry in comparison to prose.

### Long Answer Questions

1. Do you agree with Wordsworth's view that poetry is spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquillity?
2. What role does Wordsworth attach to personality, spontaneity and emotion in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*?
3. Describe and analyse what Wordsworth believes regarding rustic life and poetic diction.
4. What is the importance and value of poetry as professed by Wordsworth in the age of science? Do you agree with his views?

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## 3.9 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 4 MATTHEW ARNOLD

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### Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Mathew Arnold: An Introduction
- 4.3 ‘The Study of Poetry’: Review and Critical Commentary
- 4.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.8 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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Coming down in the history of English literature from the Romantic age of idealism to the Victorian era of Realism, one experiences the feeling of a return from solitude to society, from nature to industry, from concepts to issues, from spiritualism to pragmatism, from optimism to agnosticism, from lyricism to criticism and from organicism to compromise.

The movement of Realism is an integral part of Victorian Age. Although the literary scene during the Victorian period was dominated by novel, its achievement in poetry was not less significant.

Although the period may not have produced as great poets as were begotten by the preceding period of Romanticism, it did produce a number of poets who not only carried on the poetic tradition in English but also made significant contributions to it. Just as in the Romantic period, there were two distinct generations of poets, in the Victorian period too, there were the early Victorians (ending around 1870) and the late Victorians.

Among the early Victorians, the most prominent poets were Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Emily Bronte, Matthew Arnold, Christina Rossetti, George Eliot among others. Matthew Arnold was born in 1822 at Laleham in England. He was educated in Winchester and Oxford. In 1841, he won an open scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. His poem *Cromwell* won the Newdigate prize in 1843. In 1845, he started teaching at Rugby. In the same year, after a short interlude of teaching at Rugby, he was elected as the Fellow of Oriel College, distinction at Oxford. In 1847, he became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, Lord President of the Council of U.K. He remained loyal to France and French connection throughout his life. He died in 1888. In this unit, we will discuss Arnold’s essay ‘The Study of Poetry’ and his views on the art and functions of poetry.

## NOTES

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## 4.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life and works of the Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold
  - Explain Arnold's opinion on the function of literary criticism,
  - Describe the Arnold's Touchstone Method
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## 4.2 MATHEW ARNOLD: AN INTRODUCTION

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The poetry of Matthew Arnold (1822-88) represented the Victorian Age in a more profound way as his is the true voice of the sensitive Victorian intellectual brooding over inevitable loss of faith and the meaning of life. Arnold's first volume, *The Strayed Reveller and other poems* (1849), includes 'Mycerinus,' the story of the just king who turned to reveling when he learned from the oracle that, in spite of his virtue, he was to die after six years; it ends, not in protest, but in that characteristic note of elegiac description of landscape.

The opening of *Dover Beach* is perhaps the finest expression of that symbolic scene of night quiet which provided the setting and the emotional background of so much of Arnold's elegiac medication. His second, *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems*, appeared in 1852. The end of *Empedocles* brings us to that same silent night that can be found at the end of *Sohrab and Rustom*. Perhaps Arnold's two best-known poems are *The Scholar Gypsy* and *Thyris*. The former, ostensibly about a seventeenth century Oxford student who disappeared among the gypsies, is really about the poet himself and his generation, the *Scholar Gypsy* becomes a symbol in the light of which Arnold can develop his own position and state his own problems. *Thyris*, written to commemorate Arnold's friend Arthur Hugh Clough, who had died in 1861, is closely linked to *The Scholar Gypsy*, though written many years after it.

### List of Mathew Arnold's Major Works:

- *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* (1849)
- *Empedocles on Etna and other Poems* (1852)
- *Poems* (1853)
- *Poems, Second Series* (1855)
- *Merope, a Tragedy* (1858)
- *On Translating Homer* (lectures) (1861)
- *The Study of Celtic Literature* (lectures) (1867)

- *Essays in Criticism* (1865 and 1888)
- *New Poems* (1867)
- *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)
- *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870)
- *Friendship's Garland* (1871)
- *Literature and Dogma* (1873)
- *God and the Bible* (1875)
- *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877)

## NOTES

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### 4.3 'THE STUDY OF POETRY': REVIEW AND CRITICAL COMMENTARY

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Mathew Arnold's critical essay 'The Study of Poetry' (Published in 1880 as the General Introduction to *The English Poets*, edited by T. H. Ward.) not only traces the history of English poetry critically but also provides the readers with a parameter of judging good poetry. The essay can be described as one where Arnold is emphasizing on the need for having a scientific basis of estimating poetry.

Mathew Arnold starts the essay with the importance of poetry and points out how poetry has taken over the character of religion –

The Future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.

Poetry, according to Mathew Arnold, pleads in support of the nobility in poetry. Arnold recalls Sainte-Beuve's reply to Napoleon, when latter said that charlatanism is found in everything. Sainte-Beuve replied that charlatanism might be found everywhere else, but not in the field of poetry, because in poetry the distinction between sound and unsound, or only half-sound, truth and untruth, or only half-truth, between the excellent and the inferior, is of paramount importance. Thus, poetry is of utmost importance as it is in poetry that the distinction between the good and the worse is paramount.

#### Poetry as Criticism of life

Poetry is the 'criticism of life' which is ruled by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. It is in this aspect of poetry as 'criticism of life' that poetry

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would provide some respite to the human race, when other aspects of human life fall apart –

In poetry, as in criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

### Religion replaced by Poetry

Arnold emphasizes on the need for the study of poetry seriously. As the best poetry has the ‘power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us ...’, therefore poetry should be genuine and free from charlatanism. Thus, while broadening the function of poetry, Mathew Arnold emphasizes that ‘We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto.’ Moreover, in the Victorian era which was torn apart by the faith and doubt, Mathew Arnold points out how poetry has replaced religion and without poetry how science seems to be incomplete – ‘Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.’ It is with this need that Mathew Arnold pens this essay, as the objective of the essay is not only to provide an estimate of English poetry, but also to figure out the ways of evaluating poetry.

### Framework of Evaluation – Historical and Personal as Fallacious

Arnold points out how England lacks a proper evaluating framework for poetry as the prevalent methods are either historical or personal and both of them according to Arnold are ‘fallacious.’ He vouches for a genuine and disinterested estimate of poetry and he names it as ‘real estimate.’ He considers historical judgments of poetry fallacious as it is an usual tendency to regard the ancient classical poets with excessive veneration – so what Arnold prescribes is that if a poet is a ‘dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best . . . enjoy his work.’ Personal judgments are fallacious as human beings are mostly biased in our perception – ‘Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet’s work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance.’

As instances of flawed judgments, Arnold points out how in France, the seventeenth century French court tragedies were exaggeratedly praised,

until Pellisson reproached them for the lack of the true poetry. Arnold also expresses disapproval of the French critic Vitet, praised the epic poem *Chanson de Roland* by Turolodus, saying that it was superior to Homer's *Iliad*. Arnold's observation is that this poem cannot be compared to Homer's work in any way.

### **The Real Estimate – Touchstone Method**

So if one needs to get above such flawed judgments, whether historical or personal, then a framework of criticism should be developed where the critic can objectively and disinterestedly judge a piece of poetic work and not swayed away by any kind of personal affinities or traditional veneration. To evolve such a kind of estimate, Mathew Arnold prescribes 'Touchstone Method' – in order to judge poetry properly, a critic should compare it to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry, and that these passages should be applied as touchstones to other poetry. Even a single line or selected quotation will serve the purpose. Some of Arnold's touchstone passages are: Helen's words about her wounded brother, Zeus addressing the horses of Peleus, suppliant Achilles' words to Priam, and from Dante; Ugolino's brave words, and Beatrice's loving words to Virgil. From non-Classical writers he selects from *Henry IV Part II* (III, i), Henry's expostulation with sleep – 'Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast . . .'; From *Hamlet* (V, ii) 'Absent thee from felicity awhile . . .'; From Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book One, 'Care sat on his faded cheek . . .'; and 'What is else not to be overcome . . .'

### **Truth and Seriousness**

'Only one thing we may add as to the substance and matter of poetry, guiding ourselves by Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness . . . Let us add, therefore, to what we have said, this: that the substances and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness.' Mathew Arnold thus, following Aristotelian framework emphasizes that great poetry is advantageous over history as it possesses great truth and seriousness. And if any poetry has the qualities of 'truth' and 'seriousness' in it, then it can be considered as good poetry.

### **Estimate of English Poets**

After providing the critical framework of judging poetry – in terms of Touchstone method and truth and seriousness of poetry, Mathew Arnold in *The Study of Poetry* shifts to the estimate of English poetry beginning from Chaucer. To comment on Chaucer's poems, Mathew Arnold once more discusses French poetry as he thinks that early poetry of France is 'indissolubly connected' with the poems of England. Mathew Arnold writes –

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‘In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that seedtime of all modern language and literature, the poetry of France had a clear predominance in Europe. ... But the predominance of French poetry in Europe, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is due to its poetry of the *langue d’oil*, the poetry of northern France and of the tongue which is now the French language.’ It is this poetry (Romance poetry) of the northern France which clearly influenced the early poetry of England. It is in the fourteenth century that Chaucer comes into the scene of poetry whose superiority is ‘both in the substance of his poetry and in the style of his poetry.’ Arnold praises Chaucer by saying that ‘Chaucer’s power of fascination, however, is enduring; his poetical importance does not need the assistance of the historic estimate; it is real. He is a genuine source of joy and strength, which is flowing still for us and will flow always. He will be read, as time goes on, far more generally than he is read now.’

Thus, while praising Chaucer, Mathew Arnold points out that Chaucer is the Father of English poetry as it is he who sets the tradition of the English diction and the movement in poetry. The tradition of ‘liquid diction’ which we see in Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and Keats is set by Chaucer. Yet, Arnolds feels that Chaucer’s works cannot be termed as a ‘classic’ as ‘The substance of Chaucer’s poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness. Homer’s criticism of life has it, Dante’s has it, Shakespeare’s has it.’ Thus, according to Arnold, Chaucer lacks the high seriousness of the great classics, yet he is important to the history of English Poetry as with him the real poetry of English was born.

Mathew Arnold does not comment much on the Elizabethan poetry as he thinks and says that ‘Shakespeare and Milton are ... poetical Classics’ and has ‘universal currency.’ Moving on to the Age of Dryden, he puts the question whether Dryden and Pope’s works can be considered as classics. He says that Wordsworth and Coleridge deny them that status, though he is unsure about their views on the eighteenth-century poetry and says that ‘there are many signs to show that the eighteenth century and its judgments are coming to favour again.’ Though he says that it is impossible for him to discuss the issue fully, but he says that ‘We are to regard Dryden as the puissant and glorious founder, Pope as the splendid high priest, of our age of prose and reason, of our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century.’ Eighteenth century is an age of prose and reason, as Arnold thinks, therefore according to him, ‘Dryden and Pope are not Classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose.’

Arnold considers Thomas Gray to be the poetical genius of eighteenth century as Gray ‘lived with the great poets, he lived above all, with the Greeks, through perpetually studying and enjoying them; and he caught their poetic point of view for regarding life, caught their poetic manner.’ But even though

Gray had all these qualities which makes him one of the greatest poet of the eighteenth century, yet Arnold feels that he cannot be termed as classic as his poems lack high seriousness.

To the poems of Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth, Arnold does not make much comment as he thinks that the estimates of these poets by him would become not only personal, 'but personal with passion.' As he cannot offer real estimate of their poems therefore he thinks that it is better not to comment on them. Thus, Mathew Arnold provides a 'Real estimate' of the English poets and says that 'Even if good literature entirely lost currency with the world, it would still be abundantly worthwhile to continue to enjoy it by oneself. But it never will lose currency with the world, in spite of monetary appearances; it never will lose supremacy. Currency and supremacy are insured to it, not indeed by the world's deliberate and conscious choice, but by something far deeper—by the instinct of self-preservation in humanity.'

## NOTES

### Review

Mathew Arnold believed that England does not have a proper national critical paradigm. Without sound critical framework, it becomes very difficult for people to figure out the distinction between the good and the worse. Personal estimate of evaluation does vary and these varied perceptions of literary works can become a deterrent in the construction of canon of literature. Arnold emphasizes on constructing such a tradition of critical thought as without it England as a nation cannot think of prospering in terms of ideas. Therefore, he harped on the need of formulating a critical theory, to formulate objective criteria of evaluating literature. Moreover, Arnold thought that such disinterested and objective evaluation would pave the path for enabling criticism and would educate people about 'the best that has been thought and said.'

Mathew Arnold champions 'disinterestedness' as the primary criteria of judging literature. But it is possible to be completely disinterested or objective? Arnold himself was unable to practice disinterestedness in all his essays. Moreover, while Mathew Arnold chooses passages from various poets to set the standard for the Touchstone method, he is using his personal judgment in choosing those passages, which he thinks are the sublime creation of the poets and can be set as standards for evaluation of other works of art. Some other critic may disagree and vary from him. And a different standard can be set. So, the Touchstone Method is not even full-proof as the setting of the standard is itself a political matter in terms of who sets the standard and for what purpose?

Arnold is one of the early scholars who emphasized on the need of a canon formation. But Canon-formation is one of the most political tasks and while forming a canon what becomes more important is not what you include in the canon, but what you think should be left out. The 'left out' becomes 'the

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other', on the basis of which the canon finds an identity and its legitimacy. Mathew Arnold through his Touchstone Method is trying to do the same. As he is trying to set a great tradition in Poetry by setting 'seriousness and truth' as standards; he is moreover excluding a great number of poets and their works saying that this is not worth consideration.

What Mathew Arnold does is significant as he sets the tradition of the tradition and emphasized on creating an English canon. When one looks at the early twentieth century critical thought, one figures out that the English are following the tradition set by Mathew Arnold. T. S. Eliot in 'Tradition and Individual Talent' emphasizes on the importance of tradition (though from a different perspective, 'historical sense') and impersonality of the poet in his creative process. I. A. Richards in his works again harped on scientificity as an important criterion of understanding literature.

But in spite of all these influences of Arnold, there is something that is lacking in Arnold's critical perspective -- a historical sense. He has praised and criticized the poets without any reference to the historical juncture in which they are writing. It is the material-socio-political and cultural backdrop which influences the poet in their creative art, but Arnold never mentions anything like it. He merely tried to analyse works of art or literature from the perspective of truth and seriousness which in itself are abstract measures. This and other failings of Arnold have made Oliver Elton call him a 'bad great critic.' T. S. Eliot said that Arnold is a 'Propagandist and not a creator of ideas.' In spite of his faults, Arnold's remains an eminent critic as he is one of the early critics to set the literary house in order (Eliot). Arnold's objective approach to criticism and his view that historical and biographical studies are in no way important was very influential for the early twentieth century critical parameter of New Criticism.

### Check Your Progress

1. When and where was 'The Study of Poetry' published?
2. State the objective of 'The Study of Poetry' by Arnold.
3. Why does Arnold consider historical judgements fallacious?
4. Who is the father of English poetry as per Arnold?

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## 4.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Mathew Arnold's critical essay 'The Study of Poetry' was published in 1880 as the General Introduction to *The English Poets*, edited by T. H. Ward.



2. The objective of Mathew Arnold's essay is not only to provide an estimate of English poetry, but also to figure out the ways of evaluating poetry.
3. Arnold considers historical judgments of poetry fallacious as it is an usual tendency to regard the ancient classical poets with excessive veneration.
4. Mathew Arnold is of the opinion that Chaucer is the Father of English poetry as it is he who sets the tradition of the English diction and the movement in poetry.

## NOTES

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### 4.5 SUMMARY

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- Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), the Victorian poet and critic, is thought to be 'the first modern critic.' He championed not only of great poetry, but also literary criticism itself.
- The poetry of Matthew Arnold (1822-88) represented the Victorian Age in a more profound way as his is the true voice of the sensitive Victorian intellectual brooding over inevitable loss of faith and the meaning of life.
- Mathew Arnold's critical essay 'The Study of Poetry' (Published in 1880 as the General Introduction to *The English Poets*, edited by T. H. Ward.) not only traces the history of English poetry critically but also provides the readers with a parameter of judging good poetry. The essay can be described as one where Arnold is emphasizing on the need for having a scientific basis of estimating poetry.
- Poetry is the 'criticism of life' which is ruled by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. It is in this aspect of poetry as 'criticism of life' that poetry would provide some respite to the human race, when other aspects of human life fall apart .
- The purpose of literary criticism, in Arnold's view, was '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.'
- In 'The Study of Poetry', Mathew Arnold points out the importance of poetry in human life and says that 'poetry is criticism of life.' It has taken over the place of religion and therefore it is high time that one sets up proper framework for evaluation of poetry as the prevalent modes of evaluation – personal and historical – are fallacious.
- Arnold championed the Touchstone method – a method in which the critic compares poems to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry, and that these passages should be applied as touchstones to other poetry.

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- Mathew Arnold himself provides a list of short passages which he thinks can be applied as touchstone for evaluating other poems. Then he goes on to the evaluation of the English poets from Chaucer onwards to the Romantic poets.
- To comment on Chaucer's poems, Mathew Arnold once more discusses French poetry as he thinks that early poetry of France is 'indissolubly connected' with the poems of England.
- Mathew Arnold points out that Chaucer is the Father of English poetry as it is he who sets the tradition of the English diction and the movement in poetry. The tradition of 'liquid diction' which we see in Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and Keats is set by Chaucer.
- Mathew Arnold does not comment much on the Elizabethan poetry as he thinks and says that 'Shakespeare and Milton are ... poetical Classics' and has 'universal currency.' Moving on to the Age of Dryden, he puts the question whether Dryden and Pope's works can be considered as classics.
- Arnold considers Thomas Gray to be the poetical genius of eighteenth century as Gray 'lived with the great poets, he lived above all, with the Greeks, through perpetually studying and enjoying them; and he caught their poetic point of view for regarding life, caught their poetic manner.'
- To the poems of Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth, Arnold does not make much comment as he thinks that the estimates of these poets by him would become not only personal, 'but personal with passion.'
- Mathew Arnold champions 'disinterestedness' as the primary criteria of judging literature. But it is possible to be completely disinterested or objective? Arnold himself was unable to practice disinterestedness in all his essays.
- While Mathew Arnold chooses passages from various poets to set the standard for the Touchstone method, he is using his personal judgment in choosing those passages, which he thinks are the sublime creation of the poets and can be set as standards for evaluation of other works of art. Some other critic may disagree and vary from him.
- Arnold is one of the early scholars who emphasized on the need of a canon formation. But Canon-formation is one of the most political tasks and while forming a canon what becomes more important is not what you include in the canon, but what you think should be left out.

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## 4.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Victorian:** The Victorian era of the United Kingdom was the period of Queen Victoria's reign from 20 June 1837 until her death on 22 January 1901.
- **Sainte-Beuve:** Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve was a literary critic on nineteenth century France and one of the major figures of French literary history.
- **Chanson de Roland:** *Chanson de Roland* or *The Song of Roland* is the oldest surviving major French Epic poem by Tuoldus which is the first and most outstanding example of the *chanson de geste*, a literary form that flourished between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries and celebrated the legendary deeds of a hero.
- **Homer:** Homer is the Classical Greek poet who is known for his two epics – *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*

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## 4.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. What according to Arnold is the objective of his critical essay 'The Study of Poetry'?
2. Why does Arnold think that poetry has taken the place of religion?
3. Describe in brief Arnold's estimate of English Poetry.
4. Who, according to Arnold, is the poetic genius of the eighteenth century and why?
5. Write a short-note on cannon-making and Arnold's views.

### Long Answer Questions

1. What is Touchstone Method? What are the earlier methods of judging literature? What according to Arnold are the shortcomings of those methods and how would Touchstone method solve those problems?
2. Do you agree that 'disinterestedness' should be the criteria of judging poetry in particular and literature in general?
3. Do you agree to Mathew Arnold's view that 'poetry is criticism of life'?
4. Why does Mathew Arnold think that 'truth' and 'seriousness' are the two essential elements of judging poetry?

5. Why does Arnold think that the Historical and Personal estimate of poetry is fallacious? What is the solution he provides? Do you agree with it?

## NOTES

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### 4.8 FURTHER READINGS

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**BLOCK - II**  
**CRITICISM V - VIII**

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*T. S. Eliot*

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**UNIT 5 T. S. ELIOT**

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**NOTES**

**Structure**

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 An Introduction to T.S. Eliot
- 5.3 Critical Appreciation of 'Tradition and Individual Talent'
- 5.4 Review
- 5.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.6 Summary
- 5.7 Key Words
- 5.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.9 Further Readings

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**5.0 INTRODUCTION**

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Thomas Stearns Eliot has been a popular name in English poetry since the early 1920s. T.S. Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri (the USA). His family was of Devonshire origin, traditionally interested in trade and commerce and academics. He was an undergraduate at Harvard during 1906–1909. Here, he came under the influence of the symbolists and Laforgue. He had ruled the age in which he lived with absolute authority. The twentieth century cannot be signaled by a single voice or authority. Still, T.S. Eliot might be considered as its best spokesperson in English literature, probably more than any other literary figure. Amongst the post-war poets, playwrights as well as critics, who have enjoyed honour and prestige, Eliot can be seen as a towering celebrity. He alone could face and enjoy the life of austere and harsh realities. He would never sit back and ignore the complicated and confusing problems being faced by people of his time. He always wanted to come forward as one of us and give a first-hand report on the difficult issues of the age.

As a poet, Eliot drew from many different sources to gather his material. He was deeply influenced by some famous personalities of the past and of the modern scene. Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Ben Jonson, Arnold, etc., in general, and Donne and the metaphysical poets particularly added up in shaping Eliot's mind. Many French symbolists such as Laforgue and Gautier, German philosophers such as Hegel, Meinong and Bradley and the Indian religions and philosophies also influenced him. By accepting the influences so wide and varied in nature, Eliot significantly increased his knowledge

and augmented his susceptibility. This is also why he is a universal poet. In this unit, we will study Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

## NOTES

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### 5.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able:

- Discuss the life and works of poet critic Thomas Stearne Eliot
- Describe the Eliot's opinion on poetry, critical writing and poetic drama
- Explain the emphasis of poetry as per Eliot

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### 5.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO T.S. ELIOT

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T. S. Eliot is often considered the most important poetic voice of Modernism. His first volume of poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), portrays his witty ironical satire, the boredom, emptiness, and pessimism of the modern existence. His most famous work, *The Waste Land* (1922) made a tremendous impact on the post-war generation. Based on the legend of the Fisher King in the Arthurian cycle, it presents modern London as an arid, waste land. In series of disconcertingly vivid impressions, the poem progresses through five movements – 'The Burial of the Dead,' 'The Game of Chess,' 'The Fire Sermon,' 'Death by Water,' and 'What the Thunder Said.' Apart from poems he is also known for his dramatic works such as *Murder in a Cathedral*. Eliot's critical writing such as 'Tradition and Individual Talent', 'Hamlet and his Problems', 'The Metaphysical Poets' and others establish him as one of the greatest critics of the twentieth century. His critical writings initiated in the formation of a new brand of criticism called New Criticism which took the western academics by storm in the first half of the twentieth century. Below is the list of T. S. Eliot's major works (Collection of poems, plays and non-fiction) –

#### Poetry

- *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917)
- *Poems* (1920)
- *The Waste Land* (1922)
- *The Hollow Men* (1925)
- *Ariel Poems* (1927–1954)
- *Ash Wednesday* (1930)
- *Coriolan* (1931)

- *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939)
- *The Marching Song of the Pollicle Dogs and Billy M'Caw: The Remarkable Parrot* (1939) in *The Queen's Book of the Red Cross*
- *Four Quartets* (1945)

### Plays

- *Sweeney Agonistes* (published in 1926, first performed in 1934)
- *The Rock* (1934)
- *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935)
- *The Family Reunion* (1939)
- *The Cocktail Party* (1949)
- *The Confidential Clerk* (1953)
- *The Elder Statesman* (first performed in 1958, published in 1959)

### Nonfiction

- *The Second-Order Mind* (1920)
- *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1920)
- *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920)
- "Hamlet and His Problems"
- *Homage to John Dryden* (1924)
- *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca* (1928)
- *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928)
- *Dante* (1929)
- *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (1932)
- *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933)
- *After Strange Gods* (1934)
- *Elizabethan Essays* (1934)
- *Essays Ancient and Modern* (1936)
- *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939)
- *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948)
- *Poetry and Drama* (1951)
- *The Three Voices of Poetry* (1954)
- *The Frontiers of Criticism* (1956)
- *On Poetry and Poets* (1957)

### NOTES

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### 5.3 CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF ‘TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL TALENT’

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#### NOTES

T. S. Eliot’s critical essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919) was first published, in two parts, in *The Egoist* (1919) and later in Eliot’s first book of criticism, *The Sacred Wood* (1920).

#### Tradition

‘Tradition and Individual Talent’ significantly expresses Eliot’s views and concepts about poetry in general and the importance of tradition in poetry and in creative process in particular. Moreover, in the seminal essay, Eliot thrusts upon the need for critical thinking – ‘criticism is as inevitable as breathing.’ He believes that critical thinking is as necessary as life, if one has to stay alive in the proper sense. Consequently, in the beginning of the essay he emphasizes on criticism as he justifies it by saying ‘Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius.’ He compares the English culture with the French and says that the enormous critical writing of the French prove that they are ‘more critical’ and people sometimes think that the French are consequently ‘less spontaneous.’ But according to Eliot, this is a false notion that critical thought process would make the creative process less spontaneous. What he emphasizes in this essay, and elsewhere, is the notion that the critical thought process makes one a better poet or writer. In other words, Eliot starts questioning the binary opposition of creative versus critical and seems to suggest that both are not as antithetical to each other as one thinks. Additionally, both of them are interconnected and inseparably bound.

Similar to the word ‘criticism,’ the word ‘tradition’ is often mentioned with derogatory implications, in the sense that sometimes we call some poet ‘too traditional.’ Eliot underlines the significance of tradition as he says, ‘Tradition is a matter of wider significance.’ He questions the critical habit of appreciating a poet principally for those elements in his work which are more individual and differentiate him from others – ‘One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. If we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. Thus, according to T. S. Eliot, what is usually considered to be



the most individual part(s) of a poet's work may be those which are with the influence of his poetic ancestors.

T. S. Eliot

Speaking of the importance of tradition, Eliot observes:

It (tradition) cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.

## NOTES

### **No poet has his complete meaning alone**

For proper assessment, one must set a poet, for contrast and comparison, among dead poets and artists. Eliot envisages a dynamic relationship between past and present writers: 'The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.' An artist or a poet can be evaluated only by the standards of the past; but this does not denote the standards of the dead critics. It means a judgment when two things – the old and the new, are measured in terms of each other. To a greater extent, this reminds one of Mathew Arnold's 'Touchstone Method.' The 'ideal order' formed by the 'existing monuments' provide the standard, a kind of touchstone, for assessment. As with Arnold's touchstone method, Eliot's 'ideal order' is subjective and is in need of modification from time to time.

Eliot stresses on the fact that the artist should know 'the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country – a mind which he learns in time to be more important than his own private mind.' What Eliot means here is a consciousness of the past, an awareness of the historical sense and not merely pedantic knowledge. Some people have a greater sensitivity to this historical awareness, as Eliot states, 'Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy may sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum.'

Throughout Eliot's poetry and criticism, the emphasis lies on the poet or the artist surrendering himself to some larger authority. In case of 'Tradition and Individual Talent', Eliot is of the opinion that the artist needs to submit himself to the authority of tradition, to an awareness of the history of Europe which constantly interacts subconsciously with the individual poet. Eliot thinks that the poet should merge his personality with the tradition, as he says, 'The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.' He proposes the analogy of the catalyst in a

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scientific laboratory for this process of depersonalization. The mind of the poet is a medium in which experiences can enter into new combinations. When oxygen and sulphur dioxide are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they produce sulphuric acid. But the sulphuric acid shows no trace of platinum, which remains unaffected. The catalyst platinum assists in the chemical change, but does not participate in it, and remains unchanged. Eliot compares the mind of the poet to the filament of platinum (the catalyst), which will 'digest and transmute the passions which are its material.'

### **Impersonal Theory of Poetry**

Eliot then shifts the critical focus of the essay 'Tradition and Individual Talent' from the poet to the poetry and declares that 'Honest Criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry.'

Eliot sees the poet's mind as 'a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.' Using the same analogy of catalyst says – 'The mind of the poet ... may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.' Thus, Eliot bifurcates the two selves of the poet – the suffering self (the self that experiences the emotions and feelings) and the creative self (the self that creates poetry out of it) and even though poetry arrives out of the subjective experiences of the poet, but in its process of creation it is not anymore subjective. Eliot says that the elements that enter the presence of the transforming catalyst are of two kinds – Emotions and feelings: 'It (poetry) may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. Or great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever: composed out of feelings solely.'

Therefore, the concepts like 'sublimity', 'greatness' or 'intensity' of emotions are irrelevant, as it is not the greatness of the emotion that matters, but what matters is the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the artistic fusion takes place. Eliot, thus, rejects the Romantic emphasis on 'genius' and the exceptional mind. Eliot refutes the idea that poetry is the expression of the personality of the poet. – 'The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for

the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.'

T. S. Eliot

Experiences which are important may find no place in his poems, and the emotions occasioned by events in the personal life of the poet are not important. What is of significance is the emotion transmuted into poetry, the feelings expressed in the poetry: 'Emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him'. Eliot is of the opinion that Wordsworth's notion of poetry and the nature of creative process is fallacious. (Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling: it takes its origins from emotions recollected in tranquility.'). For Wordsworth, poetry is an expression of emotions, for Eliot, poetry is not recollection of feeling; it is a new thing resulting from the concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation:

The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must believe that "emotion recollected in tranquility" is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquility. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. These experiences are not "recollected," and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is "tranquil" only in that it is a passive attending upon the event. Of course this is not quite the whole story. There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious; and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him "personal." Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

For Eliot, the emotion/feeling of art is impersonal, and the artist can achieve this impersonality only by cultivating the historical sense, by being conscious of the tradition.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. Name some of the critical writing which established Eliot as one of the greatest critics of the twentieth century.
2. How does Eliot bifurcate the two selves of the poet?
3. List some of the factors which are irrelevant and which are important in poetry as per Eliot.

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## 5.4 REVIEW

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‘Eliot made English criticism look different, but not in a simple sense. He offered it a new range of rhetorical possibilities, confirmed it in its increasing attempts for historical processes, and yet reshaped its notion of period by a handful of brilliant institutions.’ George Watson’s aforementioned comment about T. S. Eliot as a critic points out the immense contribution that he had in the history of literary criticism of the twentieth century. One of the objectives of T. S. Eliot’s critical works has been to set the literary history of England in order, as he himself states – ‘From time to time it is desirable, that some critic shall appear to review the past of our literature and set the poets and the poems in a new order.’ Moreover, as Rene Wellek points out Eliot ‘advocated a double standard of criticism: artistic on the one hand and moral–philosophical–theological on the other.’ Eliot himself said in *Essays Ancient and Modern*, 1936, -- ‘In an age like our own ... it is more necessary ... to scrutinize works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards. The “greatness” of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards.’

Eliot’s critical works offers not only reassessment of the earlier writers, but at the same time his greatness lies in the formation of newer ideas of poetic creativity which is based on the notion of objectivity. Moreover, he is of the opinion that ‘the larger part of the labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour: the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing: this frightful toil is as much critical as creative.... Some creative writers are superior to others solely because their critical faculty is superior.’ (‘The Function of Criticism’). According to Eliot, the criticism applied by the author in his own work(s) is the most vital and the highest kind of criticism.

Eliot thought himself to be a classicist. His critical reactions against romanticism and humanism brought a classical revival in art and criticism. He is of the opinion that a critic instead of following his supposed inner critical voice (the notion of inner voice of the critic as a criterion of criticism was championed by John Middleton Murray) should follow objective standards and must conform to tradition. A sense of tradition, respect for order and authority is central to Eliot’s classicism. Eliot, following the tradition of Arnold, sought to raise criticism to the level of science. A. G. George says – ‘Eliot’s theory of the impersonality of poetry is the greatest theory on the nature of the process after Wordsworth’s romantic conception of poetry.’

Poetry, for romantics and particularly for Wordsworth, was an overflow of powerful emotions and its origin lies in ‘emotions recollected in tranquility’. Eliot rejects Wordsworthian notion of poetry and says that poetry

is not an expression of emotion and personality but an escape from them. The poet, for Eliot, is only a catalytic agent who mingles varied emotions into new organic whole – ‘When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary’. (‘The Metaphysical Poets’) Eliot distinguishes between the emotions of the poet and the artistic emotion. For Eliot the greatness of a poem is tested by the order and unity it imposes on the chaotic and disparate experiences of the poet. Wimsatt and Brooks are right in saying: ‘Hardly since the seventeenth century had critical writing in English so resolutely transposed poetic theory from the axis of pleasure versus pain to that of unity versus multiplicity.’

Even though T. S. Eliot is considered as one of the greatest critical mind that early twentieth century England produced, yet his ideas are not without any problems. Yvor Winters is of the opinion that ‘Eliot is a theorist who has repeatedly contradicted himself on every important issue that he touched ... within the same book or even within the same essay.’ W. K. Wimsatt points out that the most celebrated essay by Eliot, ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’ ‘despite its forceful suggestiveness, the smoothness and fullness of its definition of the poet’s impersonality was a highly ambiguous statement. ... In this essay as poet and critic Eliot is saying two things about three ideas (man, poet, poem) and saying them simultaneously. He is saying that a poet ought to depersonalize his raw experience, transcend the immediacy of the suffering man. At the same time, he is saying that the reader ought to read the poem impersonally, as an achieved expression, not personally, with attendant inquiries into the sufferings, the motives of the man behind the poem. The idea “poet” as Eliot employs it in this essay is sometimes the anti-thesis of “man” and sometimes the antithesis of “poem”.’

T. S. Eliot’s idea of ‘tradition’ is also narrow as he is referring to the poetic tradition but neglects the fact that even the poetic tradition is a complex amalgamation of written and oral poetry and the elements that go into them. Moreover, while talking about tradition he neglects the non-poetic elements of the tradition – such as the social formation which is an important part of poetic creativity as every poet is writing in a particular historical-cultural juncture which is also evolved by a tradition of thought process. An author can never ignore that. Therefore, in his later writings such as ‘Notes towards a Definition of Culture’, Eliot broadened his view of tradition.

### Check Your Progress

4. Instead of following his supposed inner critical voice, what should a critic follow?
5. What is Eliot’s views on Wordsworthian notion of poetry?

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## 5.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Eliot's critical writing such as 'Tradition and Individual Talent', 'Hamlet and his Problems', 'The Metaphysical Poets' and others establish him as one of the greatest critics of the twentieth century.
2. Eliot bifurcates the two selves of the poet – the suffering self (the self that experiences the emotions and feelings) and the creative self (the self that creates poetry out of it); whereas poetry arrives out of the subjective experiences of the poet, but in its process of creation it is not anymore subjective.
3. For Eliot, the concepts like 'sublimity', 'greatness' or 'intensity' of emotions are irrelevant, as it is not the greatness of the emotion that matters, but what matters is the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the artistic fusion takes place.
4. Eliot is of the opinion that a critic instead of following his supposed inner critical voice (the notion of inner voice of the critic as a criterion of criticism was championed by John Middleton Murray) should follow objective standards and must conform to tradition
5. Eliot rejects Wordsworthian notion of poetry and says that poetry is not an expression of emotion and personality but an escape from them.

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## 5.6 SUMMARY

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- Thomas Stearne Eliot's 'Tradition and Individual Talent' is one of the most notable critical essays of the early twentieth century.
- T. S. Eliot is often considered the most important poetic voice of Modernism. His first volume of poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), portrays his witty ironical satire, the boredom, emptiness, and pessimism of the modern existence.
- Eliot's critical writing such as 'Tradition and Individual Talent', 'Hamlet and his Problems', 'The Metaphysical Poets' and others establish him as one of the greatest critics of the twentieth century.
- Eliot's critical writings initiated in the formation of a new brand of criticism called New Criticism which took the western academics by storm in the first half of the twentieth century.
- T. S. Eliot's critical essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) was first published, in two parts, in *The Egoist* (1919) and later in Eliot's first book of criticism, *The Sacred Wood* (1920).

- Eliot in the essay 'Tradition and Individual Talent' champions two important notions which influenced literary writings and critical thought of the age – (i) the importance of tradition in the creative process and (ii) the theory of impersonality which destabilizes and questions the Wordsworthian romantic notion of poetry and poetic creativity.
- 'Tradition and Individual Talent' significantly expresses Eliot's views and concepts about poetry in general and the importance of tradition in poetry and in creative process in particular. Moreover, in the seminal essay, Eliot thrusts upon the need for critical thinking – 'criticism is as inevitable as breathing.'
- For proper assessment, one must set a poet, for contrast and comparison, among dead poets and artists. Eliot envisages a dynamic relationship between past and present writers: 'The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.'
- Eliot is of the opinion that an author should have an awareness of all the past literature – that is a consciousness of 'the mind of Europe' so as to produce great work as a poet before being a poet should be able to exercise the critical activity to his own poetic process.
- Eliot envisages a dynamic relationship between past and present writers: 'The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.'
- Eliot stresses on the fact that the artist should know 'the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country – a mind which he learns in time to be more important than his own private mind.' What Eliot means here is a consciousness of the past, an awareness of the historical sense and not merely pedantic knowledge.
- In case of 'Tradition and Individual Talent' Eliot is of the opinion that the artist needs to submit himself to the authority of tradition, to an awareness of the history of Europe which constantly interacts subconsciously with the individual poet.
- Eliot bifurcates the two selves of the poet – the suffering self (the self that experiences the emotions and feelings) and the creative self (the self that creates poetry out of it); whereas poetry arrives out of the subjective experiences of the poet, but in its process of creation it is not anymore subjective.
- For Eliot, the concepts like 'sublimity', 'greatness' or 'intensity' of emotions are irrelevant, as it is not the greatness of the emotion that matters, but what matters is the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the artistic fusion takes place. Eliot, thus, rejects

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the Romantic emphasis on 'genius' and the exceptional mind. Eliot refutes the idea that poetry is the expression of the personality of the poet.

- One of the objectives of T. S. Eliot's critical works has been to set the literary history of England in order, as he himself states – 'From time to time it is desirable, that some critic shall appear to review the past of our literature and set the poets and the poems in a new order.'
- Eliot, following the tradition of Arnold, sought to raise criticism to the level of science. A. G. George says – 'Eliot's theory of the impersonality of poetry is the greatest theory on the nature of the process after Wordsworth's romantic conception of poetry.'
- T. S. Eliot's idea of 'tradition' is also narrow as he is referring to the poetic tradition but neglects the fact that even the poetic tradition is a complex amalgamation of written and oral poetry and the elements that go into them.
- Eliot champions impersonal theory of poetry, according to which the poet should be like a catalyst, not affected by the suffering self of his while in the process of writing.

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## 5.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Catalyst:** In chemistry, a substance which starts a reaction or increases the rate of the reaction; without itself undergoing any change. Eliot uses the analogy of catalyst for the poet who in the poetic process should not be affected as the suffering man in the poet and the artistic self of the poet should be two different individuals.
- **Modernism:** Modernism primarily refers to a period of English Literature between the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century characterized by a feeling of disorder as a result of the collapse of all certainties of human life.
- **Touchstone Method:** Mathew Arnold, the Victorian critic and poet evolves a method of evaluating poetry which he terms as Touchstone method. According to this methodology of evaluation, a critic or literary scholar while judging poetry should compare it to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry. The passages of the great masters, as Arnold himself suggest some should be applied as touchstones to other poetry.
- **Classicism:** Classicism refers to a high regard for classical antiquity, in setting standards for taste which the classicists seek to emulate.



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## 5.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. What does Eliot mean when he says that ‘criticism is as inevitable as breathing’?
2. Briefly comment on T. S. Eliot’s impersonal theory of poetry.
3. Explain Eliot’s analogy of filament of platinum (the catalyst).
4. How does Eliot envisage a dynamic relationship between past and present writers?

### Long Answer Questions

1. ‘No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.’ In the light of the statement, discuss notion and importance of Tradition in poetry as pointed out by T. S. Eliot.
2. What does Eliot mean when he says, ‘the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates’? Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.
3. On what grounds does Eliot refute Wordsworth’s theory of poetry being ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions ... recollected in tranquility’?
4. Do you agree that Mathew Arnold’s Touchstone Method and Eliot’s ‘ideal order’ are same? How do both of them help in evaluating poetry?
5. What importance does Eliot attach to Tradition in poetic creativity? Why does he do so?

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## 5.9 FURTHER READINGS

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*T. S. Eliot*

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# UNIT 6 EDGAR ALLAN POE AND SRI AUROBINDO

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Edgar Allan Poe and  
Sri Aurobindo

## NOTES

### Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Edgar Allan Poe
  - 6.2.1 'The Philosophy of Criticism' – Summary and Commentary
- 6.3 Sri Aurobindo: 'The Word and the Spirit'
  - 6.3.1 'The Word and the Spirit': Summary and Critical Comments
- 6.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Key Words
- 6.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.8 Further Readings

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## 6.0 INTRODUCTION

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Edgar Allan Poe was an American author popular in the Romantic era of literature. In the critical essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' delves into the question of 'narrative designing' – in other words, the way a writer achieves his or her complete text by ascertaining steps which leads to a complete text – 'step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion.' It is usually thought that writers/ authors/ poets write under some kind of 'divine frenzy' (Plato) or under some kind of inspiration. But what Edgar Allan Poe tries to show in this essay is that writing is a step by step process through which the writers come to the final work.

Sri Aurobindo was an Indian seer, philosopher, poet, and Indian nationalist. He was the promoter of the philosophy of spiritual evolution. He actively took part in the Indian national movement for freedom against the British and was imprisoned for the same. He later took refuge in Pondicherry (which was a French colony at the time) and immersed himself in the spiritual realm of internal yoga and later founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. In this unit, we will discuss his essay 'The Word and the Spirit' from his treatise on poetry *The Future Poetry*.

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## 6.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the critic Edgar Allan Poe
- Describe the important points of work 'The Philosophy of Composition'

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- Examine the creative process as a step by step movement as presented by Edgar Allan Poe.
- Discuss briefly the life of Sri Aurobindo
- Assess the basic idea behind his book *The Future Poetry*
- Critically understand the basic ideas as presented by Aurobindo in ‘The Word and the Spirit.’

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## 6.2 EDGAR ALLAN POE

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Edgar Allan Poe (19 January 1809 – 7 October 1849) was an American writer, editor, and literary critic. Though Edgar Allan Poe is best known for his poems and short stories, yet he is also famous for his critical writings which he produced in his life time. He is often regarded as a central figure of Romanticism in the United States and American literature, and one of the country’s earliest practitioners of the short story. In the essay ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ Poe describes his method in writing one of his famous poems, *The Raven*. He provides a step by step movement of how he created the poem *The Raven*. Often people have questioned whether he really followed this system, however. T. S. Eliot said: ‘It is difficult for us to read that essay without reflecting that if Poe plotted out his poem with such calculation, he might have taken a little more pains over it: the result hardly does credit to the method.’ Biographer Joseph Wood Krutch described the essay as ‘a rather highly ingenious exercise in the art of rationalization’.

### 6.2.1 ‘The Philosophy of Criticism’ – Summary and Commentary

It is true that most authors/poets do not want the readers to peep into how they have constructed a narrative. In other words, the creative process is always kept in hidden from the readers and what the readers are given is just the final product –

Most writers - poets in especial - prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy - an ecstatic intuition - and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought- at the true purposes seized only at the last moment- at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view- at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable- at the cautious selections and rejections- at the painful erasures and interpolations- in a word, at the wheels and pinions- the tackle for scene-shifting- the step-ladders, and demon-traps- the cock’s feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio.

But Edgar Allan Poe tried in this essay to show how the literary production is done, how in the creative process the author takes a step by step process to put together his or her work – in author’s word, ‘to how the modus operandi by which some of my own works was put together.’ He selects his poem *The Raven* as an example to show how he has achieved the final product by ‘the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.’

**Box 6.1 Edgar Allan Poe's Poem *The Raven***

(The poem should be read first to figure out what the poem is all about and then how Edgar Allan Poe shows he has constructed the poem)

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.  
“’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—  
Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.  
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow  
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—  
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;  
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating  
“’Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—  
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—  
This it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,  
“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;  
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,  
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,  
That I scarce was sure I heard you”—here I opened wide the door;—  
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,  
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;  
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,  
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, “Lenore?”  
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, “Lenore!”—  
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.  
“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;  
Let me see, then, what thence is, and this mystery explore—  
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—  
’Tis the wind and nothing more!”

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Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;  
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;  
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,  
“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!”  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being  
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as “Nevermore.”

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only  
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.  
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—  
Till I scarcely more than muttered “Other friends have flown before—  
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before.”  
Then the bird said “Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,  
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store  
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster  
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—  
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore  
Of ‘Never—nevermore’.”

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,  
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;  
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking  
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—  
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore  
Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing  
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;  
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining  
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,  
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,  
    *She* shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer  
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.  
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee  
Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;  
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"  
    Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—  
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!"  
    Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."  
    Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—  
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!  
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!  
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"  
    Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
    Shall be lifted—nevermore!

## NOTES

## NOTES

### Creation of the Poem

The following is the step by step process of the creation of the poem *The Raven* as presented by Edgar Allan Poe:

#### 1. Length of the poem to be decided

According to Poe, the first job is to decide the length of the work as it will decide everything else. He says – ‘the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect- this, with one proviso- that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all.’ In the context of the poem *The Raven* he says that ‘what I conceived the proper length for my intended poem- a length of about one hundred lines. It is, in fact, a hundred and eight.’

#### 2. Rendering the work Universally Appreciable

What Edgar Allan Poe did next was to decide how he can take something which will be appreciable for all. In other words, he decided that as ‘beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem’ therefore it should be the essence the poem and further that the poem should evoke such beautiful images, emotions and feelings in the minds of the readers that it becomes ‘universally appreciable.’

#### 3. Tone of its highest Manifestation

Next, Edgar Allan Poe goes on to set the tone of the poem *The Raven* and he settles that it should be a melancholic tone as ‘Melancholy is the most legitimate of all the poetical tones’ according to the author.

#### 4. The Application of the Refrain

Next Edgar Allan Poe went on to decide what should be the ‘Refrain’ of his poem *The Raven* as he thinks that the refrain which moreover settle the issue of the tone of the poem further. He thought that a single word refrain should be the best one. To come to his refrain, he started with the study of sounds – he decided that two sounds should be there in the refrain – ‘r’ sound (which he terms as the most producible sound) and long ‘o’ vowel sound (which he thought to be most sonorous). As he decided on the sounds, he moved on to the next level of selecting a word which embodies this sounds and he came to the word ‘Nevermore’ which he thought to continuously use as a ‘refrain’ in the poem.

#### 5. The Topic

After ascertaining his refrain, he went on to decide the topic – which he thought should be about a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven monotonously repeating the word ‘nevermore’. ‘I had now gone so far as the conception of a Raven, the bird of ill-omen, monotonously repeating



the one word “Nevermore” at the conclusion of each stanza in a poem of melancholy tone, and in length about one hundred lines. Now, never losing sight of the object- supremeness or perfection at all points, I asked myself- “Of all melancholy topics what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy?” Death, was the obvious reply.’

## 6. The Climax or the Conclusion

‘I first established in my mind the climax or concluding query – that query to which “Nevermore” should be in the last place an answer - that query in reply to which this word “Nevermore” should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.’ So Edgar Allan Poe first thought of the climax of the poem to which the Raven would say ‘Nevermore’ and from there on went on to build the poem.

## 7. Rhythm and Metre

Edgar Allan Poe further mentions that he did not decide to bring about anything new in terms of rhythm and metre as he decided for the poem *The Raven*. He says – ‘Of course I pretend to no originality in either the rhythm or metre of the “Raven.” The former is trochaic- the latter is octametre acatalectic, alternating with heptametre catalectic repeated in the refrain of the fifth verse, and terminating with tetrametre catalectic. Less pedantically the feet employed throughout (trochees) consist of a long syllable followed by a short, the first line of the stanza consists of eight of these feet, the second of seven and a half (in effect two-thirds), the third of eight, the fourth of seven and a half, the fifth the same, the sixth three and a half.’ Thus, having decided the rhythm and metre, he decided to move on further.

## 8. Locale

The next question which came to Edgar Allan Poe’s mind was to make the bereaved lover and the raven meet and he decided to place the lover in his chamber which is sacred to him as his beloved used to visit him there. So as he decided about the lover’s chamber, he then decided that the raven would perch above the chamber of the lover. Having decided the locale, he found the things to be very easy in presenting the whole scene of the poem where he says that ‘The casement being thrown open at the fluttering of the bird’s wings, the bird itself perches on the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of the student, who amused by the incident and the oddity of the visitor’s demeanour, demands of it, in jest and without looking for a reply, its name. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word, “Nevermore”- a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again startled by the fowl’s repetition of “Nevermore.”’

## NOTES

And thus the poem *The Raven* was created by Edgar Allan Poe as he elucidates in his essay ‘The Philosophy of Composition.’

### Critical Commentary on ‘The Philosophy of Composition’

#### NOTES

The ideas presented above in the step by step process of the composition of the poem *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe probably has brought to your mind the idea how a poem is being composed by a poet. It talks a great deal about the poetic process itself. It talks about the story that goes behind the process of a creation of a particular poem. What Edgar Allan Poe does is to systematically point out how creative process is a methodical affair – in the sense, that how writing can be taken as a systematic way of progressing, how the writer’s mind works in a systematic way to produce a poem, how the writer/ poet is very systematic in dealing with how and what he wants to do to reach upon a particular effect to his or her readers. So Edgar Allan Poe suggests that writing should be taken as a methodical progression – a narrative designing needs to be there if a poet or a writer wants to be successful in his or her presentation of things to reach the readers.

Poe moreover mentions that most writers and poets do not want to talk about the narrative designing of their works as it is often a murky process. They are of the view that the beauty of a work will be lost as soon as the process of creation of a poem is given to the readers. But Poe does not have any such inhibition in giving out the way in which he created his poem *The Raven*. Though the step by step process that Poe talked about sounds very great on paper it has its own pitfalls. They are –

- (a) If creative writing would have been merely that of a process then all the people in the world would have been writers. All would have learnt the craft and would have been poets or writers of great eminence. But that only few has achieved the fame of being poets and writers show that writing cannot always be a craft which can be learnt so easily just by being systematic about the writing process.
- (b) Edgar Allan Poe has talked about the step by step process of choosing the length, theme, tone, refrain, climax, etc. of the poem *The Raven*; but hasn’t really mentioned how he wrote the poem. One can have mastery over all technical aspects of creativity, and then also it is not necessary that he or she will create a good piece of work of art.
- (c) Edgar Allan Poe tries to show that creative writing is merely a craft – a craft where the writer of the artist takes into consideration many technical aspects and creates the work of art. This is not always true. If there is nothing great to tell then in most cases the technical aspects will not work.
- (d) Edgar Allan Poe could have written the means that he employed to write his poem *The Raven*; but it is not applicable to all writings. Each

piece of writing is distinctive, and each writer has a distinctive way of creating his or her work. There cannot be any generalization about it.

Edgar Allan Poe, though may have objectively presented the means and ways that he employed to write *The Raven* but it is not necessary that the creative process may necessarily follow the way prescribed by him. Creativity or creative writing is a much more complex process than this. It is true that the writers or artists those who are new to the field of creative writing, for them Poe's essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' is a great eye-opener; but it cannot be taken as an ultimate word on creative writing.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. Name the literary form of which Poe is regarded as an early practitioner of.
2. What is the first job of the creation of poem as per Poe?
3. State the poetical tone which Poe regards as the most legitimate.

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## 6.3 SRI AUROBINDO: 'THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT'

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Aurobindo Ghosh (1872 – 1950) is known to the world as Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo was a patriot, poet, philosopher, prophet and mystic. He was born on 15 August 1872 at Kolkata in West Bengal. Sri Aurobindo was sent to Loretto Convent at Darjeeling for his studies in 1877 and after two years he was sent to England for his studies. Sri Aurobindo studied at Saint Paul's School, London and King's College, Cambridge. After completing his studies in England Sri Aurobindo returned to India in 1893. Sri Aurobindo joined Baroda State Service which was a princely state in British India.

After the Partition of Bengal in 1905, there was great political upsurge in Bengal in which Sri Aurobindo took active interest and joined the fight against the British. He published many articles in magazines of his time to arise political awakening amongst the mass. His secret revolutionary activities and writings created reaction both in Congress as well as in the British Government. He was put in jail.

Later in life, Sri Aurobindo decided to live a life of spiritual pursuit. He came to Pondicherry in April 1910 in disguise as it was a French Colony at that time. At Pondicherry, he lived a life of an ascetic and engaged in Yogic practice. There he published a monthly journal *Arya* where he serially wrote on different themes. He began to be known in the intellectual circle of the place.

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Some of the great works of Sri Aurobindo were serially written in his monthly philosophical journal *Arya*. Some of the important works of Sri Aurobindo are – *Life Divine, Synthesis of Yoga, Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, Foundations of Indian Culture, On the Veda, Essays on Geeta* etc. Besides Sri Aurobindo was a great poet and his epic *Savitri* is a marvelous literary creation. Sri Aurobindo passed away on 5 December 1950.

### A Short Note on *The Future Poetry*

The Book *The Future Poetry*, as it exists today is actually a collection of essays written between 1917 to 1920 by Sri Aurobindo. The following quote from the book *The Future Poetry* will enumerate the essence of the book –

Poetry and art most of all our powers can help to bring this truth home to the mind of man with an illumining and catholic force, for while philosophy may lose itself in abstractions and religion turn to an intolerant otherworldliness and asceticism, poetry and art are born mediators between the material and the concrete, the spirit and life. This mediation between the truth of spirit and the truth of life will be one of the chief functions of the poetry of the future. (*The Future Poetry*, p. 199)

The book *The Future Poetry* starts with a focus on a lost poetry, then becomes a revised history of English poetry, and in the final chapters define and characterize *mantra* of the poetry. Summarizing the development of English poetry Sri Aurobindo wrote –

The high energy of English poetry has done great and interesting things; it has portrayed life with charm and poetic interest in Chaucer, made thought and character and action and passion wonderful to the life soul in us in Shakespeare, seen and spoken with nobility and grandeur of vision and voice in Milton, intellectualized vigorous or pointed commonplace in Pope and Dryden, played with elegance and beauty on the lesser strings with the Victorians or cast out here and there a profounder strain of thought or more passionate and aspiring voice, and if the most spiritual strains have been few, yet it has dreamed in light in Shelley or drawn close in Wordsworth to the soul in Nature.

The essay ‘The Word and the Spirit’ comes at almost the end of his book *The Future Poetry*.

### 6.3.1 ‘The Word and the Spirit’: Summary and Critical Comments

Sri Aurobindo brings in spirituality in his understanding of poetry and to talk about his poetic theory. For him, the spirit is of extreme consequence in whatever exists in the world. In this essay on ‘The Word and the Spirit’, Sri Aurobindo analyses the relationship between the poetic language and the spiritual. Let us start the discussion by a quote from the essay which more or less sums up the essence of the essay –

The poetic word is a vehicle of the spirit, the chosen medium of the soul’s self-expression, and any profound modification of the inner habit of the soul, its thought atmosphere, its way of seeing, its type of feeling, any change of the light in which it lives and the power of the breath which it breathes, greatening of its elevations or entry into deeper chambers of its self must reflect itself in a

corresponding modification, changed intensity of light or power, inner greating and deepening of the word which it has to use, and if there is no such change or if it is not sufficient for the new intention of the spirit, then there can be no living or no perfect self-expression.

*Edgar Allan Poe and  
Sri Aurobindo*

What Sri Aurobindo tries to explain in the quoted lines is that the poetic word or the poetry is the essence through which the spirit of the man finds expression in words. In other words, what is of significance here is that as the poetic words achieve certain greatness, so does the spiritual aspect of humankind as pure poetry is nothing but the spiritual aspects of the humankind. Aurobindo further adds that –

The poet has to do much more than to offer a precise, a harmonious or a forcefully presented idea to the intelligence: he has to give a breath of life to the word and for that must find out and make full use of its potential power of living suggestion; he has to make it carry in it not only the intellectual notion but the emotion and the psychical sensation of the thing he would make present to us; he has to erect an image of its presence and appeal with which we can inwardly live as we live with the presence and appeal of the objects of the actual universe.

Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo, a great poet does not necessarily deal with the outward things of the world, but presents the innermost emotions and the physical sensations rather than intellectualizing. A poet's word is much more than a harmony to the intellect; he has to give breath to the word in such a way that the word expresses to the readers the essence of things, the spirit. He gives various examples of Dryden, Wordsworth, Milton and Shelley in his essay 'The Word and the Spirit' to elucidate this point of how the poet needs to provide energy to the word so that spirit is enthused within the word.

Sri Aurobindo further adds that –

The genius of the poet can do work of a high beauty or of a considerable greatness in any of these degrees of poetic speech, but it is the more purely intuitive, inspired or revelatory utterance that is the most rare and difficult for the human mind to command, and it is these kinds that we peculiarly value. Their power not only moves and seizes us the most, but it admits the soul to a most spiritually profound light of seeing and ecstasy of feeling even of ordinary ideas and objects and in its highest force to thoughts and things that surpass the manner and range and limits of depth of the normal intelligence. The greatest poets have been those in whom these moments of a highest intensity of intuitive and inspired speech have been of a frequent occurrence and in one or two, as in Shakespeare, of a miraculous abundance.

What Sri Aurobindo has spoken earlier, he emphasizes on the same thing again with a fresh spirit in the above quoted lines. What Aurobindo means to say here is that the genius of a poet or an artist lies in trying to provide certain beauty to a work of art by means of his poetic speech. The poetic speech should be of such a kind which has the power in it to appeal to the spiritual aspects in such a way that one can have the profound light of seeing while one reads the poem. Thus, the words be of such a nature that they produce 'the ecstasy of feelings' in the readers – even when the poet

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has spoken about the ordinary things to should be presented in such a poetic language that the readers are able to see the extraordinary beauty in it so that their soul and spirit becomes ecstatic. In other words, the poet's role is to present the extraordinariness of ordinary things though his poetic speech. In some poets this is achieved with much abundance and Sri Aurobindo gives the example of Shakespeare. Thus, Sri Aurobindo goes on to explain the essence of future poetry as he states at the end of the essay –

The future poetry, assuming it to be of the kind I have suggested, its object to express some inmost truth of the things which it makes its subject, must to be perfectly adequate to its task express them in the inmost way, and that can only be done if, transcending the more intellectualised or externally vital and sensational expression, it speaks wholly in the language of an intuitive mind and vision and imagination, intuitive sense, intuitive emotion, intuitive vital feeling, which can seize in a peculiarly intimate light of knowledge by a spiritual identity the inmost thought, sight, image, sense, life, feeling of that which it is missioned to utter.

### Check Your Progress

4. Name the monthly journal published by Sri Aurobindo when he shifted to Pondicherry.
5. What is the subject with which the book *The Future* begins?
6. List the authors mentioned by Sri Aurobindo to elucidate how the poet needs to spirit is enthused within the word.

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## 6.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Edgar Allan Poe is often regarded as a central figure of Romanticism in the United States and American literature, and one of the country's earliest practitioners of the short story.
2. According to Poe, the first job is to decide the length of the work as it will decide everything else.
3. 'Melancholy is the most legitimate of all the poetical tones' according to the Poe.
4. Sri Aurobindo published a monthly journal *Arya* where he serially wrote on different themes when he shifted to Pondicherry.
5. The book *The Future Poetry* starts with a focus on a lost poetry, then becomes a revised history of English poetry, and in the final chapters define and characterize *mantra* of the poetry.
6. Sri Aurobindo gives various examples of Dryden, Wordsworth, Milton and Shelley in his essay 'The Word and the Spirit' to elucidate this

point of how the poet needs to provide energy to the word so that spirit is enthused within the word.

*Edgar Allan Poe and  
Sri Aurobindo*

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## 6.5 SUMMARY

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- Edgar Allan Poe (19 January 1809 – 7 October 1849) was an American writer, editor, and literary critic.
- In the essay ‘The Philosophy of Composition’, Poe describes his method in writing one of his famous poems *The Raven*. He provides a step by step movement of how he created the poem *The Raven*.
- Edgar Allan Poe in the critical essay ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ delves into the question of ‘narrative designing’ – in other words, the way a writer achieves his or her complete text by ascertaining steps which leads to a complete text – ‘step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion.’
- Step by Step Process of the creation of the poem ‘The Raven’ as presented by Edgar Allan Poe are:
  - o Length of the poem to be decided.
  - o Rendering the work Universally Appreciable
  - o Tone of its highest Manifestation
  - o The Application of the Refrain.
  - o The Topic
  - o The Climax or the conclusion
  - o Rhythm and Metre
  - o Locale
- Sri Aurobindo brings in spirituality in his understanding of poetry and to talk about his poetic theory.
- In this essay on ‘The Word and the Spirit’, Sri Aurobindo analyses the relationship between the poetic language and the spiritual.
- The poetic words achieve certain greatness, so does the spiritual aspect of humankind as pure poetry is nothing but the spiritual aspects of the humankind.
- According to Sri Aurobindo, a great poet does not necessarily deal with the outward things of the world but presents the innermost emotions and the physical sensations rather than intellectualizing.
- What Aurobindo means to say here is that the genius of a poet or an artist lies in trying to provide certain beauty to a work of art by means of his poetic speech.

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### 6.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Meter:** Meter is the rhythmic pattern produced when words are arranged in such a order that their stressed and unstressed syllables fall into a more or less regular sequence, resulting in repeated patterns of accent and creates rhythm in poetry and songs.
- **Rhyme:** A rhyme is a repetition of similar sounds in two or more words and is most often used in poetry and songs.
- **Theme:** It refers to a common thread or repeated idea that is incorporated throughout a literary work.
- **Tone:** It refers to the implied attitude of a writer toward the subject and characters of a work or the prevailing mood or atmosphere in a literary work.
- **Climax:** It refers to the turning point of the action in the plot of a play or story. The climax represents the point of greatest tension in the work.

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### 6.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a brief overview of the poem *The Raven*.
2. Briefly explain the application of refrain as explained by Poe in the essay 'The Philosophy of Composition.'
3. Write a short note on the climax of the poem *The Raven* and its creation.
4. Explain the gist of Sri Aurobindo's book *The Future Poetry*.
5. Why does Aurobindo say that a poet's word is much more than a harmony to the intellect?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. What is the idea behind the essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' by Edgar Allan Poe? Do you think the idea is applicable to all literatures written? Why do you think so?
2. What are the steps that Edgar Allan Poe talks about in the critical essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' which he employed to write his poem *The Raven*? Do you feel the steps are justified?
3. 'Narrative Designing' is the essence of the creative process. Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer with reference to Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Philosophy of Composition.'



4. What according to you is the essence of Sri Aurobindo's essay 'The Word and the Spirit.'? Discuss in detail.
5. Do you think that Sri Aurobindo is justified in saying that the essence of the poetic word is to present the beauty of ordinary things in an extraordinary way?

*Edgar Allan Poe and  
Sri Aurobindo*

## NOTES

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### 6.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 7 C. G. JUNG AND LIONEL TRILLING

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 C.G. Jung: 'Psychology and Literature'
  - 7.2.1 'Psychology and Literature': Summary and Critical Comments
- 7.3 Lionel Trilling: 'Freud And Literature'
  - 7.3.1 'Freud and Literature': Summary and Commentary
- 7.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.5 Summary
- 7.6 Key Words
- 7.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.8 Further Readings

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### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

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Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology, has been influential not only an important figure in the field of psychiatry but also in other subjects of study, such as anthropology, literature, philosophy as well as religious studies. Carl Jung is thought to have created some of the best known psychological concepts like 'synchronicity', 'archetypal phenomena', 'collective unconscious', 'psychological complex', 'extraversion' and 'introversion', etc. In this unit, we will examine Jung's essay 'Psychology and Literature'.

Sigmund Freud is a famous psychoanalyst theoretician whose writings shaped much of the early twentieth century writings. In this unit, we will study the influence of Sigmund Freud on literature through the essay 'Freud and Literature' by Lionel Trilling.

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### 7.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the life the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung
- Describe the essay 'Psychology and Literature'
- Explain the relationship between psychology and literature
- Recall the life and works of the critic Lionel Trilling
- Critically appreciate the essay 'Freud and Literature'
- Examine the influence of Freud in reading literature

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## 7.2 C.G. JUNG: 'PSYCHOLOGY AND LITERATURE'

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*C. G. Jung and  
Lionel Trilling*

Carl Jung is often considered the first modern psychologist to state that the human psyche is religious by nature and he tries to analyse human mind from that perspective. The primary focus of his works is myth, though his writings on myth are sprayed over his works. For Carl Jung –

Myth is the primordial language natural to these psychic processes, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical imagery.

He had major disagreement with the other significant psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud as Carl Jung downplayed the significance of sexual development and focused on the 'collective unconscious.'

Sigmund Freud was primarily interested in the origin of religion and rationalization to ritual, Jung shifted his focus on myths and legends as they are told within religions. Moreover, for Carl Jung, myths are shared by all members of a society and it becomes a part of our 'collective unconscious.' Jung himself significantly pointed out his other differences with Freudian psychoanalysis –

I did not reduce them to personal factors, as Freud does, but – and this seemed indicated by their very nature – I compared them with the symbols from mythology and the history of religion, in order to discover the meaning they were trying to express.

Moreover, Carl Jung is also against Freud way of interpreting dream –

Whereas he (Freud) will always look for sexual causes, I trace the origin of dreams back to age-old mythological influences. Deriving from our remotest ancestors, there slumber in all of us subconscious memories which awaken at night and seek to compensate the false attitude modern man has towards nature.

Jung also distinguishes himself from Sigmund Freud in their perception of literature or art, as Jung says –

The Truth is that (Freud's view of art) takes away from the psychological study of the work of art and confronts us with the psychic disposition of the poet himself. That the latter presents an important problem is not to be denied, but the work of art is something in its own right and may not be conjured away.

Coming back to the theme of myth, for Carl Jung, the clues to self-realization in myths, are the archetypes, that is the symbolic elements which contains different aspects of the workings of human mind. Jung also associates archetypes to formula, as he says –

The archetype is a symbolic formula which always begins to function when there are no conscious ideas present, or when conscious ideas are inhibited for internal or external reasons.

An archetype is a primordial image that does not exist in individual psyches as such but in what Jung called the 'collective unconscious', which according to him is trans-cultural and trans-historical. Based on Carl Jung's

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theory of archetypes, literary critics have developed the brand of criticism known as archetypal criticism. The most significant work in archetypal criticism is Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) where N. Frye used archetypes to do a classification of literary genres.

### Box 7.1 Psychoanalysis

From the beginning of the twentieth century Psychoanalysis has been a major tool of analysing literary texts and also psychoanalysis has been a major shaping force of literature. Many Modernist writings deal with the psychoanalysis, whether one talks about D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (which is a study of 'Oedipus Complex') or the Stream of Consciousness technique novels of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf. In other words, one of the aspects of modernist writing is that they shifted their focus from the reality outside to the reality within. It is obvious that the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and others influenced the modernist writers to change their course of thought process and literary creativity. Thus, Psychoanalysis has been a major shaping force of literary creativity, writing and analysis in the twentieth century as it is under the influence of Sigmund Freud that the twentieth century writing and thought processes took a different turn. In other words, it can be said that Sigmund Freud along with Nietzsche and Karl Marx are the three main pillars of twentieth century ideas and thoughts.

Psychoanalytic criticism can be defined as 'a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature.' (Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*.) Sigmund Freud's notions on how mind works and how human behaviour and actions are impacted by sexual instincts became the basis of understanding the complexity of the human thought processes. Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and others later added on Freud's thesis and developed Psychoanalysis further. It is to be remembered here that it is not that psychology of the characters were not the subject matter of literature before the Psychoanalytic theories came into being; they were always a part of literary concern and subject matter. Shakespeare's famous tragedy *Hamlet* is a good example of how psychoanalysis is used in literature; but it is only after the psychoanalytic theories came into being that it has become the fashion to understand and interpret literature using these theories.

In terms of the use of psychoanalytic theories in literary studies, it has moved through three main emphases in its pursuit of the literary 'unconscious':

- (i) on the author (and also the character, by corollary),
- (ii) on the reader, and
- (iii) on the text.

It starts with Sigmund Freud's analysis of the literary work as a symptom of the artist, where the relationship between author and text is analogous to dreamers and their 'text'. It is modified by later theorists from a psychoanalytic reader response criticism where the reader's relation to the text came to the forefront; and is contested by Carl Jung's 'archetypal' criticism in which the literary work is not a focus for the writer's or reader's personal psychology but a representation of the relationship between the personal and the collective unconscious, the images, myths, symbols, 'archetypes' of past cultures. More recently, psychoanalytic criticism has been remodeled in the context of Post structuralism by the works of the French scholar Jacques Lacan and his followers.

### 7.2.1 ‘Psychology and Literature’: Summary and Critical Comments

C. G. Jung and  
Lionel Trilling

According to Carl Jung, psychology is the study of the psychic process, and he is of the opinion that ‘Human psyche is the womb of all sciences and art’. In other words, Carl Jung considers the study of psychology as the most significant of all studies as it is through the study of psychology that all other studies can manifest itself. He is also of the view that the creative process or the formation of a work of art can be explained to some extent with the psychological research. He also looks at the factors that make a person an artist.

According to Carl Jung, a work of art is a complicated product and it is an intentional and conscious product of the artists. Therefore, when one tries to analyse the creative process, it becomes very essential that there is a psychological analysis of the work of art. In other words, when we look at the creative artist, we look at the creative human being or the artist as a unique personality.

Yet when one looks at a literary work, it has to be understood that the psychologist’s examination as well as the literary critic’s examinations of the literary work are very different. What becomes significant for a psychologist often seems to be irrelevant to a literary critic and vice versa. Here Carl Jung gives the example of the psychological novel where the psychologist has nothing more to explain that the novelist has not done in the novel.

Therefore, Carl Jung emphasizes that ‘The novels which are most fruitful for the psychologist are those in which the author has not already given a psychological interpretation of his characters, and which therefore leave room for analysis and explanation...’ Jung gives some examples of the French novels of Pierre Benoit and the English novels of Rider Haggard. He even adds Conan Doyle’s detective fiction, and Melville’s *Moby Dick*, ‘which I (Jung) consider the greatest American Novel.’

In other words, it can be said that when the narrative is exciting but there is no psychological explanation that is given in the narrative itself, it becomes more interesting to a psychologist as he has ample things to say about that narrative then. On the other hand, in a psychological novel as the author himself has taken the pains of psychological explanations, the psychologist does not have much work to perform probably rather than trying to find deeper meanings in that work of art.

Carl Jung takes the example of Goethe’s *Faust* to explain things further. In the first part of *Faust*, it seems to be a love tragedy and psychologically Goethe has given such brilliant analysis of the things that there is nothing more that a psychologist would add to the explanation. But as one comes to the second part of *Faust*, nothing seems to be self-explanatory at all. Therefore, the reader finds it difficult to understand this part.

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Jung says that these are examples of two different kinds of writing –

- (a) The Psychological Mode
- (b) The Visionary Mode.

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Jung argues that Goethe was writing in the psychological mode in the first part of *Faust*, and he was in the visionary mode in the second part. According to Jung, it is in the second part, that the psychologist has much to do as it is without him that the reader won't be able to decipher the whole of the signification of *Faust*. According to Jung, in the psychological mode, the writer deals with the materials taken from ordinary human consciousness and there the artist raises the material from the commonplace to the poetic. Such works are thought never to exceed the boundaries of psychology. All the experiences pictured in them belong to the realm of the understandable to the general readers.

As against that, in the visionary mode, things are no more familiar with the readers. In other words, 'It is a strange something that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind....' It is a primordial experience that often surpasses human being's understanding of things and therefore Nietzsche calls it 'treason against humanity'.

Jung gives the example of the visionary mode in the following works –

- in Dante, in the second part of *Faust*,
- in Nietzsche's Dionysian exuberance,
- in Wagner's Nibelungen ring, and
- in the poetry of William Blake

Thus, Carl Jung is of the opinion that in the visionary mode, the source material is often obscure and exactly opposite to the psychological mode. According to Jung, in this visionary mode things happen in a way in 'which is a frightening revelation of the abysses that defy the human understanding.'

According to Jung, the poets, the seers, prophets, leaders, and enlighteners also were familiar with the nocturnal world – the darker aspects of the mind and the civilization. Psychoanalysis has always dealt with the subject of the darker aspect of the mind. It may be true that psychoanalysis is a new arena of study, but at the same time it is also true that that the poets and the seers have known the dark recesses of the human mind from time immemorial. Therefore, from the primitive times we see that man has tried to give expression to the visionary mode of art whether it is drawings of the Christian churches or the Tibetan monasteries. For the poet, these primordial experiences are very significant as they are the source of his or her creativity. According to Jung, what appears in this visionary mode is but the 'collective unconscious.' Jung defines 'collective unconscious' thus:

We mean by Collective Unconscious, a certain psychic disposition shaped by the forces of heredity; from it consciousness has developed. In the physical structure of the body we find traces of earlier stages of evolution...It is a fact that in eclipses of consciousness—in dreams, narcotic states, and cases of insanity—there come to the surface psychic products or contents that show all the traits of primitive levels of psychic development.

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Great poetry, according to Jungian analysis, gets its strength from this collective unconscious which is a living experience and is brought to bear upon the conscious outlook of an age through the creative act. Therefore, he adds that –

‘A work of art contains message to generations of men. Faust touches something in the soul of every German. An epoch is like an individual. It has its limitations of conscious outlook. It requires a compensatory adjustment. This is effected by the collective unconscious in that a poet, a seer, or a leader allows himself to be guided by the unexpressed desire of his times and shows the way, by word or deed, to the attainment of that which everyone blindly craves and expects’.

When one tries to explain a work of art from the point of view of Sigmund Freud, one notices that for Freud, a work of art is close to neurosis as it can be analysed in terms of the poet’s repressions. But according to Jung, a work of art is not just neurosis. ‘The personal idiosyncrasies that creep into a work of art are not essential, in fact, the more we have to cope with these peculiarities, the less is to a question of art’. A work of art should rise above personal life of the artist and speak from the spirit and heart of the poet. The personal aspect is a limitation, and even a sin, in the realm of art. An art which is primarily personal has to be considered neurotic as pointed out by Freud. A poet or an artist has got two aspects –

- (a) he is a human being and has a personal life and
- (b) on the other side, he is an impersonal being while getting into the creative process.

Jung explains his views of the artist thus:

... the specifically artist disposition involves an overweight of collective psychic life as against the personal. Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him.

‘As a human being the artist may have moods and a will and personal aims, but as an artist he is a man in a higher sense—he is ‘collective man’—one who carries and shapes the unconscious, psychic life of mankind. To perform this difficult office it is sometimes necessary for him to sacrifice happiness and everything that makes life worth living for the ordinary human being.’

Thus, within the artist, two forces are at war with each other – that of a common man looking for happiness and security and on the other side a passion for creativity. In order to lend voice to his creative being an artist therefore has to suffer. Therefore, Jung adds that:

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Whenever the creative force predominates, human life is ruled and molded by the unconscious as against the active will, and the conscious ego is swept along on a subterranean current being nothing more than an observer of events. The work in progress becomes the poet's fate and determines his psychic development. It is not Goethe who creates *Faust*, but *Faust* which creates Goethe.

At last, Carl Jung emphasizes once again how a work of art needs to be objective and impersonal and where the poet has to get over his or her personal life to give vent to his creative energies through the presentation of the collective unconscious.

### Check Your Progress

1. Name the greatest American Novel in Carl Jung's opinion.
2. Where does the great poetry get its strength from as per Carl Jung?

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## 7.3 LIONEL TRILLING: 'FREUD AND LITERATURE'

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Lionel Trilling was a famous American literary critic who brought sociological, psychological and philosophical methodologies and insights into literary criticism. His famous critical writings include *Matthew Arnold* (1939) and *E.M. Forster* (1943), as well as collections of literary essays: *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (1965). Throughout his life, Lionel Trilling had a deep interest in Sigmund Freud and Psychoanalysis as well as to the tradition of humanistic thought in literature. Like the other critics of his generations, Lionel Trilling had the objective of educating and stimulating the minds of the educated masses.

Lionel Trilling had a deep admiration for Sigmund Freud for he had shown to the world the dark side of the mind/ life and thereby helped the humankind to know themselves better and in a coherent manner. Moreover, Trilling appreciated the modern writers such as D. H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Joseph Conrad and Proust who explored various facets of the human mind from different perspectives. The abyss of terrors and mysteries of the human mind found expression in these great writers of the first half of the twentieth century and therefore Lionel Trilling found these writers interesting. In other words, any writer whose work dealt with the human mind and its different contours was something which was of much significance to Trilling as he was completely seeped in understanding the human mind through literature. The essay 'Freud and Literature' is an extract from his famous book – *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*. The essay first appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, Spring 1940 (pp. 152 – 73) and later revised in *Horizon* September, 1947.



### Box 7.2 Some Ideas of Freud

Sigmund Freud (1851 – 1939), as mentioned earlier, was one of the three pillars of modern critical thought, the other two being Karl Marx and Nietzsche, was a practicing psychoanalyst from Austria whose biggest contribution had been his newer way of looking at the way human mind, behaviour and action and how they are guided or impacted by the sexual instincts. To understand this, Sigmund Freud distinguished the human mind in three quarters – conscious, subconscious and unconscious. Freud is of the opinion that our thought processes and actions are to a larger extent impacted / determined by the ‘unconscious.’ According to him, due to the social taboos attached to certain sexual impulses, many of these impulses are suppressed and repressed from our conscious mind. These repressed impulses find their way in the formation of the unconscious. Therefore, in a number of cases we find that human mind’s conscious part has no control over it. We are more governed by our unconscious impulses than our conscious mind.

#### Id, Ego and Superego

Sigmund Freud also tried to analyse the human mind by showing how our mind has three ‘psychic’ zones –

- the Id,
- the Ego, and
- the Superego.

Sigmund Freud defined Id as ‘a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement.’ The Id is linked with the human libido or sexual energy which does not distinguish between the good and the evil as it only aspires for pleasure by satisfying the instinctual needs. It does not know any ethics, legality, etc., as Freud says – ‘the id knows no values, no good, no evil, no morality.’ It is governed only by the ‘pleasure principle.’

If the Id makes human being pursue pleasure without any restraint, the Ego is the rational agent of our psyche which regulates the instinctual drives and stops us from destructive human behaviour. The Ego has been termed as the ‘Reality Principle.’ Freud says – ‘On behalf of the Id, the Ego controls the path of access to motility, but it interpolates between desire and action the procrastinating factor of thought, during which it makes use of the residues of experience stored up in memory. In this way it dethrones the pleasure-principle, which exerts undisputed sway over the processes in the Id, and substitutes for it the reality-principle, which promises greater security and greater success.’

The Ego does not only have to deal with the untamed passion of the Id, but also that of the demands of the external world and the Superego. The Superego is the moral censoring agency; in the sense that whereas Id’s impulses are restrained by the Ego from the point of view of the practicality, the Superego restrains it from an idealistic and moral point of view. Thus, if Id is the ‘pleasure principle’ and the Ego is the ‘reality principle’, then the Superego can be termed as the ‘Morality Principle’.

Thus Sigmund Freud attaches supreme importance to the Ego in making us live our everyday life by saying that – ‘On the one hand, its every movement (Ego’s) is watched by the Superego, which holds up certain norms of behaviour, without regard to any difficulties coming from the Id and the external world; and if these norms are not acted up to, it punishes the Ego with the feelings of tension which manifest themselves as a sense of inferiority and guilt. In this way, goaded on by the Id, hemmed in by the Super-ego, and rebuffed by reality, the Ego struggles to cope with its economic task of reducing the forces and influences which work in it and upon it to some kind of harmony; and we may well understand how it is that

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we so often cannot repress the cry: "life is not easy." When the Ego is forced to acknowledge its weakness, it breaks into anxiety: reality anxiety in the face of the external world, normal anxiety in face of the Super-ego, and neurotic anxiety in face of the strength of the passions in the Id.'

Thus, Sigmund Freud with the three psychic zones of human beings is able to understand the way the human mind works. His analysis of the psychic zones has helped us not only in the analysis of literature but also in understanding our own thoughts, actions and behaviour.

### **Oedipus Complex:**

According to Sigmund Freud the sense of guilt of mankind as a whole is the ultimate source of religion and morality, which for him, was acquired in the beginnings of history through the Oedipus-Complex or mother-fixation. Freud defines mother-fixation or Oedipus complex as –

'The little man wants his mother all to himself, finds his father in his way, becomes restive when the latter takes upon himself to caress her, and shows his satisfaction when the father goes away or is absent.' This fixation for the mother of a male child is a universal phenomenon and every male child goes through this phase and joins the father's order at the end. Freud believed that the Oedipus complex was '...one of the most powerfully determinative elements in the growth of the child.' Only those who are not able to get over this fixation ends up in a neurosis, as Freud claims – 'But, since all men and not only neurotic persons have perverse, incestuous and murderous dreams of this kind, we may infer that those who are normal today have also made the passage through the perversions and the object-investments of the Oedipus complex; and that this is the path of normal development; only the neurotics show in a magnified and exaggerated form what we also find revealed in the dream analyses of normal people.'

### **Interpretation of Dreams:**

Dream is being interpreted by Sigmund Freud as a certain fulfillment of human being's repressed and suppressed desires and wishes. Freud says, 'the process of dream work is something quite new and strange, the like of which has never before been known, it has given us our first glimpse into those processes which go on in our unconscious mental system, and shows us that they are quite different from what we know about our conscious thought, and that to this latter they must appear faulty and preposterous. The importance of this discovery is increased when we realize that the same mechanisms – we hardly dare call them "thought processes" – are at work in the formation of neurotic symptoms as having turned the latent dream-thoughts into the manifest dream.' It can be said that the unconscious impulse is the real creator of the dream as it provides the psychic energy required for its formation. In other words, in every dream an instinctual wish is displayed as fulfilled. When we cut ourselves off from the mental life of reality and our mind is regressed into the primitive mechanisms the repressed instinctual desires finds an expression in a hallucinatory fashion in our dreams. Freud says – 'On account of the same process of regression ideas are turned into visual pictures in the dream; the latent dream-thoughts are, that is to say, dramatized and illustrated.'

According to Sigmund Freud, Condensation, Displacement, Representation and Secondary Revision are the four processes involved in the dream. Condensation happens when the manifest dream has a smaller or shorter content than the latent one. Therefore, it is abbreviated. By Displacement, the dream puts itself in disguise. Sigmund Freud says – 'Displacement is the chief method employed in the process of dream-distortion, which the dream thoughts have to undergo under the influence

of censorship. Representation refers to the transposition of thought into imagery, as the latent dream-thoughts are turned into a collection of sensory images and visual scenes. Secondary Revision is the significant part where the mind attempts to order, to revise, to supplement the content of the dream to give it an intelligible shape. (Later Freud excluded Secondary Revision from his interpretation of Dream. Thus, in dreams, the repressed and the suppressed desires take the form of concrete images (by the processes mentioned earlier) by passing the censor of the Ego and the Superego and manifests itself to the surface of the conscious mind as dreams.)

Thus, Freud in his works dealt with divergent issues relating to the analysis of the mind which paved the path for looking at things in a newer perspective. Freud's theories influenced literature to the utmost – not only in the creative process, but also in interpreting literary texts. One of the prime examples of Freud's notion of Oedipus complex is being dealt with by D. H. Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers*. Other modern novelists were also influenced by him. The stream of consciousness technique of writing by the modern novelists like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf was possible only because Freud has already developed his theories on Psychoanalysis. The Freudian approach to psychology is, as Lionel Trilling argues in the essay 'Freud and Literature', the 'only systematic account of the human mind' which is comparable 'in point of subtlety and complexity, of interest and tragic power' to the 'mass of psychological insights which literature has accumulated through the centuries.' This may be the reason why psychoanalysis is said to have the greatest influence on the study of literature. Though it should also be kept in mind that the effect is 'reciprocal, and the effect of Freud upon literature has been no greater than the effect of literature upon Freud.' Freud himself admitted that the 'poets and philosophers before me uncovered the unconscious' and what he 'discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied.'

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### 7.3.1 'Freud and Literature': Summary and Commentary

Trilling believes that Freudian psychology offers a systematic account of the human mind. In the very beginning of the essay 'Freud and Literature', Trilling hails Freud by saying that –

The Freudian psychology is the only systematic account of the human mind which, in point of subtlety and complexity, of interest and tragic power, deserves to stand beside the chaotic mass of psychological insights which literature has accumulated through the centuries. (p.95)

Thus, with such a beginning it seems pretty clear to the readers that Trilling is going to deal with Freud and his theories of human mind in this essay and its effect on literature. Trilling goes on to show how the psychoanalytical theory had a great impact on literature and literary studies; but at the same time, he points out that 'the effect of Freud on literature has been no greater than the effect of literature on Freud'. Trilling mentions that when Freud's seventieth birthday was celebrated, one of the speakers in the meeting described him as 'the discoverer of the unconscious'; which Freud corrected by stating 'The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious. What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied'. In other words, it can be said that the explorations of the unconscious aspects of our mind has been a subject of much interest

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to poets and writers; what Freud did was to present a scientific and coherent analysis of the same.

Next, Lionel Trilling speaks about the influences on Freud in terms of the scholars who came before Freud and spoke on the same lines as that of Freud in terms of anticipating more or less the same ideas as that of Freud; and according to Trilling, they are Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. But, as Freud mentions, he did not read their works before formulating his theories. If this is true that it can be said that it is a case of zeitgeist (the direction of thought of that era). In other words, the age was so that many thinkers were thinking and writing in similar lines and Freud, similar to the other scholars and philosophers of the age presented the analysis of the human mind from a more or less similar perspective.

According to Lionel Trilling, psychoanalysis can be thought to be the culmination of the spirit of the Romantics. The Romantics thought that science is standing on the shoulders of literature as they believed that literature itself finds manifestation into a scientific search into the 'self.' The Romantics did not have any faith in the wisdom of mere analytical reason and therefore according to Trilling it seems that the Romantics had a great effect in understanding human mind led to the scientific analysis that psychoanalysis aims at.

Lionel Trilling, then, speaks about the influence Sigmund Freud had on literature and literary studies. In the essay, Trilling shows how the writers like Kafka explored Freudian concepts of guilt and punishment, Joyce and Thomas Mann looked at the rational side of Freud who was 'committed to the night side of life.' He further adds that 'it is to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of vision, and so to extend the organization of the id.' In other words, as psychoanalysis is all about rationally analysing the darker side of human mind therefore the literature of the modern age also tried to do so being under the influence of Freudian psychology.

Further, Lionel Trilling adds that Freud had a deep admiration for art and literature. On the one hand, Freud had a deep admiration for art as it talked about the charms of life as well as the motives of men; yet at the same time Freud believed that art is some kind of substitute gratification – an illusion which is in contrast to reality. But at the same time, he mentions that it is an illusion which is most harmless and often beneficent, because 'the poet is in command of his fantasy, while it is exactly the mark of the neurotic that he is possessed by his fantasy.' Thus, Freud thought highly about art and literature. Freud believed that there are two ways of dealing with reality –

- (a) the practical way of the conscious self; and
- (b) the antithetical way of fiction.

Therefore, he says – ‘The poet dreams being awake. His subject does not possess him but he has dominion over it. The poet is in command of his fantasy. The neurotic has very little command over it. The artist is not like the neurotic. He knows a way back from his fantasy.’ Thus, for Freud, art has a therapeutic function as it releases mental tension and at the same time promotes the social sharing of highly valued emotional experience.

Saying this, this is also true that Freud did not want to encroach upon the autonomy of the artist as he thought that the artist can neither yield to the psychoanalyst and vice versa. Thus, for the analytical method of psychoanalysis of literature can do two things –

- (a) explain the inner meanings of the work of art, and
- (b) explain the temperament of the artist as man.

To achieve this, Lionel Trilling takes the example of Ernest Jones and the mystery of Hamlet. Dr. Jones tried to clear the mystery of Hamlet’s character as he believed that *Hamlet* gives the clue to the workings of Shakespeare’s mind. Trilling says that ‘The Jones research undertakes to discover what it was that Shakespeare intended to say about Hamlet. It finds that the intention was wrapped by the author in a dreamlike obscurity because it touched so deeply both his personal life and the moral life of the world; what Shakespeare intended to say is that Hamlet cannot act because he is incapacitated by the guilt he feels at his unconscious attachment to his mother.’

There is nothing wrong with the Freudian interpretation of *Hamlet* as being done by Ernest Jones apart from the fact that there is no single meaning to any work of art. Artistic meaning is not bound by a single conception of things. The psychoanalytical reading of *Hamlet* is true, as true as any other reading. Moreover, as Lionel Trilling points out ‘the meaning of a work cannot lie in the author’s intention alone.’ The audience also partly determines the meaning of a work of art and therefore the meaning of a work of art also depends from which perspective the reader is willing to enter the reading of the text.

So, if analytical method of psychoanalysis is not the contribution of Freud to literature and literary studies – why is Freud so important to literature? To answer this question, Lionel Trilling says that Freud’s real contribution lies in his ‘whole conception of the mind.’ He further adds –

For, of all mental systems, the Freudian psychology is the one which makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind. Indeed, the mind, as Freud sees it, is in the greater part of its tendency exactly a poetry making organ. This puts the case too strongly, no doubt, for it seems to make the working of the unconscious mind equivalent to poetry itself, forgetting that between the unconscious mind and the finished poem there supervene the social intention and the formal control of the conscious mind. Yet the statement has at least the virtue of counterbalancing the belief, so commonly expressed or implied, that the very opposite is true, and that poetry is a kind of beneficent aberration of the mind’s right course.

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According to Trilling, Sigmund Freud tried to present how poetry is indigenous to the very constitution of the mind. Poetry is seen as a method of thought though unreliable and ineffective for conquering reality. The mind in one of its parts could work without logic. The unconscious mind works without any logic. 'It recognizes no "because", no "therefore", no "but".' Then Trilling goes on to discuss the idea Freud puts forward in his essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. Freud's earlier theory was that all dreams could be understood as the effort to fulfill the dreamer's wishes. The pleasure principle worked in dreams. Freud reconsiders this view in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. He feels that in cases of war neurosis – shell shock- the patient recollects the experience with utmost anguish. Here no 'pleasure principle' is involved. Therefore, Lionel Trilling ends the essay by saying –

One is always aware in reading Freud how little cynicism there is in his thought. His desire for man is only that he should be human, and to this end his science is devoted. No view of life to which the artist responds can insure the quality of his work, but the poetic qualities of Freud's own principles, which are so clearly in the line of classic tragic realism, suggest that this is a view which does not narrow and simplify the human world for the artist but on the contrary opens and complicates it.

### Check Your Progress

3. List some of the famous critical writings of Lionel Trilling.
4. Name the book from which the essay 'Freud and Literature' is taken.
5. Who are the authors who looked at the rational side of Freud as per Trilling?

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## 7.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Melville's *Moby Dick*, is the 'greatest American Novel' as per Carl Jung.
2. Great poetry, according to Jungian analysis, gets its strength from this collective unconscious which is a living experience and is brought to bear upon the conscious outlook of an age through the creative act.
3. Lionel Trilling's famous critical writings include *Matthew Arnold* (1939) and *E.M. Forster* (1943), as well as collections of literary essays: *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (1965).
4. The essay 'Freud and Literature' is an extract from Lionel Trilling famous book – *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*.

5. As per Trilling, authors Joyce and Thomas Mann looked at the rational side of Freud who was 'committed to the night side of life'.

C. G. Jung and  
Lionel Trilling

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## 7.5 SUMMARY

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## NOTES

- Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology, has been influential not only an important figure in the field of psychiatry but also in other subjects of study, such as anthropology, literature, philosophy as well as religious studies.
- Carl Jung is often considered the first modern psychologist to state that the human psyche is religious by nature and he tries to analyse human mind from that perspective. The primary focus of his works is myth, though his writings on myth are sprayed over his works.
- An archetype is a primordial image that does not exist in individual psyches as such but in what Jung called the 'collective unconscious', which according to him is trans-cultural and trans-historical. Based on Carl Jung's theory of archetypes, literary critics have developed the brand of criticism known as archetypal criticism.
- According to Carl Jung, Psychology is the study of the psychic process, and he considers 'Human psyche is the womb of all sciences and art'.
- According to Carl Jung, a work of art is a complicated product and it is an intentional and conscious product of the artists. Therefore, when one tries to analyse the creative process, it becomes very essential that there is a psychological analysis of the work of art.
- Jung says that these are examples of two different kinds of writing –
  - o The Psychological Mode
  - o The Visionary Mode.Goethe was writing in the psychological mode in the first part of *Faust*, he was in the visionary mode in the second part.
- Jung observes that for the poet, these primordial experiences are very significant as they the source of his or her creativity. According to Jung, what appears in this visionary mode is but the 'collective unconscious.'
- As per Jung, within the artist, two forces are at war with each other – that of a common man looking for happiness and security and on the other side a passion for creativity. In order to lend voice to his creative being an artist therefore has to suffer.
- Carl Jung emphasizes how a work of art needs to be objective and impersonal and where the poet has to get over his or her personal life to give vent to his creative energies through the presentation of the collective unconscious.

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- Psychoanalysis is a branch of study which tries to analyse human mind in a scientific manner to understand human actions, thought processes and their culture.
- Lionel Trilling was a famous American literary critic who brought sociological, psychological and philosophical methodologies and insights into literary criticism. Throughout his life, Lionel Trilling had a deep interest in Sigmund Freud and Psychoanalysis as well as to the tradition of humanistic thought in literature.
- Trilling believes that Freudian psychology offers a systematic account of the human mind. At the very beginning of the essay 'Freud and Literature', Trilling hails Freud by saying that – 'The Freudian psychology is the only systematic account of the human mind which, in point of subtlety and complexity, of interest and tragic power, deserves to stand beside the chaotic mass of psychological insights which literature has accumulated through the centuries.'
- Lionel Trilling speaks about the influences on Freud in terms of the scholars who came before Freud and spoke on the same lines as that of Freud in terms of anticipating more or less the same ideas as that of Freud; and according to Trilling, they are Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.
- According to Lionel Trilling, psychoanalysis can be thought to be the culmination of the spirit of the Romantics. The Romantics thought that science is standing on the shoulders of literature as they believed that literature itself finds manifestation into a scientific search into the 'self.'
- Lionel Trilling, then, speaks about the influence Sigmund Freud had on literature and literary studies. In the essay, Trilling shows how the writers like Kafka explored Freudian concepts of guilt and punishment, Joyce and Thomas Mann looked at the rational side of Freud who was 'committed to the night side of life.'
- Freud believed that there are two ways of dealing with reality –
  - (a) the practical way of the conscious self; and
  - (b) the antithetical way of fiction.
- The analytical method of psychoanalysis of literature can do two things–
  - (a) explain the inner meanings of the work of art, and
  - (b) explain the temperament of the artist as man.

Lionel Trilling takes the example of Ernest Jones and the mystery of Hamlet. Dr. Jones tried to clear the mystery of Hamlet's character as he believed that *Hamlet* gives the clue to the workings of Shakespeare's mind.



- According to Trilling, Sigmund Freud tried to present how poetry is indigenous to the very constitution of the mind. Poetry is seen as a method of thought though unreliable and ineffective for conquering reality.

## NOTES

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### 7.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Archetypal literary criticism:** It is a type of critical theory that interprets a text by focusing on recurring myths and archetypes in the narrative, symbols, images, and character types in literary work.
- **Zeitgeist:** It refers to the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time.
- **Psychoanalysis:** It is a branch of study which tries to analyse human mind in a scientific manner to understand human actions, thought processes and their culture.
- ***Faust*:** *Faust* is Goethe's great dramatic poem in two parts, is his crowning work. Even though it is based on the medieval legend of a man who sold his soul to the devil, it actually treats modern man's sense of alienation and his need to come to terms with the world in which he lives. *Faust* was made into a symbol of free thought, anti-clericalism, and opposition to Church dogma.
- **Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900):** He was a consummate and prolific philosopher. While most philosophers warned people of the danger of physical passions, Nietzsche recommended cultivating them as powerful assets.

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### 7.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. What are the forces at war within an artist as per Jung?
2. List some of the examples of works showcased by Jung to be representing the visionary mode.
3. Briefly explain Jung's thoughts on psychological novel.
4. What according to you is the contribution of Sigmund Freud in terms of literature and literary studies?
5. What are the two ways of dealing with reality as per Freud?
6. What are the functions of analytical method of psychoanalysis of literature as per Trilling?

7. 'Psychoanalysis can be thought to be the culmination of the spirit.' Briefly explain in the context of the essay 'Freud and Literature'.

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### Long Answer Questions

1. What is the relationship between psychology and literature according to Carl Jung? Discuss in detail.
2. Discuss the psychological and visionary mode as talked about by Carl Jung in the essay 'Psychology and Literature.'
3. Why do you think the artist needs to suffer to give vent to his creativity as pointed out by Carl Jung in his essay 'Psychology and Literature'?
4. Write short notes on the following –
  - Psychoanalysis and Literature
  - Influence of Sigmund Freud on Literature and Literary Studies
5. Discuss Sigmund Freud's contribution to psychoanalytic theories.
6. How far do you think is Ernest Jones right in his analysis of *Hamlet*? What is Trilling's view about the same? Discuss in detail.
7. What according to you is the significance of the relationship of Freud and Literature as discussed by Lionel Trilling?

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## 7.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 8 NORTHROP FRYE

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### Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Northrop Frye as a Critic
- 8.3 ‘The Archetypes of Literature’: Summary and Commentary
- 8.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.5 Summary
- 8.6 Key Words
- 8.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.8 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 8.0 INTRODUCTION

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Northrop Frye is usually considered to be the one of the critics who brought to the fore the notion of archetypal criticism in literature, though he is not the first one to use archetypal criticism. It is in 1934 with the publication of Maud Bodkin’s *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* that the journey of archetypal criticism began. But Northrop Frye is the one who popularized the critical tool in 1950s with his essay ‘The Archetypes of Literature’ and from then on for a decade and more this kind of criticism gained immense popularity in the west. In this unit, we will discuss the important elements of the essay ‘The Archetypes of Literature’ by Frye.

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### 8.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the works of Northrop Frye as a literary critic of eminence
- Describe the notions of archetypes of literature
- Explain Frye’s categorization of literary genres as per human seasons

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### 8.2 NORTHROP FRYE AS A CRITIC

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As stated in the introduction Northrop Frye was the critic who popularized the notion of archetypal criticism in the west with his critical writings, especially ‘The Archetypes of Literature’ which was originally published in 1951. His most famous writing is *Anatomy of Criticism*. Till structuralism and semeiotics came to be a major tool of criticism in the 1960s and 70s, Archetypal criticism was in favour of the critics though not a very significantly useful tool for many. Here one needs to understand the difference between Frazer and Jung

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who were also concerned with archetypes; but unlike Northrop Frye, Jung and Frazer were more concerned with the origin of the archetypes. For Northrop Frye, archetypes were just a device to understand the universe in a better fashion. So, he used archetypes to study literature.

Northrop Frye was born in Canada in 1921 and studied at Toronto University and Merton College, Oxford University. Initially he studied theology and but then decided to switch over to literature. His first book, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* in 1947, is an original study of the poetry of Blake and it is considered a classic critical work. Northrop Frye rose to fame with the publication of *Anatomy of Criticism*, in 1957. Frye died in 1991. The *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* is a critical work published in 1963. The present essay, 'Archetypes of Literature,' is taken from the book. In the essay Frye critically analyses literature against the backdrop of rituals and myths. He interprets literature in the light of various rituals and myths. Frye has divided the essay into three parts:

- The first part deals with the concept of archetypal criticism
- The second part throws light on the inductive method of analysis of a text
- The third part focuses on the deductive method of analysis

**Box 8.1 Some Significant Lines from the text 'The Archetypes of Literature'**

- Art, like nature, is the subject of a systematic study, and has to be distinguished from the study itself, which is criticism.
- ... nor should I consider it advisable to muddle the study of literature with a schizophrenic dichotomy between subjective-emotional and objective-descriptive aspects of meaning, considering that in order to produce any literary meaning at all one has to ignore this dichotomy. I say only that the principles by which one can distinguish a significant from a meaningless statement in criticism are not clearly defined. Our first step, therefore, is to recognize and get rid of meaningless criticism: that is, talking about literature in a way that cannot help to build up a systematic structure of knowledge. Casual value-judgments belong not to criticism but to the history of taste, and reflect, at best, only the social and psychological compulsions which prompted their utterance. All judgments in which the values are not based on literary experience but *ire* sentimental or derived from religious or political prejudice may be regarded as casual. Sentimental judgments are usually based either on non-existent categories or antitheses ("Shakespeare studied life, Milton books") or on a visceral reaction to the writer's personality. The literary chit-chat which makes the reputations of poets become and crash in an imaginary stock exchange is pseudo-criticism. That wealthy investor Mr. Eliot, after dumping Milton on the market, is not buying him again; Donne has probably reached his peak and will begin to taper off; Tennyson may be in for a slight flutter but the Shelley stocks are still bearish. This sort of thing cannot be part of any systematic study, for a systematic study can only progress whatever dithers or vacillates or reacts is merely leisure-class conversation.

- It is right that the first effort of critical apprehension should take the form of a rhetorical or structural analysis of a work of art.
- I suggest that what is at present missing from literary criticism is a coordinating principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole.
- We are now looking for classifying principles lying in an area between two points that we have fixed. The first of these is the preliminary effort of criticism, the structural analysis of the work of art. The second is the assumption that there is such a subject as criticism, and that it makes, or could make, complete sense. We may next proceed inductively from structural analysis, associating the data we collect and trying to see larger patterns in them. Or we may proceed deductively, with the consequences that follow from postulating the unity of criticism. It is clear, of course, that neither procedure will work indefinitely without correction from the other. Pure induction will get us lost in haphazard guessing; pure deduction will lead to inflexible and over-simplified pigeon-holing. ...
- The critic takes over where the poet leaves off, and criticism can hardly do without a kind of literary psychology connecting the poet with the poem. Part of this may be a psychological study of the poet, though this is useful chiefly in analysing the failures in his expression, the things in him which are still attached to his work. More important is the fact that every poet has his private mythology, his own spectroscopic band or peculiar formation of symbols, of much of which he is quite unconscious. In works with characters of their own, such as dramas and novels, the same psychological analysis may be extended to the interplay of characters, though of course literary psychology would analyse the behavior of such characters only in relation to literary convention.
- An archetype should be not only a unifying category of criticism, but itself a part of a total form, and it leads us at once to the question of what sort of total form criticism can see in literature.
- If so, then the search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology, concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folktale. We next realize that the relation between these categories and literature is by no means purely one of descent, as we find them reappearing in the greatest classics—in fact there seems to be a general tendency on the part of great classics to revert to them.
- Literature seems to be intermediate between music and painting: its words form rhythms which approach a musical sequence of sounds at one of its boundaries, and form patterns which approach the hieroglyphic or pictorial image at the other. The attempts to get as near to these boundaries as possible form the main body of what is called experimental writing. We may call the rhythm of literature the narrative, and the pattern, the simultaneous mental grasp of the verbal structure, the meaning or significance. We hear or listen to a narrative, but when we grasp a writer's total pattern we 'see' what he means.
- In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility and partly a god or archetypal human being. The crucial importance of this myth has been forced on literary critics by Jung and Frazer in particular, but the several

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books now available on it are not always systematic in their approach, for which reason I supply the following table of its phases:

1. The dawn, spring and birth phase. Myths of the birth of the hero, of revival and resurrection, of creation and (because the four phases are a cycle) of the defeat of the powers of darkness, winter and death. Subordinate characters: the father and the mother. The archetype of romance and of most dithyrambic and rhapsodic poetry.
  2. The zenith, summer, and marriage or triumph phase. Myths of apotheosis, of the sacred marriage, and of entering into Paradise. Subordinate characters: the companion and the bride. The archetype of comedy, pastoral and idyll.
  3. The sunset, autumn and death phase. Myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice and of the isolation of the hero. Subordinate characters: the traitor and the siren. The archetype of tragedy and elegy.
  4. The darkness, winter and dissolution phase. Myths of the triumph of these powers; myths of floods and the return of chaos, of the defeat of the hero, and Gotterdammerung myths. Subordinate characters: the ogre and the witch. The archetype of satire (see, for instance the conclusion of *The Dunciad*).
- So in terms of significance, the central myth of art must be the vision of the end of social effort, the innocent world of fulfilled desires, the free human society. Once this is understood, the integral place of criticism among the other social sciences, in interpreting and systematizing the vision of the artist, will be easier to see. It is at this point that we can see how religious conceptions of the final cause of human effort are as relevant as any others to criticism. The importance of the god or hero in the myth lies in the fact that such characters, who are conceived in human likeness and yet have more power over nature, gradually build up the vision of an omnipotent personal community beyond an indifferent nature. It is this community which the hero regularly enters in his apotheosis. The world of this apotheosis thus begins to pull away from the rotary cycle of the quest in which all triumph is temporary. Hence if we look at the quest-myth as a pattern of imagery, we see the hero's quest first of all in terms of its fulfilment.
  - We conclude with a second table of contents, in which we shall attempt to set forth the central pattern of the comic and tragic visions. ...
    1. In the comic vision the *human* world is a community, or a hero who represents the wish-fulfilment of the reader. The archetype of images of symposium, communion, order, friendship and love. In the tragic vision the human world is a tyranny or anarchy, or an individual or isolated man, the leader with his back to his followers, the bullying giant of romance, the deserted or betrayed hero. Marriage or some equivalent consummation belongs to the comic vision; the harlot, witch and other varieties of Jung's "terrible mother" belong to the tragic one. All divine, heroic, angelic or other superhuman communities follow the human pattern.
    2. In the comic vision the *animal* world is a community of domesticated animals, usually a flock of sheep, or a lamb, or one of the gentler birds, usually a dove. The archetype of pastoral images. In the tragic vision the animal world is seen in terms of beasts and birds of prey, wolves, vultures, serpents, dragons and the like.

3. In the comic vision the *vegetable* world is a garden, grove or park, or a tree of life, or a rose or lotus. The archetype of Arcadian images, such as that of Marvell's green world or of Shakespeare's forest comedies. In the tragic vision it is a sinister forest like the one in *Camus* or at the opening of the *Inferno* or a heath or wilderness, or a tree of death.
4. In the comic vision the *mineral* world is a city, or one building or temple, or one stone, normally a glowing precious stone—in fact the whole comic series, especially the tree, can be conceived as luminous or fiery. The archetype of geometrical images: the "starlit dome" belongs here. In the tragic vision the mineral world is seen in terms of deserts, rocks and ruins, or of sinister geometrical images like the cross.
5. In the comic vision the *unformed* world is a river, traditionally fourfold, which influenced the Renaissance image of the temperate body with its four humors. In the tragic vision this world usually becomes the sea, as the narrative myth of dissolution is so often a flood myth. The combination of the sea and beast images gives us the leviathan and similar water-monsters.

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### Archetypal Criticism

From the above quotes from the Northrop Frye's 'The Archetypes of Literature' you probably have come across this notion already that there is a kind of criticism that exists in literature which one can term of archetypal criticism, which is a distinct kind of criticism altogether.

Archetypal criticism involves interpretation of a literary text in the light of the cultural patterns which is based on myths and rituals of a race, nation or a group to decipher its signification. Before Northrop Frye, James George Frazer and Carl Gustav Jung were the two great authorities who, have greatly contributed to the development of archetypal approach. Frazer was a social anthropologist and through his book *The Golden Bough* studied archetypes, Jung (associated with Sigmund Freud) used the notion of 'collective unconscious' (myth) to study how man preserves the ideas, concepts and values of civilized life through unconsciously submitting to the myths and rituals of his forefathers as well as his time. Northrop Frye builds on the ideas presented in Frazer and Jung, but instead of trying to define an archetype, he goes on to present the 'mythical patterns' in literature so that they can be used as a tool of literary analysis.

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### 8.3 'THE ARCHETYPES OF LITERATURE': SUMMARY AND COMMENTARY

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Northrop Frye begins the essay by stating that criticism is more over like a science which should be systematized and organized to make it a body of knowledge which can objectively analyse literary texts. Northrop Frye talks about two kinds of criticism –

- a significant and meaningful criticism, and
- a meaningless criticism.

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According to Northrop Frye, a systematic body of knowledge needs to be developed in the study of literature otherwise the work of criticism becomes meaningless. Some sporadic remarks here and there on few poets make no sense to him. What is needed is a scientific systematic way of reading literature. Frye therefore thinks that using the background information about a work of art is not necessarily the right kind of criticism that one should be looking at. This kind of meaningless criticism only distracts the readers far away from literature.

Frye further adds that there are two branches of knowledge – philosophy and history – which are very essential for the study and understanding of literature as these two branches of knowledge are the major tools for interpretation of literature from the point of view of the archetypal criticism. For Frye, archetypal criticism is a form of meaningful criticism as it provides a coherent systematic pattern of understanding and studying literature.

There are certain kinds of criticisms which only focus on the text and remain merely commentaries on the text without giving much of the background information about the text. This kind of formalistic or structural criticism helps the reader to understand the text to some extent, but it does not help the readers evolve an understanding of the pattern what is involved in the creation of the text. Thus, structural criticism helps the reader in understanding the pattern in the text and historical criticism makes him understand the background; but what the readers need is a synthesis of both historical and structural criticisms – and according to Frye, archetypal criticism is that branch of criticism which does the synthesis of historical and structural criticisms to make the readers have a comprehensive understanding of literature.

One has to remember here that Frye wanted literary criticism to achieve the status of being as systematic as any science, so he tried his best to bring about methodical nature to literary criticism. Towards the close of the first section of the essay ‘The Archetypes of Literature’, Frye opines that structural criticism will help a reader in understanding a text, and in his analysis, and therefore he proceeds inductively. That is, from particular truths in a work, he draws general truths.

According to Frye, an author cannot intrude into his text and express his personal emotions and comments while writing the text. Moreover, he should maintain absolute objectivity as far as his presentation is concerned. A critic’s role, while he or she studies a work of art, is to find out whether an author is free from textual interference. This is thought to be some sort of psychological approach also, and this method of criticism helps the reader in understanding an author’s personal symbols, images and myths which he



incorporates in his works. At times, the author himself may be unconscious of the myths, symbols etc., which he has exploited in his works, and the critic role is to 'discover' such things.

The second type of criticism, historical criticism, looks at the birth of a text and tries to figure out how the text is an outcome of the social and cultural demands of a society in a particular period. In other words, the socio-political and cultural milieu of the work of art becomes the most significant way of looking and interpreting a text in historical criticism.

Frye is of the view that both structural criticism and historical criticism are a necessity in archetypal criticism and that neither can be dispensed with. According to him neither the structural criticism, nor the historical criticism alone explains a work of art completely. He is therefore of the opinion that the critic must use both. He further adds, that a historical critic discovers common symbols and images being used by different writers in their works, and resolves that there must be a common 'source from which writers have derived their symbols, images and myths.' It can be said that there is a pool of common symbols that the writers have been using over centuries and therefore they become archetypal symbols.

What archetypal criticism aims to do is to understand these symbols, images and myths that are used by authors over a period of time from a critical way to understand the text. These symbols, myths and rituals have their origin in primitive myths, rituals, folk-lore and cultures and according to Carl Jung, these lie buried in the 'collective unconscious' which may otherwise be called 'racial memory' of a people. (We have already discussed Carl Jung in Unit 7).

As a writer is also a part of the historical-cultural milieu, that is, a part of the race, therefore from his 'unconscious' mind many myths, rituals, images and symbols find expression in a work of art. Sometimes this is done by the writer consciously and often it happens in an unconscious way. The objective of archetypal criticism is to analyse that work of art from that perspective to come to the general truth from that of the particular.

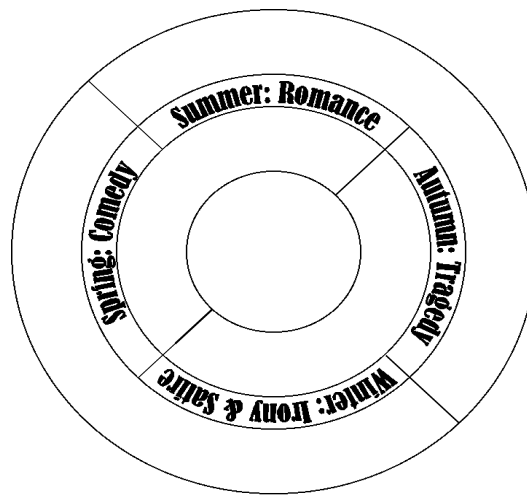
Further Frye adds that an archetypal critic thereafter proceeds to establish the meaning of a work from the general truth to the particular truth. He then goes on to discuss the rhythms (narrative) of the work of art and while doing so he says that the world of nature is governed by a rhythm which we call natural cycle and he associates works of art with the natural cycle.

The seasonal rhythms in a solar year are spring, winter, autumn and summer and everything in nature happens along with the rhythms of the seasonal cycle. A ritual is not performed frequently, but rhythmically after a long gap and it has a meaning. In the human world rituals are performed voluntarily and they have their own significance. Works of literature have their origins in such rituals and the archetypal critic discovers and explains them.

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In this literary universe, according to Frye, the four radical mythoi (i.e. plot forms, or organizing structural principles), correspondent to the four seasons in the cycle of the natural world, are incorporated in the four major *genres* of comedy (spring), romance (summer), tragedy (autumn), and satire (winter). Within the overarching archetypal mythos of each of these genres, individual works of literature also play variations upon a number of more limited archetypes – that is, conventional patterns and types that literature shares with social rituals as well as with theology, history, law, and, in fact, all ‘discursive verbal structures.’ Viewed in an archetypal fashion, Frye asserted, literature turns out to play an essential role in refashioning the impersonal material universe into an alternative verbal universe that is intelligible and viable, because it is adapted to universal human needs and concerns.



*Fig 8.1 Major Genres of Comedy and Four Seasons in the Cycle*

There are two basic categories in Frye’s framework, i.e., comedic and tragic. Each category is further subdivided into two categories: comedy and romance for the comedic; tragedy and satire (or ironic) for the tragic. Though he is dismissive of Frazer, Frye uses the seasons in his archetypal schema. Each season is aligned with a literary genre: comedy with spring, romance with summer, tragedy with autumn, and satire with winter.

- **Comedy** is aligned with **spring** because the genre of comedy is characterized by the birth of the hero, revival and resurrection. Also, **spring** symbolizes the defeat of winter and darkness.
- **Romance** and **summer** are paired together because **summer** is the culmination of life in the seasonal calendar, and the romance genre culminates with some sort of triumph, usually a marriage.
- **Autumn** is the dying stage of the seasonal calendar, which parallels the **tragedy** genre because it is, (above all), known for the ‘fall’ or demise of the protagonist.

- **Satire** is metonymized with **winter** on the grounds that **satire** is a ‘dark’ genre. Satire is a disillusioned and mocking form of the three other genres. It is noted for its darkness, dissolution, the return of chaos, and the defeat of the heroic figure.

The context of a genre determines how a symbol or image is to be interpreted. Frye outlines five different spheres in his schema: human, animal, vegetation, mineral, and water.

- The comedic **human** world is representative of wish-fulfillment and being community centered. In contrast, the tragic human world is of isolation, tyranny, and the fallen hero.
- **Animals** in the comedic genres are docile and pastoral (e.g. sheep), while animals are predatory and hunters in the tragic (e.g. wolves).
- For the realm of **vegetation**, the comedic is, again, pastoral but also represented by gardens, parks, roses and lotuses. As for the tragic, vegetation is of a wild forest, or as being barren.
- Cities, temples, or precious stones represent the comedic **mineral** realm. The tragic mineral realm is noted for being a desert, ruins, or ‘of sinister geometrical images’ (Frye 1456).
- Lastly, the water realm is represented by rivers in the comedic. With the tragic, the seas, and especially floods, signify the water sphere.

Frye admits that his schema in ‘The Archetypes of Literature’ is simplistic but makes room for exceptions by noting that there are neutral archetypes.

#### Check Your Progress

1. What are the two kinds of criticism as per Northrop Frye?
2. What is believed to be the origin of symbols, myths and rituals?
3. State the criticism which synthesizes the historical and structural criticism according to Frye.
4. Which genre of literature finds parallels in the season of autumn as per Frye?

## 8.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Northrop Frye talks about two kinds of criticism –
  - a significant and meaningful criticism, and
  - a meaningless criticism.

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2. These symbols, myths and rituals have their origin in primitive myths, rituals, folk-lore and cultures.
3. Archetypal criticism synthesizes of historical and structural criticisms to make the readers have a comprehensive understanding of literature as per Frye.
4. According to Frye Autumn is the dying stage of the seasonal calendar, which parallels the tragedy genre because it is, (above all), known for the 'fall' or demise of the protagonist.

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## 8.5 SUMMARY

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- Northrop Frye is usually considered to be the one of the critics who brought to the fore the notion of archetypal criticism in literature, though he is not the first one to use archetypal criticism.
- Northrop Frye was the critic who popularized the notion of archetypal criticism in the west with his critical writings, especially 'The Archetypes of Literature' which was originally published in 1951. His most famous writing is *Anatomy of Criticism*.
- Archetypal criticism involves interpretation of a literary text in the light of the cultural patterns which is based on myths and rituals of a race, nation or a group to decipher its signification. Before Northrop Frye, James George Frazer and Carl Gustav Jung are the two great authorities who, have greatly contributed to the development of archetypal approach.
- Towards the close of the first section of the essay 'The Archetypes of Literature', Frye opines that structural criticism will help a reader in understanding a text, and in his analysis, and therefore he proceeds inductively. That is, from particular truths in a work, he draws general truths.
- The second type of criticism as per Frye, historical criticism, looks at the birth of a text and tries to figure out how the text is an outcome of the social and cultural demands of a society in a particular period. In other words, the socio-political and cultural milieu of the work of art becomes the most significant way of looking and interpreting a text in historical criticism.
- Frye is of the view that in both structural criticism and historical criticism are a necessity in archetypal criticism and that neither can be dispensed with. According to him neither the structural criticism, not the historical criticism is able to explain a work of art completely.

- What Archetypal Criticism aims to do is to understand these symbols, images and myths that are used by authors over a period of time from a critical way to understand the text.
- Frye in his essay discusses the rhythms (narrative) of the work of art and while doing so he says that the world of nature is governed by a rhythm which we call natural cycle and he associates works of art with the natural cycle. The seasonal rhythms in a solar year are spring, winter, autumn and summer and everything in nature happens along with the rhythms of the seasonal cycle.
- In this literary universe, according to Frye, the four radical mythoi (i.e. plot forms, or organizing structural principles), correspondent to the four seasons in the cycle of the natural world, are incorporated in the four major *genres* of comedy (spring), romance (summer), tragedy (autumn), and satire (winter).

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### 8.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Archetype:** It refers to a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole.
- **Mythos:** It refers to one of the four archetypal narratives, classified as comic, romantic, tragic and ironic.
- **Structuralism:** In sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, it is the methodology that implies elements of human culture must be understood by way of their relationship to a broader, overarching system or structure.
- **Semeiotics:** It refers to the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation.

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### 8.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Name the parts in which Frye divides his essay 'The Archetypes of Literature'.
2. What are the branches of knowledge as per Frye?
3. How does Frye describe meaningless criticism?

4. Why does Frye think that an author cannot intrude into his text and express his personal emotions?
5. What are Frye's opinion on historical criticism?

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### Long-Answer Questions

1. In what ways, Archetypal criticism discovers basic cultural pattern? Discuss in detail in reference to N. Frye's essay 'The Archetypes of Literature.'
2. 'Frye proposed that the totality of literary works constitute a "self-contained literary universe."' Discuss.
3. 'In literary criticism the term archetype denotes recurrent narratives designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes, and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature.' Elucidate with N. Frye's views in his essay 'The Archetypes of Literature'.
4. Discuss how literary genres are related with human seasons as per Frye.

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## 8.8 FURTHER READINGS

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**BLOCK - III**  
**CRITICISM IX - XI**

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**NOTES**

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**UNIT 9 HAROLD BLOOM**

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**Structure**

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 An Introduction to Harold Bloom
- 9.3 'The Breaking of Form': Summary and Critical Commentary
- 9.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.5 Summary
- 9.6 Key Words
- 9.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.8 Further Readings

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**9.0 INTRODUCTION**

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Harold Bloom (born in July 1930) is thought to be one of the most famous living literary critics of the world as he is such a critical voice which resonates throughout the literary and critical world. His position as Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University and a leading American critic makes it pretty clear that he cannot be but remembered as one the leading critics. Post 1988 he was also lecturing at New York University. He is known for his new and fresh interpretations of literary history with bold daring arguments which has made him one of the most visible contemporary literary critics. In this unit, we will discuss Bloom's essay 'The Breaking of Form' which deals with the concept of literary influence.

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**9.1 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Discuss Harold Bloom as one of the major voices of the late twentieth century
- Describe the basic concepts of Harold Bloom's essay 'The Breaking of Form'
- Critically analyse the essay 'The Breaking of Form'

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## 9.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO HAROLD BLOOM

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Harold Bloom began his critical career by defending the reputation of the high romantics like P. B. Shelley and others in his first book called *Shelley's Myth Making*. From his first book itself he created much furor in the academic world of literary and cultural studies as he made it a point to provide a fresh perspective at looking at literary studies. His most famous works include –

- *Ruin the Sacred Truths*
- *The Books of J*
- *The American Religion*
- *The Western Canon*
- *The Anxiety of Influence*
- *Kabbalah and Criticism*
- *Anatomy of influence*

Harold Bloom's famous essay 'The Breaking of Form' (which is a part of our syllabus) was published in 1973 in the book called *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom's ideas in this essay as well as the book mark a clear break with earlier concepts of literary influence. The essay 'The Breaking of Form' is mainly concerned with the poet's misinterpretation of their predecessors and their influence.

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## 9.3 'THE BREAKING OF FORM': SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTARY

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Harold Bloom in his essay 'The Breaking of Form' deals with the concepts of the development of western poetic tradition which he terms as a process of borrowing and misreading. What he means is that when he studies the poets he figures out that in the western literature the poets, instead of making their creative work on their own, tries to gain inspiration from the previous poets and writers – that is, they imitate the previous poets to develop a poetic voice of their own. We have come across this notion in T. S. Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' where T. S. Eliot talks about the significance of tradition in poetical creative writing. But Harold Bloom's idea is very different from that of T. S. Eliot as he argues very differently in his essay 'The Breaking of Form.' According to Harold Bloom, the creative writers (poets) when they look at their precursors, they inevitably 'misread' them. What Harold Bloom does in his work such as 'The Breaking of Form' or in his books such as *The Anxiety of Influence* is to develop a theory of poetry. Harold Bloom begins the essay by saying that 'Poems instruct us in how they break form to bring about meaning, so as to utter a complaint, a



moaning intended to be all their own. The word *form* goes back to a root meaning “to gleam” or “to sparkle,” but in a poem it is not form itself that gleams or sparkles. I will try to show that the lustres of poetic meaning come rather from the breaking apart of form, from the shattering of a visionary gleam.’ Thus, the essay ‘The Breaking of Form’ begins with the theoretical considerations on the poetic form and meaning from a new dimension. What Bloom does is to trace out the significance of meaning and form of poetry. He mentions that the word ‘meaning’ goes back to a root that signifies ‘*opinion*’ or ‘*intention*’, which is closely related to the world ‘*moaning*’.

Poems instruct us in how they break form to bring out the meaning. Then the ‘*form*’ goes back to a root meaning ‘*to gloom*’ or ‘*to sparkle*’, but in a poem it is not only a ‘form’ that *gleams or sparkles*. So, Bloom feels that ‘form’ in poetry is itself a ‘*trope*’ which is a figurative substitution to reveal something from ‘outside.’ – ‘What is called “form” in poetry is itself a trope, a figurative substitution of the as-it-were “outside” of a poem for what the poem is supposed to represent or be “about.” Etymologically, “about” means “to be on the outside of” something anyway, and so “about” in regard to poems is itself only another trope. Is there some way out of this wilderness of tropes, so that we can recover some sense of either a reader’s or writer’s other-than-verbal needs and desires?’

Harold Bloom then goes on to point out the concept of Kenneth Burke notion of the ‘form’ where Kenneth Burke tries to define ‘form’ in literature as ‘an arousing and fulfillment of desires’. Burke further adds that ‘the work has from in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence.’ Harold Bloom thus quotes Kenneth Burke to assert the fact that the sequence of parts is only another trope of the form which needs to be broken to find the meaning/signification. In other words, according to Bloom, form in poetry ceases to be a trope as far as a clear understanding of the meaning of the text of the poem is concerned.

Bloom then brings the notions of Emerson to point out his understanding of the breaking of form. He says that Emerson views poets somehow as ‘liberating gods’ as they free and made others free. The freedom in poem that Bloom here refers to is the freedom of meaning and to have the freedom of having a meaning of one’s own. To support his idea of breaking of form, Bloom then goes on to talk about Sigmund Freud (we have discussed Freud at length in Unit 7 on Lionel Trilling ‘Freud and Literature’) where Freud shows how like a child in *Family Romances*, the child is not just the biological offspring of his so called ‘parents’ similarly, the poet considers himself ‘changeling’ – he considers himself as a free agent who is marked by disjunction from the earlier poets – the poet, if he has to mark himself as a memorable one, then he needs to have his disjunctions from the precursors.

Here Bloom also admits the significance of reading and refers to the concepts of Paul Valer who believes that to get to a new meaning of one’s

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own, one needs to break the form – a good reader necessarily needs to twist and break the form if he has to understand the poem in its entirety and make some meaning out of it. This kind of textual violence is something that is a must for a good reader as being pointed out and illustrated by Rabbi Issac the Blind in the thirteenth century or Gershome Scholem in the twentieth century.

Harold Bloom then goes on to talk about the six revisionary ratios which he thinks is the basic idea to understand his theory of the relationship between the poets and his precursors as well as their texts.

### Six Revisionary Ratios

The six revisionary ratios are meant to understand the poems to its fullest extent and to go beyond the reading of the poems from the point of view of traditional rhetoric. In other words, it can be said that these revisionary ratios are necessary to understand the relations of the literary sons to their fathers, the present poets from their precursors. These ratios are:

- (a) **Clinamen** – the term means ‘poetic misreading’ – it is used to mean that clinamen appears as a corrective movement in the new poet’s own poem. The precursor of the poet has taken a point of view which may not necessarily be the same with the present poet. The new poet should deviate in his direction as the new poem moves along. What Bloom means is that the new poet should take a ‘swerve away’ from his precursor so as to attain the meaning of the poem.
- (b) **Tessera** – which means ‘completion or antithesis’ – the term is derived from the Latin word ‘cube’ or ‘die’ which is still used for mosaic. What the new poet must do is to retain the past as being represented in his or her precursors and then from there move to a new direction to create something new.
- (c) **Kenosis** – the term is derived from the Greek word ‘Kenoo’ which means ‘to empty out.’ In Christian theology, the term is used to mean a certain kind of ‘self-emptying’ of one’s own will and becomes completely receptive of the God’s will. The sense in which Harold Bloom uses the word ‘Kenosis’ is that the present poet must empty out the poetic influence of his precursors so that he or she can put forth the new idea. It is this act of ‘self-emptying’ of the new poet which will make him or her make a mark and become a successful one in encoding his or her signification in the work of art, i.e. the poem.
- (d) **Daemonization** – By this Harold Bloom means that only through this process the new poet will be able to reach new sublime heights. The new poet believes that he is superior than his precursors and therefore taps into his or her daemonic power to create something new.
- (e) **Askesis** – means ‘a movement of self-purgation’ which can only happen in a moment of solitude. The new poet’s revisionary movement

‘curtails’ both his as well as his precursor’s achievements and cleanses him/ her as well as his or her works from earlier influences.

- (f) **Aprophrades** – which refers to ‘the return of the dead.’ The new poet is burdened by his own achieved solipsism. So, he or she should make the conscious effort of holding his own poem open to that precursor to make his one new.

After discussing these six revisionary ratios, Harold Bloom quotes from Anna Freud’s ‘The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense’ to point out how the Id and Ego concepts are related to precursors and new poets. According to Bloom, the precursors stand for Id and the new poets as Ego leading to a situation when the new poet can either be rebellious or be servile to the earlier poets. In other words, whether the new poet with his or her work is enslaved by the influence of the earlier poets or are they liberated enough from them. It is true that the new works of art, i.e. the poems originate from the old ones, but the struggle of the new poet is always against his or her precursors. In other words, the new poet, according to Harold Bloom, should do a ‘creative misreading’ of the earlier poets of the past and at the same time overcome ‘the anxiety of influence’ so as to achieve certain kind of poetic immortality.

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### Check Your Progress

1. Name the book from which the essay ‘The Breaking of Form’ is taken.
2. How does the essay ‘The Breaking of Form’ begin?
3. Name the poet mentioned by Bloom who views poets somehow as ‘liberating gods’.
4. When does form in poetry ceases to be a trope as per Bloom?
5. What is deamonization as explained by Bloom?

## 9.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Harold Bloom’s famous essay ‘The Breaking of Form’ was published in 1973 in the book called *The Anxiety of Influence*.
2. The essay ‘The Breaking of Form’ begins with the theoretical considerations on the poetic form and meaning from a new dimension.
3. Bloom says that Emerson views poets somehow as ‘liberating gods’ as they free and made others free.
4. According to Bloom, form in poetry ceases to be a trope as far as a clear understanding of the meaning of the text of the poem is concerned.

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5. Harold Bloom explains daemonization is the only process through which the new poet will be able to reach new sublime heights. The new poet believes that he is superior than his precursors and therefore taps into his or her daemonic power to create something new.

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### 9.5 SUMMARY

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- Harold Bloom is thought to be one of the most famous living literary critics of the world as he is such a critical voice which resonates throughout the literary and critical world.
- Harold Bloom's famous essay 'The Breaking of Form' was published in 1973 in the book called *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom's ideas in this essay as well as the book mark a clear break with earlier concepts of literary influence.
- The essay 'The Breaking of Form' is mainly concerned with the poet's misinterpretation of their predecessors and their influence.
- According to Harold Bloom, the creative writers (poets) when they look at their precursors, they inevitably 'misread' them.
- What Harold Bloom does in his work such as 'The Breaking of Form' or in his books such as *The Anxiety of Influence* is to develop a theory of poetry.
- Harold Bloom talks about the six revisionary ratios which he thinks is the basic idea to understand his theory of the relationship between the poets and his precursors as well as their texts.
- The new poet, according to Harold Bloom, should do a 'creative misreading' of the earlier poets of the past and at the same time overcome 'the anxiety of influence' so as to achieve certain kind of poetic immortality.
- The six revisionary ratios as presented by Bloom are meant to understand the poems to its fuller extent and to go beyond the reading of the poems from the point of view of traditional rhetoric. In other words, it can be said that these revisionary ratios are necessary to understand the relations of the literary sons to their fathers, the present poets from their precursors. These ratios are – Clinamen, Tessera, Kenosis, Daemonization, Askesis, and Aprophrades.

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### 9.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Trope:** It refers to a figurative or metaphorical use of a word or expression.

- **Changeling:** It refers to a child believed to have been secretly substituted by fairies for the parents' real child in infancy.
- **Six revisionary ratios:** It refers to the concept propounded by Bloom which he thinks is the basic idea to understand his theory of the relationship between the poets and his precursors as well as their texts.
- **Rhetoric:** It refers to the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.

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## 9.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. List some of the famous works by Harold Bloom.
2. What, according to you, is the essential argument of Harold Bloom in the essay 'The Breaking of Form'?
3. What is Bloom's opinion about the significance of reading?
4. List the six revisionary ratios according to Harold Bloom.
5. How are the concepts of Id and Ego related to precursors and new poets as per Bloom?

### Long Answer Questions

1. Harold Bloom in the essay 'The Breaking of Form' deals with the poetic tradition but from a different perspective. Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.
2. How does Bloom define the 'breaking of form'? Explain the concept of 'form' in poetry as explained by Bloom.
3. Discuss the 'ratios' in detail to ascertain how Harold Bloom talks about the significance of them in reading of the poetic tradition.
4. Write short notes on:
  - Six Revisionary Ratios
  - The breaking of form
  - Form in poetry itself is a trope

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## 9.8 FURTHER READINGS

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*Harold Bloom*

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## UNIT 10 ROLAND BARTHES

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### Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 An Introduction to the Style of Roland Barthes
- 10.3 ‘Criticism as Language’: Summary and Critical Comments
- 10.4 Structuralism: A Discussion
- 10.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.6 Summary
- 10.7 Key Words
- 10.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.9 Further Readings

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### 10.0 INTRODUCTION

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The 19th and 20th century saw a large number of philosophers espousing the existentialist philosophy, which postulated that the human subject was not only a thinking subject but one who had feelings and acted individually. The most prominent philosopher in this school of thought was Jean Paul Sartre. His work ‘What is Literature?’ published in 1947 showed his disenchantment with the current forms of writing. He was also disillusioned with the avant-garde or experimental forms, which he felt alienated the audience.

Barthes’s early ideas were a reaction to such existing philosophies. He wanted to discover what could be considered unique and original in writing.

It is common to divide the works of Roland Barthes into an early and late ‘structuralist’ phase. In the words of Bjornar Olsen in his article ‘Roland Barthes: From Sign to Text’, a more detailed evaluation of his writing as it developed from the early 1950s till 1980 suggests four partly overlapping phases.

Roland Gérard Barthes was born on 12 November 1915 in France. He is known for his works as a literary theorist. Alongside this, he was a philosopher and a critic, and semiotician. (Semiotics is the theory and study of signs and symbols.) He explored a wide range of fields on which had a major influence on the development of schools of theory on structuralism, semiotics, existentialism, social theory, Marxism, anthropology and post-structuralism. In this unit, we will study Barthes’ essay ‘Criticism as Language.’

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### 10.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the critical writings of Barthes

- Explain the important elements of Barthes' essay 'Criticism as Language'
- Describe the literary movement of structuralism

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## 10.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STYLE OF ROLAND BARTHES

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Structuralists try to look at the 'grammar', or the structure or the pattern of particular human systems of meaning. They do it for any human system whether kinship, garments, *haute cuisine*, narrative discourse, myths. The liveliest examples of such writings of Roland Barthes are *Mythologies* (1957) and *Système de la mode* (1967). The theory of these studies is given in *Elements of Semiology*. Roland Barthes most popular work *Mythologies* deals with the mechanisms by which meanings are produced and put into circulation. In the book *Mythologies*, Barthes discusses various things like wrestling, soap powders, toys, tourism, advertising, striptease, etc., to figure out how these things make sense to us in the signifying processes. Moreover, his objective is to bring the methodology of semiology to the things and events happening around us. The most important theoretical essay comes at the end of *Mythologies* – 'Myth Today', where Barthes outlines a sociological model to understand the first and second level of signifying process. According to him, myth is a second order sociological system in which the signs of language, both signifiers and signified, function as the signifiers of myth, signifying the mythical signified.

There are a host of other writers like these who began their academic life being a structuralist and found inherent problems with Structuralism and went on to be a critic of Structuralism. Roland Barthes is one of them and his writings are surely enigmatic and entertaining as well as engaging to read. Though Barthes' writing had spanned both Structuralism and Post Structuralism, yet if one looks at the thematic link between his works, one figures out that he dealt with a single theme – the conventionality of all forms of representation. In his later writings, Barthes emphasizes that a writer does not need to pretend that language is a natural transparent medium and that through language he or she can provide a unified truth or reality to the readers. That writing is an artifice is emphasized by Barthes and therefore he points out similar to that of Jacques Derrida how the writer plays with language.

As writing is a 'play' of signifiers, therefore, Barthes points out that the readers while reading a text explore that 'play' and thus can afford to have their own signification of the text. Moreover, the writer should focus on writing in such a way that the readers experience that notion of 'play' in the writing. In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), Barthes emphasizes on two kinds of pleasure that a reader can experience while in the process of reading–



Pleasure and Bliss. The general pleasure that a reader can experience is that the text exceeds a single transparent meaning; but when the reader experiences 'bliss' (jouissance), he or she is transported from a singular meaning to a state which unsettles his or her historical, cultural and other such assumptions to bring him/her to a crisis which are encountered in the texts like James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.

In *S/Z* (1970), Barthes points out the vanity of the structuralists to put every kind of story within a single structure. Barthes is of the opinion that not only each text is unique, but at the same time has 'difference' from each other which results from its own textuality. Each text is already situated within the 'already written' sea of signification. While the reader enters the text(s) she or he encounter a language where either they emphasize on referring to a fixed meaning (therefore, 'writerly') or emphasize on the 'play' of signification and therefore 'readerly' where the reader is not just a mere *consumer* of what the author has to offer, but a *producer* of meaning.

In that sense in a readerly text, the authorial viewpoint does not exist and therefore 'the author is dead' as soon as he or she chooses to provide his or her text to the public domain. We can say that in a *writerly* text, the author invites the reader to enter the text from any point she or he wants to as Barthes says – 'this ideal text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signified; it has no beginning . . . we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach.'

Thus, Barthes as a post structuralist philosopher and literary theorists emphasized that a writer needs to represent just the signifier in his or her text and let the reader choose what he or she wants to choose from the infinite voices that the text has. In that sense, Barthes is a true post structuralist as he accentuates on 'free play' of signification and frees the domain of knowledge from artificial weight of scientificity and structure.

#### Check Your Progress

1. What does Barthes' book *Mythologies* deal with?
2. State the thematic link between Barthes' writing.

### 10.3 'CRITICISM AS LANGUAGE': SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS

Roland Barthes' essay 'Criticism as Language', published in 1963, deals with French Criticism during the 1960s – Roland Barthes talks about the different kinds of criticism that existed in France during those times. He is of the opinion that there are basically four kinds of criticism which existed in

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the then France which he terms as ‘four great philosophies’. These criticisms/philosophies are:

- (i) **Existentialism:** Primarily in the writings of Jean Paul Sartre’s critical words – in his studies of Baudelaire and Flaubert, and in his articles on Proust, Mauriac, Giraudoux and Ponge and above all in his outstanding book on Genet.
- (ii) **Marxism:** In the works of Lucien Goldman on Racine, Pascal, the ‘New Novel’, the avant-garde theatre and Malraux
- (iii) **Psychoanalysis:** In the analytical criticism of Charles Mauron on Racine and Mallarme.
- (iv) **Structuralism:** Brought into fashion in France by Claude Levi-Strauss with his work on social sciences and philosophical reflections. Roland Barthes then goes on to a detailed discussion of Structuralism as a theory and a philosophy which is heavily influenced by the linguistic model worked out by Ferdinand de Saussure and later elaborated by Roman Jakobson.

According to Roland Barthes criticism is not in any sense a table of results or a body of judgments; it is essentially an activity, that is to say a series of intellectual acts inextricably involved with the historical and subjective (the two terms synonymous) existence of the person who carried them out and has to assume responsibility for them. ... the object of criticism is very different; it deals not with “the world”, but with the linguistic formulations made by others; it is a comment on a comment, a secondary language or metalanguage (as logicians would say), applied to a primary language (or language as object).

What Roland Barthes says is that criticism is almost a secondary activity as criticism is done on literary texts. In that sense, literary texts are commentaries on the world/ reality and criticism is a commentary on the comment of the world. Therefore, Barthes calls it a ‘metalanguage.’ So, if a critic is dealing with a commentary on a comment on reality then what he or she is looking forward to is not truth but ‘forms of validity.’ And it is valid only when it consists of a coherent system of signs. Therefore, in Barthes’ opinion, the rules governing the language of literature are not concerned with the correspondence between that language and reality, but only with its being in line with the system of signs that the author has decided on. It is not the function of criticism to tell if an author has told the truth or not, but ‘its function is purely to evolve its own language and to make it as coherent and logical, that is as systematic, as possible, so that it can render an account of, or better still integrate.’ In other words, Barthes says that the task of criticism does not consist of discovering in the work of art, under consideration, some hidden or profound meaning, but to discover the formal system of logical rules of language that the author evolved in the conditions of his time.

The objective of the critic therefore is not to reconstitute the message of the work of art, but only its system. As a linguist, tries not to decipher the meaning of a sentence, but merely determines the formal structure which permits the transmission of meaning, similarly a critic's role is to look at the structure of a text to figure out how the structure / the system facilitates the meaning / signification of the text. Thus, Barthes champions the structuralist way of reading a text which emphasizes on the structure to be the most significant element of the text that the critic should focus on.

For a better understanding of structuralism, we will discuss the concept of structuralism in the succeeding section.

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### 10.4 STRUCTURALISM: A DISCUSSION

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Structuralism, says Gerard Genette, 'is a study of the cultural construction or identification of meaning according to the relations of signs that constitute the meaning-spectrum of the culture.' Structuralism is an intellectual movement and a method of approaching texts, practices, cultures which became popular in France in the 1950s and 60s, which is derived from the theoretical work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's seminal text *Course in General Linguistics* which was a text written much before the structuralist movement began. But Saussure's work is important as it emphasized on making a scientific study of language at a given point of time. Based on Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of scientific study of language, many social scientists and anthropologists and later literary scholars tried to bring scientific study of structure into other fields of studies. The chief exponents of Structuralism are – Louis Althusser in Marxism, Claude Levi-Strauss in anthropology, Roland Barthes in Cultural Studies, Pierre Macharey in literary theory. What unites all these scholars and their works is the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure and his theory on language.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913, born in Geneva), who is usually considered as the 'father of modern linguistics', studied Sanskrit and comparative linguistics in Geneva, Paris, and Leipzig. In 1878, at the age of twenty-one, Ferdinand de Saussure published a long and bright article 'Note on the Primitive System of the Indo-European Vowels' which established his credential as a young scholar. His most famous book *Course in General Linguistics* is not his own writing; but his ideas which he discussed with his students during their classes which the students put together. The book contains the ideas of Saussure which changed the way of studying language, society and culture.

Ferdinand de Saussure's influence on linguists was far-reaching, first through his direct influence on his students at the University of Geneva, who practically worshipped him, and then through his ideas as collected and disseminated after his death by two of his students, Charles Bally and Albert

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Sechaye. These students, who became well-known linguistic researchers in their own right, put together course notes from their and another student's notebooks to produce the *Cours de Linguistique Generale* (*Course in General Linguistics*). This composite work, shaped and interpreted by Bally and Sechaye, was prepared in the years immediately following Saussure's death as a tribute and as a way of making his brilliant ideas accessible beyond Geneva and for posterity. It worked: the *Cours de Linguistique Generale* was widely read in French by scholars all over Europe, and in 1959 was translated into English by Wade Baskin mainly for American students, who were less likely to have learned to read French than their European counterparts. A new translation of the *Cours de Linguistique Generale* by Roy Harris appeared in 1986.

Ferdinand de Saussure's fresh ideas were consonant with those of his influential compatriot Claude Levi-Strauss, and also those of Emile Durkheim, pioneer of the new field of sociology. Ferdinand de Saussure's influence spread all through the new social sciences in the early and mid-twentieth century, and ultimately, for better or worse, to literary theory and modern cultural studies. They still exert a very strong intellectual force in all these disciplines (probably most in Linguistics and the disciplines most influenced by literary theory; less so now in traditional Anthropology, Sociology, and Psychology).

In Linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure's focus on the synchronic dimension and on language as an interrelated system of elements was maintained through the American Structuralist period (Bloomfield, Charles Hockett), and also in the Generative period (Noam Chomsky, Bresnan). His view of the essential nature of the form-meaning pairing, without the intermediate and essentially meaningless syntactic layer posited by Chomsky, Perlmutter, and other generative theory-builders, has re-emerged in theories like Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (Sag and Pollard) and Construction Grammar.

Modern functionalist theories have integrated diachrony much more than generative theories (cf. the Functional Typology of Greenberg, Givón, Comrie, Heine, and Bybee), but the focus on the synchronic has nevertheless been essentially maintained in modern Cognitive theories of language, in keeping with the synchronic view of the human mind in the Cognitive Sciences, notably Psychology and Neuroscience.

Claude Levi-Strauss uses Saussure's linguistic model to discover the unconscious foundation of the culture in so called primitive societies. In his anthropological study of the myths, Levi-Strauss argued that Myths works like language. Anthropologists' task is to figure out the underlying conventions/ grammar/ structure, that is, the underlying rules and conventions of the myth which makes it meaningful. He says that myths are structured in terms of binary oppositions – such as good/bad, light/dark, culture/ nature,

man/woman, us/them, I/you etc. Basing his argument of Saussure's theory, Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that therefore meaning is the result of the interplay between similarity and difference.

Lévi-Strauss, moreover, figures out that all myths have similar structure. The purpose of myth(s) is to make the world explicable by magically resolving its problems and contradictions. In the four volumes of *Mythologiques*, he sought to explain the passage from nature to culture as symbolized in the indigenous cultures of North and South America. All Indian peoples, he concluded, 'seem to have conceived of their Myths for one purpose only: to come to terms with history and, on the level, of system, to re-establish a state of equilibrium capable of acting as a shock-absorber for the disturbances caused by real life events.' Meaning did not inhere in the myths themselves; the myths were media or grids through which one can make sense of a world that can never be known in itself. Lévi-Strauss' another famous work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949) dealt with a typically anthropological subject – marriage and descent – but in a typically semiological manner, through the attempt to construct a grammar of kinship. He is of the opinion that both kinship and phonology are systematic; in both, individual terms or entities are determined by their difference from others in the system; both function as unconscious structures; both are governed by general laws.

In *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss writes that 'no civilization can define itself if it does not have at its disposal some other civilizations for comparison.' Here he identified three stages in the history of Western Humanism that allowed the West to acquire such a perspective on its own culture:

- Renaissance Humanism, which looked back to antiquity to define itself in comparison with the past;
- Bourgeois humanism, when Europe became aware of the Orient and came to define itself as superior; and
- Democratic humanism, which subscribes to an ethic of tolerance and respect for different cultures.

Most societies have experienced progress and technological development. The difference is in the fact that Western culture 'has proved to be more cumulative than others.' Therefore, in *The Savage Mind*, he argues that savage was not at all savage in the sense of being either alien or primitive. He stressed that totemic religion and primitive science actually work perfectly well in their own systems. This conception releases us from notions of cultural superiority and unilinear narratives of progress from backwardness to enlightened modernity.

We have learnt before that structuralists try to look at the 'grammar', or the structure or the pattern of particular human systems of meaning. They do

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it for any human system whether kinship, garments, *haute cuisine*, narrative discourse, myths.

Structuralist narrative theory was developed from elementary linguistic formulation of Structuralism. Claude Lévi-Strauss, the structuralist anthropologist, worked on the Oedipus myth in a structuralist manner by using the linguistic model. A. J. Greimas, in his famous structuralist work *Sémantique Structurale* (1966), aimed to the universal ‘grammar’ of narrative. In place of Vladimir Propp’s seven ‘spheres of action’ (Vladimir Propp made a structuralist analysis of the Russian Fairy tales) Greimas proposes three pairs of binary oppositions which include all six roles:

- Subject/Object
- Sender/Receiver
- Helper/Opponent

The work of Tzvetan Todorov is a summation of Propp, Greimas and others. Gérard Genette developed his complex and powerful theory of discourse in the context of a study of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*. He refines the Russian Formalist distinction between ‘story’ and ‘by dividing narrative into three levels: story (*histoire*), discourse (*récit*), and narration. For example, in *Aeneid* II Aeneas is the story-teller addressing his audience (*narration*); he presents a verbal *discourse*; and his discourse represents events in which he appears as a character (*story*). Structuralism also underlines the importance of genre, that is, the basic rules as to how subjects can be approached and interpreted, about conventions of reading, significance of language use, and so forth. ‘Different genres lead to different expectations of types of situations and actions, and of psychological, moral, and esthetic values.’ (Genette)

Jonathan Culler was the first structuralist scholar who tried to amalgamate French structuralism with the Anglo-American critical perspective to provide novelty to the debate between the critical practices between the two continents in his famous work *Structuralist Poetics* (1975). Jonathan Culler starts with the basic premise that linguistics is the best model of scientific knowledge for the humanities and social sciences. Though instead of Saussure’s distinction between ‘*langue*’ and ‘*parole*’, Culler preferred Noam Chomsky’s distinction between ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ Competence, according to Chomsky, is the ideal ability of the native speaker of a particular language to use the language in any given circumstances, whereas performance is the real use of language by the native speaker of any language in a given circumstance.

Having Chomsky’s distinction between competence and performance in mind, Culler tries to show the significance of this in the perspective for literary theory, as he states that ‘the real object of poetics is not the work itself but its intelligibility. One must attempt to explain how it is that works can

be understood; the implicit knowledge, the conventions that enable readers to make sense of them, must be formulated...’ What is significant in Culler’s ideas is the shift we can perceive from the text to the reader.

Thus, according to Culler, one can determine the rules governing the interpretation of text(s), but it is difficult to govern the rules of writing. Thus, Culler’s perspective is reader-oriented as he is concerned more with how the readers can make sense of a literary text rather than the way the author has tried to construct it. For Culler, a skilled reader, when he comes across a text, knows what to do with it in terms of making sense of it. He knows the possible codes of interpreting the text which makes the text intelligible to him. Thus, according to Culler, the structure is not so important in the system underlying the text but more significant in the system underlying the reader’s act of interpretation.

Thus, the Structuralist model argues that:

- The structure of language itself produces reality – that our thought processes is governed by language and consequently, all our perceptions of reality are framed and determined by the structure of language. Therefore, all documents, whether history, film, literature, all cultural practices, all belief systems can be structurally analysed.
- The source of signification/ meaning is not an individual, but the rules and structure that govern language. In that sense the grammar of language, the sets of opposition and codes of its operations along with the signs (Signifier and Signified) govern the way we interpret the text, practices and everything around and within us. In that sense, the meaning does not arise from individual, but from the structure that governs the language within which the individual can interpret.
- In Structural analysis, meaning occurs through difference, as everything is paired in binary opposition. It is in these set of binaries that human beings thought process is governed. Meaning is derived not from the identification of the signifier (the sound pattern, whether verbal or orthographic) with object in the real world or with some concept (Signified); rather sense is generated by the difference among signs in a signifying system. Structuralists are of the opinion that our imaginative world is structured in terms of binary oppositions (man/woman, male/female, being/nothingness, hot/cold, culture/nature and so on and so forth).

Thus, rather than seeing the individual as the center of meaning, structuralism places the structure at the center – it’s the structure that originates or produces meaning, not the individual self. The post-structuralists have a problem with the centrality of the structure in Structuralism. The leading figure in post-structuralism and deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, looks at philosophy (Western metaphysics) to see that any system necessarily posits a

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center, a point from which everything comes, and to which everything refers or returns. Sometimes it's God, sometimes it's the human self, the mind, and sometimes it's the unconscious, depending on what philosophical system (or set of beliefs) one is talking about. Therefore, the post-structuralists criticize the structuralist thought process as it heavily emphasizes on a centre from where meaning arrives.

### Check Your Progress

3. Why does Barthes call criticism a 'metalanguage'?
4. Name the text written much before the structuralist movement began.
5. Who was the first structuralist scholar who tried to amalgamate French structuralism with the Anglo-American critical perspective?
6. From where does meaning occur in structural analysis?

## 10.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Roland Barthes most popular work *Mythologies* deals with the mechanisms by which meanings are produced and put into circulation. In the book *Mythologies*, Barthes discusses various things like wrestling, soap powders, toys, tourism, advertising, striptease, etc., to figure out how these things make sense to us in the signifying processes. Moreover, his objective is to bring the methodology of semiology to the things and events happening around us.
2. The thematic link between Barthes' works, is that he dealt with a single theme – the conventionality of all forms of representation.
3. Roland Barthes says that criticism is almost a secondary activity as criticism is done on literary texts. In that sense, literary texts are commentaries on the world/ reality and criticism is a commentary on the comment of the world. Therefore, Barthes calls it a 'metalanguage.'
4. The theoretical work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* was the text written much before the structuralist movement began.
5. Jonathan Culler was the first structuralist scholar who tried to amalgamate French structuralism with the Anglo-American critical perspective to provide novelty to the debate between the critical practices between the two continents in his famous work *Structuralist Poetics* (1975).
6. In structural analysis, meaning occurs through difference, as everything is paired in binary opposition. It is in these set of binaries that human



beings thought process is governed. Meaning is derived not from the identification of the signifier (the sound pattern, whether verbal or orthographic) with object in the real world or with some concept (Signified); rather sense is generated by the difference among signs in a signifying system.

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### 10.6 SUMMARY

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- Structuralists try to look at the ‘grammar’, or the structure or the pattern of particular human systems of meaning. They do it for any human system whether kinship, garments, *haute cuisine*, narrative discourse, myths. The liveliest examples of such writings of Roland Barthes are *Mythologies* (1957) and *Système de la mode* (1967). The theory of these studies is given in *Elements of Semiology*
- As writing is a ‘play’ of signifiers therefore Barthes points out that the readers while reading a text explore that ‘play’ and thus can afford to have their own signification of the text. Moreover, the writer should focus on writing in such a way that the readers experience that notion of ‘play’ in the writing.
- In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), Barthes emphasizes on two kinds of pleasure that a reader can experience while in the process of reading – Pleasure and Bliss.
- In *S/Z* (1970), Barthes points out the vanity of the structuralists to put every kind of story within a single structure. Barthes is of the opinion that not only each text is unique, but at the same time has ‘difference’ from each other which results from its own textuality.
- The essay ‘Criticism as Language’ by Roland Barthes where Barthes makes an attempt to understand the role of a critic from the structuralist point of view
- There are four varieties of criticisms or philosophies which existed in France in the 1960s – Existentialism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Structuralism.
- The objective of the critic as per Barthes is not to reconstitute the message of the work of art, but only its system. As a linguist, tries not to decipher the meaning of a sentence, but merely determines the formal structure which permits the transmission of meaning, similarly a critic’s role is to look at the structure of a text to figure out how the structure / the system facilitates the meaning / signification of the text. Thus, Barthes champions the structuralist way of reading a text which emphasizes on the structure to be the most significant element of the text that the critic should focus on.

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- Structuralism is an intellectual movement and a method of approaching texts, practices, cultures which became popular in France in the 1950s and 60s, which is derived from the theoretical work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's seminal text *Course in General Linguistics* which was a text written much before the structuralist movement began.
- The chief exponents of Structuralism are – Louis Althusser in Marxism, Claude Levi-Strauss in anthropology, Roland Barthes in Cultural Studies, Pierre Macharey in literary theory. What unites all these scholars and their works is the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure and his theory on language.
- Ferdinand de Saussure, who is usually considered as the 'father of modern linguistics', studied Sanskrit and comparative linguistics in Geneva, Paris, and Leipzig. His most famous book *Course in General Linguistics* is not his own writing; but his ideas which he discussed with his students during their classes which the students put together. The book contains the ideas of Saussure which changed the way of studying language, society and culture.
- Ferdinand de Saussure's fresh ideas were consonant with those of his influential compatriot Claude Levi-Strauss, and also those of Emile Durkheim, pioneer of the new field of sociology. Ferdinand de Saussure's influence spread all through the new social sciences in the early and mid-twentieth century, and ultimately, for better or worse, to literary theory and modern cultural studies.
- Claude Levi-Strauss uses Saussure's linguistic model to discover the unconscious foundation of the culture in so called primitive societies. In his anthropological study of the myths, Levi-Strauss argued that Myths works like language. Anthropologists' task is to figure out the underlying conventions/ grammar/ structure, that is, the underlying rules and conventions of the myth which makes it meaningful.
- In *Structural Anthropology*, Levi-Strauss writes that 'no civilization can define itself if it does not have at its disposal some other civilizations for comparison.' Here he identified three stages in the history of Western Humanism that allowed the West to acquire such a perspective on its own culture: Renaissance Humanism, Bourgeois humanism, and Democratic humanism.
- Greimas proposes three pairs of binary oppositions which include all six roles: Subject/Object, Sender/Receiver and Helper/Opponent.
- Jonathan Culler was the first structuralist scholar who tried to amalgamate French structuralism with the Anglo-American critical perspective to provide novelty to the debate between the critical practices between the two continents in his famous work *Structuralist Poetics* (1975). Jonathan Culler starts with the basic premise that

linguistics is the best model of scientific knowledge for the humanities and social sciences.

- Rather than seeing the individual as the center of meaning, structuralism places the structure at the center – it's the structure that originates or produces meaning, not the individual self. The post-structuralists have a problem with the centrality of the structure in Structuralism. The leading figure in post-structuralism and deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, looks at philosophy (Western metaphysics) to see that any system necessarily posits a center, a point from which everything comes, and to which everything refers or returns.

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### 10.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Anthropology:** Anthropology is a branch of social science studies which emphasizes on the study of humanity and its different aspects, such as, the study of kinship and social organization, economic and political organization, law and conflict resolution, patterns of consumption and exchange, material culture, technology, language etc.
- **Linguistics:** Linguistics is the scientific study of human language.
- **Signifier and Signified:** In Saussure's theory of language, a sign refers to a combination of the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the graphic or the verbal element of a word – that is the mark that we make while writing it or the sound that we make while uttering it. The signified refers to the concept that the signifier refers to.

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### 10.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. What are the four great philosophies as per Barthes?
2. Write a short note on the two kinds of pleasures in a text as per Barthes.
3. List Claude Lévi-Strauss' stages of history of Western Humanism that allowed the West to acquire such a perspective on its own culture.
4. What are the three pairs of binary opposition as per Greimas?
5. Why does Strauss say that meaning is the result of the interplay between similarity and difference?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the main argument of Roland Barthes' essay 'Criticism as Language'.

2. What do you think is the role of a critic as Roland Barthes points out in the essay 'Criticism as Language'?
3. Describe, in detail, the literary movement of structuralism.

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### 10.9 FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 11 JACQUES DERRIDA

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### Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’: Summary and Critical Comments
- 11.3 Deconstruction
- 11.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.5 Summary
- 11.6 Key Words
- 11.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.8 Further Readings

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### 11.0 INTRODUCTION

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Jacques Derrida, a French Philosopher who teaches Philosophy at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, in his essay ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ and his famous book *Of Grammatology* (Translated by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak) came up with the questions of the western metaphysical preoccupation with ‘logos’ (logocentrism) and destabilizes the whole of Western Metaphysics to open up the infinite possibilities of signification. Derrida puts the basic question about the metaphysical assumption since the Classical Greek times that presupposes a ‘center’ of meaning.

Even the Structuralist theories also suffers from a similar problem according to Derrida and therefore he questions the whole of the western metaphysical tradition and shows how the western metaphysics is based on a desire for a centre as it guarantees ‘being as presence.’ This desire for a fixed center is being termed in *Of Grammatology* as ‘Logocentrism.’

In this unit, we will first focus on the seminal essay by Derrida ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ and then will discuss Derrida’s notion of deconstruction in detail so as to build a perspective about how the he is a post-structuralist thinker who has put the erstwhile philosophies into question to ascertain free play of signification infinitely.

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### 11.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the important elements of Jacques Derrida’s essay ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’

- Examine Derrida's questioning of the 'structurality of structure'
- Describe Derrida's positing of deconstruction as an analytical tool

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### 11.2 'STRUCTURE, SIGN AND PLAY IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES': SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS

Jacques Derrida's essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' heralds a new beginning or a rupture in the western thought process when it questions the classical structuralist and humanist as well as empiricist discourses and thought processes of western world by positing the question of 'the structurality of structure.' It was a paper presented in a seminar titled 'The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man' held at John Hopkins University, Baltimore, the United States of America, in 1966.

In this paper Derrida emphasizes how the notion of structure is also old as the episteme, that is, as old as western science and western philosophy and how the notion of a structure presupposes a centre which closes of the notion of 'play' –

the function of this center was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure – one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure – but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of structure would limit what we might call the *free play* of structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.

As Derrida states a little later in the essay –

The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its centre elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure – although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the episteme as philosophy or science – is contradictorily coherent. ... This is why one perhaps could say that the movement of any archaeology, like that of any eschatology, is an accomplice of this reduction of the structurality of structure and always attempts to conceive the structure on the basis of a full presence which is beyond play. (ibid, 90)

Thus, as against the centrality of structure, Derrida posits how 'play' (infinite) is significant is the signifying processes and how structuralist thought process mars the infinite play of signification in the name of episteme, similar to the humanist, rationalist or the idealist tradition. Thus the 'transcendental signified', the presence of it becomes the centre and consequently not only organizes, balances and orients the structure but at the same time sets limits to its signification. Derrida posits that 'the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.' (91)

To attain this infinite play of signification, Derrida is of the opinion that centre should be destabilized so that it loses its 'fixed locus' and lead to a much freer play – 'Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign substitutions come into play.' (91)

In this context, it is essential to remember that from the beginning of the twentieth century, poets and writers have been encountering the falling apart of the centre (of the being) whether one talks about Yeats' famous proclamation in *The Second Coming* – 'Things fall apart, centre cannot hold / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the earth' or the fragmented self of Eliot's Prufrock (in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*) or that of the jaundiced parasitical existence of Joyce's protagonists. But whereas the modern writers and poets presented their 'angst,' their sad realization of the falling apart of the centre, Jacques Derrida points out that falling apart of the center or the decentralization has its own radical advantages as it leads to a much less intellectually oppressive environment in the process of signification.

Jacques Derrida points out in the essay that his postulation is nothing new. This rupture / event (as he mentions it) in the history of intellectual thought has already being done by Nietzsche in his critique of metaphysics and in the concepts of being and truth, in Freudian critique of self-presence and in Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics. Therefore, many tend to ascribe the term Nietzschean irrationalist / nihilist to Derrida without fully realizing how he is not there to subvert every standard of reason and truth just for the sake of it, but 'to systematize a deconstructive critique precisely against the authority of meaning, as the transcendental signified or as telos, in other words history determined in the last analysis as the history of meaning.' (Derrida, *Positions: Interview with Jean – Loudebibe and Guy Scarpetta*, Trans and Annotated by Alan Bass, Continuum, London and New York, 2002).

In the essay, Derrida therefore states, 'The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of the signification infinitely.' (91) Thus Derridean 'play' is to liberate the signification process from the tharldom of its deepest recesses of 'episteme.' This process is named as Deconstruction – a process of reading where the traditional methods (ethnological, ...). Derrida then goes on to portray how Levi-Strauss is caught in the binary opposition of nature / culture which is an opposition that is 'at least as old as the Sophists.' (93)

In the book *Elementary Structures*, Levi-Strauss 'begins from this axiom on definitions that which is universal and spontaneous and not dependent on any particular culture or on any determinate norm, belongs to nature. Inversely, that which depends upon a system of norms regulating society and therefore is capable of varying from one social structure to another,

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belongs to culture.’ Apparently, the binary opposition of nature versus culture thus seems to be distinguished but such distinctions are based on epistemes whose basis can be very easily questioned and destabilized. Derrida does so by referring to Incest prohibition which is universal and may seem natural; but at the same time as it is based on a system of norms, therefore also cultural. Thus, by example of the incest taboo and prohibition, Derrida unsettles the binary opposition of nature versus culture to show how ‘language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique.’ (94)

Derrida then posits that this critique of language can take two paths –

- (a) One can systematically and rigorously question the history of these concepts (binary oppositions). But this systematic and historic questioning, according to Derrida ‘is neither a philological nor a philosophical action in the classical sense of the term.’ (94)
- (b) The second choice is ‘to avoid the possibly sterilizing effects of the first one, (and) ... in conserving all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used. No longer is any truth value attributed to them: there is a readiness to abandon them ...’ (95). Levi-Strauss does it, according to Derrida, by having a ‘double intention.’:
  - (i) Of preserving these binary oppositions as methodological tools; and
  - (ii) Of criticizing the truth value of these binary oppositions.

If Levi-Strauss does have this ‘double intention’ in *Elementary Structures*; in *The Savage Mind*, Levi-Strauss presents ‘bricolage’ as the discourse of this method. Derrida mentions that bricolage is the way in which the signification process could carry on till the time we have a new of things to do away with the traditional signification process. Derrida therefore emphasizes on the ‘free play’ as against the ‘structurality of structure’ and emphasizes on ‘différance’ as the way in which the readings can be possible.

In the next section on ‘Deconstruction’ we will take up the notion of ‘différance’ along with the philosophical background with and against which Jacques Derrida is reacting with his deconstructive criticism.

### Check Your Progress

1. What must be done to attain an infinite play of signification as per Derrida?
2. What, according to Derrida, are the radical advantages of decentralization?



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### 11.3 DECONSTRUCTION

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Jacques Derrida points out, following the Nietzschean argument, that the figural power of language has always stood in the way of truth and knowledge. In this connection, it is important to understand that Nietzsche points out that truth is nothing more than a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphism – in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and heroically. This Nietzschean lead makes Derrida question language which is grounded on truth, finality and metaphysical closure. We have figured out while discussing the essay ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ that Derrida objects to the notion of ‘presence’, as he writes – ‘It could be shown that all names related to fundamentals, to principles or to the centre have designated the constant of a presence.’ It is this self-presence which is actually absent which makes Derrida come up with his notion of Deconstruction.

Derrida is of the view that whatever is logocentric is phonocentric, the latter merging with ‘the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence with all the sub determinations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to the sight as eidos, presence as substance/ essence/existence (ousia), temporal point as presence as point of the now or of the moment (nun), the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness and subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth. Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being, of the entity as presence.’ Evidently all the concepts in the foregoing citation relate themselves to the metaphysics of presence. In pairs such as speech / writing, soul / body, literal / metaphorical, nature / culture, positive / negative, meaning / form, serious / non-serious, transcendental / empirical, the first term is invariably accorded priority over the second. What Jacques Derrida notices in these opposing pairs is a kind of debasement of writing under the overwhelming episteme of speech itself which makes Derrida questions the very parameter which privileges speech over writing.

Derrida figures out and expresses the repression of writing under the logocentric systematics of Rousseau and Saussure. ‘Writing is nothing but the representation of speech; it is bizarre that one gives more care to the determining of the image than to the object,’ says Rousseau. In this kind of a statement by Rousseau speech is valorized over writing. Ferdinand de Saussure too privileges phone and logos. In his celebration of these, writing is condemned, a fact which Derrida laments. ‘... It is within a sort of intralinguistic leper colony that Saussure wants to contain and concentrate the problem of deformations through writing’. As against these notions of

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Rousseau and Saussure, Derrida is of the opinion that writing is not a subdued partner of speech and thus he gives writing something new and different which makes us look at this binary opposition from a fresh and different perspective.

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### *Box 11.1 For Further Information*

In 'Signature Event Context', Derrida gives writing three characteristics:

- A written sign is a mark which can be repeated in the absence not only of the subject who emitted it in a specific context but also of a specific addressee.
- The written sign can break its 'real context' and can be read in a different context regardless of what its writer intended. Any chain of signs can be 'grafted' into a discourse in another context (as in a quotation).
- The written sign is subject to 'spacing' (*espacement*) in two senses: first, it is separated from other signs in a particular chain; second, it is separated from 'present reference' (that is, it can refer only to something not actually present in it).

Derrida points out that writing is widespread and irrepressible and in that it 'precedes, exceeds and comprehends' language, it is the origin of language. Writing is distinct from the one which limits it to the alphabetic-phonetic script—a carrier of the spoken sound. It is grammatological and primary and as an *archi-écriture* it comprehends speech as its vocal instantiation. 'What writing itself' says Derrida 'in its non-phonetic moment betrays is life. It menaces at once the breath, the spirit, and history as the spirit relations with itself. It is their end, their finitude, their paralysis cutting breath short, sterilizing of immobilizing spiritual creation in the repetition of the letter... it the principle of death and difference in the becoming of being.'

Such writing does not exclude physical marks. It functions in the absence of the speaker disavowing any certain access to meaning thought. Thus, different from the logocentric writing it entails a reordering of the polarities engendered by speech and the like. Thus, writing precedes speech, graphic phone, silence absence, non-being being, 'écriture' alphabetic phonetic script, unconscious conscious and absence presence. 'And thus' remarks Derrida 'we say "writing" for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural "writing" one might also speak of military or political writing in view of the techniques that govern those domains.'

Derrida's *écriture* or writing is a technical innovation for the sign functioning independently of the subject. His grammatology is therefore not different from the Saussurean Semiology, though Saussure's linguistic enterprise is a network of differential relations opposed to the traditional idea that language has positive entities in terms of words forming a system with a view to signification. Saussure's is a system of signs where there are

differences without positive terms. Yet through his insistence on a distinction between the sensible and the intelligible along the synchronic axis, he affirms 'the spoken word' to the detriment of its semiotic independence.

Derrida, on the other hand, envisions a diachronic model privileging genesis over structure. This is expressed in terms of the temporal connection between trace and origin. And the two are never present to each other. In fact, Derrida finds Husserl, too being towed away by the logocentric pull when he posits being as presence without the intervention of signs. Signs to him become secondary. By relegating language to a 'secondary stratum,' Husserl, complains Derrida only 'confirms the traditional phonologism of metaphysics.' To Derrida, Husserl capitulates to a dichotomization of signs and along the logocentric line privileges the expressive over the indicative sign. To him two are not far apart. He therefore would not assent to a semiological split as can be evident from the following. 'Although there is no meaning without speech, on the other hand not everything in speech is expressive. Although discourse would not be possible without an expressive core, one could almost say that the totality of speech is caught up in an indicative web'.

However, Derrida scrambles the logocentric semiology through the Husserlian temporality according to which the presence of the present moment is expressed in terms of retention and protention or memory and anticipation. In fact, he stays with retention, the retention of the past until the sign is replaced by trace, 'the arch-phenomenon of memory'. As a unit of writing, this trace is a network of relations totalizing as absent, a substitution for the snake. Although situated in the present, it refers to the past. 'It is a trace of something that can never present itself that is that can never appear and manifest itself as such in its phenomenon'. In fact, there is 'no originary trace.' Every trace is a trace of trace ad infinitum. Its different forms may comprise architrace, gramme, grapheme difference. Even writing 'is just one of the representatives of trace in general. It is not the trace itself. The (pure) trace does not exist.' Recasting Saussure's, Derrida 'shall call it grammatology.'

To unground the metaphysics of presence, the Derridean writing evolves a whole bunch of figuralizers: Différance, supplement, iterability, context, undecidability, etc. Let us take différance first. Différance is a French neologism which combines two verbs 'to differ' and 'to defer'. It 'denotes not only the activity of primordial difference but also the temporalizing detour of deferring.' This coinage is designed to seize on more spatio-temporal movement than any other traditionally established founding concepts like consciousness, absolute truth, self-identity, intuition. Everything is as it is only as it differs from or defers any other. 'Each' is 'other' at the same time. This undoer of self-identity seems to resemble syncategorematic terms like 'for' and 'of' which are only relational. It is 'non-full, non simple origin; it is the structured and differing origin of differences.' But, 'there is no name

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for it, not even being-not even the name of “différance” which is not a pure nominal unity, and continually breaks up in a chain of substitutions.’ It is just a metaphysical tag. Another sample runs, ‘There is nothing kerygmatic about this work so long as we perceive its reduction to a lower case letter.’ Yet *différance* is different from Saussurean and Heideggerian distinction and difference which look for a resting place of Being or Mimesis or Truth or Centre or origin and self. In fact, Derrida’s difference offers a critique of both classical semiology and phenomenology. ‘There is no presence before the semiological difference or outside of it.’

One of the ways in which writing is structured is through supplementarity. Another name for difference, it is surrounded like other Derridean non-words by a string of negotiations; ‘neither a presence nor an absence... neither substance nor an essence of man...it is precisely the play of presence and absence, the opening of this play that no metaphysical concept can comprehend.’ It is a deconstructive lever inserted in the interstices of speech and writing, nature and culture, nature and education, sex and masturbation, man and woman and such other binary oppositions. A discovery based on Derrida’s is not a mere addition to the pairs. On the contrary it is an inevitable condition of the totalized actualization.

According to Rousseau, writing is an addition to speech. What he does not discover himself is that it is writing that completes the speech. For speech basically shares some of the features of writing, such as absence and misunderstanding or ‘Semiotic independence.’ Hence writing and speech are not two different things. In a sense thus supplementarity is co-extensive with the growth and development of humanity. As a model of ‘ensemble’ it comprehends society, speech, education, sex, economics, and history. As Leitch explains ‘... The pure entity, the uncontaminated thing, the immediate presence, the pristine object and the “undivided origin comes forth as necessarily as fictions.”’

Textuality is another deconstructive liquefier in the Derridean lexicon. According to Derrida there is nothing outside the text, but this text is an ever-expanding universe where presence, meaning, consciousness can only be assembled together. No word of the text has a unique existence. Its existence is a matter of diacritical relationship with other words. Further as Derrida says, ‘The thing always escapes’, ideality of meaning as consciousness is a fake. It is only an inscription; and just like the Freudian unconsciousness it is already inscribed in the material space of the mind. (WSD) What thus issues from the mind as consciousness meaning, and presence is an effect which is not originary. The obvious text is an intertext: and so this continues in an endless chain. Since there is no access to pure perception what the reader runs up against is an ever-fluid textuality which has just a provisional status as the realization of meaning and presence. In the language of Julia Kristeva,

it may be an instance of ‘geno-text’, as against the ‘pheno-text’ that structures the logocentric texts.

A crucial development in the deconstructive lexicon synchronizes with Derrida’s encounter with Austin’s speech Act philosophy. With a view to removing the traditional dichotomy which marked a statement as true/false, Austin offers his models of constatives and performatives – the former either true or false, the latter independent of both truth and falsity but deviant and dispensable from the traditional point of view performing only actions. ‘I hereby promise to pay you tomorrow’ accomplishes the rhetorical act of promising. Other performatives may include declaring a couple man and wife and also naming some object (ship). Such utterances are held by ‘illocutionary force’. Thus, while on the one hand Austin frees performatives from the constraints of truth and falsity, on the other he substitutes ‘illocutionary force’ as an indispensable tag to them. And once he has done this, he seems to return to the logocentric systematics and classified performatives as genuine performatives and parasitic or failed cases of performatives.

‘A performative utterance’, according to Austin, ‘will ..... Be ..... hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage or introduced in a poem or spoken on the stage in soliloquy. this applies in a similar manner, to any and every utterance-a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is ..... used not seriously but in way parasitic upon its normal use-ways which fall under the doctrine of etiologies of language. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.’

As the image of the parasite indicates, the ordinary language uses both kinds of serious and non-serious utterances. But the non-serious case is not the standard case. This exclusion is the chief source of trouble for Derrida. He holds that the so-called non-serious case is a structural possibility that goes with the serious use itself. To quote Derrida, ‘What Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, ‘non-serious’ citation (on stage, in a poem, or in a soliloquy), is the determined modification of the general citationality – or that general interability – without which there would not even be a “successful speech-act”?’

Iterability is therefore a defining feature of all kinds of utterances. A derivative from ‘Itara’ meaning ‘other’ in Sanskrit, it is a form of conventional repetition which goes with alterity. Each time it turns up, it is different from its last presence. Austinian performatives take on their meanings from the conventional forms and tokens of utterances which are in existence even before speakers come to use them – a fact which Austin does not realize. If he can use them in specific contexts, the meanings are doubtless context bound. But according to Derrida the context itself is always unbound: ‘no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation. What I am referring to here is not the richness of substance, semantic fertility,

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but the rather structure, the structure of the remnant of iteration.’ Thus, the iterability of the speech-acts-the power of its transference from one context to another only means that these acts cannot be enclosed in the unique self-presence of being or meaning. Another model of iterability is signature. Signature, a performative to start with, is an index of the signifying intention of the signatory. This function of the signature is what Derrida questions. The machine or the rubber stamp signs the check and his payment is made irrespective of the intention of the real signatory.

According to Searle, Derrida relying on the type-token distinction has made a misapplication of iteration to the Austinian parasitic discourse as can be seen from the following:

... to begin with most of the instances of parasitic discourse are not cases of citation at all. They are to repeat cases where expressions are used and not mentioned. But more important, parasitic discourse of the kind we have been considering is a determined modification of the rules for performing speech act, but it is not in any way a modification of iterability or citationality.’

Not surprisingly, Searle concludes that, ‘the iterability of linguistic forms facilitates and is a necessary condition of the particular forms of intentionality that are characteristic of Speech-Act.’

In fact, there is no radical difference between Derrida and Searle over the intentionality as such. Derrida comprehends it in a variety of forms of iteration; ‘In such a typology the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance ... The iteration structuring it a priori introduces into it a dehiscence and a cleft.’

Philosophy of language is verbal nirvana that cannot do without is figuralization culminating in Derridean dehiscence and cleft (Abram would say in ‘nescience’). Traditionally reference and representation have performed the role of ‘karma’. This karma places curbs on the freedom of an individual. In a similar way, reference or representation circumscribes through semantic constraints the role of the signifier. Yet a certain ‘slippage’ cannot be forestalled. This is why Barthes too notes slippage or aberration of referential meaning in his reply to Searle’s knock-down case of straight forward communication. More than that, he advances his concept of writing intransitively meaning writing in freedom from all referential constraints. This seems to mean that language is self-reflexive. Can it be so? ‘Houch’ and ‘Hurray’ and the like indicate an emotive use as distinct from the descriptive or referential one.

Yet as Foucault would argue, even such emotional outbursts are not self-begotten; for, emotional states do precede them. A case is usually built that the purely non-representational language is the language of fiction. For fiction fights shy of real people and events. Two things are adduced against

such a view too. First, reference and representation cannot be restricted to the depiction of the actual world. Second, the fictional discourse as Searle would insist does have a logical status in that a signifier can refer as much to real events and real people as to the fictive entities. Some difficulties arise in cases of fictional involvements of authors like Samuel Beckett whose texts propagate overwhelming nothingness or linguistic nihilism. A philosopher like Derrida does not despair of this linguistic nihilism; on the contrary he rejoices at it and may recast it as 'verbal nirvana' which is nothing short of linguistic revolution. This nirvana is closer to, if not identical with what Rorty calls philosophy as a kind of writing and a revolt against the 'Kantian cosmologization and eternalization of the present.' Under its overarching shadow there is going to be no 'vertical' relationship between the word and the world. There can be only a horizontal seriality without a paradigm. Philosophy is thus 'delimited as any literary genre not by form and matter, but by tradition—a family romance involving e.g. Father Parmenides, honest Uncle Kant and bad brother Derrida.' For his own part does not Derrida look for foreign words, queer etymologies, name-droppings, and the likeness between 'Hegel' and 'eagle' in the French phonemics conditioned by his bunch of figuralizers which nudge him too often into the Indo-European white mythology/metaphorics. For him, white mythology is a 'metaphysics which has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being and which yet remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, and invisible drawing covered over in the palimpsest?'

In conclusion, we can say that Deconstruction is a new movement in the academic world in the 1970s when Derrida questioned the scientific pretensions of discourses and signification processes and showed to the world that such pretensions only make the ruling class control the signification process for their own benefits. He emphasized on 'free play' of meaning which is necessary for opening up the signification process and to show how deconstruction is the way through which eternal possibilities of meaning is possible. It may be accused by many that Derrida is an irrationalist or a nihilist who is opening up Pandora's box and there is nothing he offers as replacement. But that is the whole point that Derrida is making when he uses the notion of *différance* that there is no notion of replacement, but supplementarity. That in the process of getting to the signification of thing we are only postponing our search of meaning. Derrida's deconstructive reading may have many critics; but as a methodological tool it is of supreme importance as it opens up the infinite possibilities.

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**Check Your Progress**

3. List the figuralizers propounded by Derrida to unground the metaphysics of presence.
4. Mention the other model of iterability.
5. What is the model offered by Austin with a view to removing the traditional dichotomy which marks a statement true/false?

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**11.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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1. To attain the infinite play of signification, Derrida is of the opinion that centre should be destabilized so that it loses its 'fixed locus' and lead to a much freer play.
2. Jacques Derrida points out that falling apart of the center or the decentralization has its own radical advantages as it leads to a much less intellectually oppressive environment in the process of signification.
3. To unground the metaphysics of presence, Derridean writing evolves a whole bunch of figuralizers: Différance, supplement, iterability, context, undecidability, etc.
4. Another model of iterability is signature.
5. With a view to removing the traditional dichotomy which marked a statement as true/false, Austin offers his models of constatives and performatives.

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**11.5 SUMMARY**

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- Jacques Derrida, a French Philosopher who teaches Philosophy at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, in his essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' and his famous book *Of Grammatology* (Translated by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak) came up with the questions of the western metaphysical preoccupation with 'logos' (logocentricism) and destabilizes the whole of Western Metaphysics to open up the infinite possibilities of signification. The desire for a fixed center is being termed in *Of Grammatology* as 'Logocentricism.'
- Jacques Derrida's essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' heralds a new beginning or a rupture in the western thought process when it questions the classical structuralist and humanist as well as empiricist discourses and thought processes of western world by positing the question of 'the structurality of structure.'



- To attain the infinite play of signification, Derrida is of the opinion that centre should be destabilized so that it loses its ‘fixed locus’ and lead to a much freer play – ‘Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign substitutions come into play.’
- In the essay, Derrida states, ‘The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of the signification infinitely.’
- Jacques Derrida points out, following the Nietzschean argument, that the figural power of language has always stood in the way of truth and knowledge.
- Derrida figures out and expresses the repression of writing under the logocentric systematics of Rousseau and Saussure.
- Derrida is of the opinion that writing is not a subdued partner of speech and thus he gives writing something new and different which makes us look at this binary opposition from a fresh and different perspective.
- To unground the metaphysics of presence, the Derridean writing evolves a whole bunch of figuralizers: Différance, supplement, iterability, context, undecidability, etc.

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### 11.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Logocentrism:** It refers to the desire for a centre in Derrida’s classic work, *Of Grammatology*.
- **Logos:** ‘Logos’ (Greek for ‘word’) is a term which in the New Testament carries the greatest possible concentration of presence: ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ Being the origin of all things, the ‘Word’ underwrites the full presence of the world; everything is the effect of this one cause. Even though the Bible is written, God’s word is essentially *spoken*. A spoken word emitted from a living body appears to be closer to an originating thought than a written word.
- **Nietzsche:** Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was a 19th-century German philosopher and poet whose style and radical questioning of the value and objectivity of truth have resulted in much commentary and interpretation in post-modernism.
- **Metaphysics of Presence:** The deconstructive criticism points out that the entire history of Western philosophy has emphasized on the desire for immediate access to meaning, and thus built the metaphysics around the privileging of presence over absence.

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- **Modernism:** It generally refers to the broad aesthetic movements of the twentieth century which reflected a set of philosophical, political, and ethical ideas which provide the basis for the aesthetic aspect of modernism.
- **Hegemony:** Hegemony is power exerted by a dominant group over others. It requires the consent of the majority to keep the dominant group in power.
- **Enlightenment:** Enlightenment the term was applied to the intellectual and cultural movement in Western Europe during the seventeenth century which reached its height in the eighteenth century.

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## 11.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a critical note on 'supplementarity'.
2. Write a note on Derrida's position on the binary opposite of speech / writing.
3. Briefly explain Derrida's position on the comparison between writing and speech.
4. Write short notes on the following:
  - Deconstruction
  - Bricolage
5. Write a short note on Austin's constatives and performatives.
6. What is verbal nirvana as per Derrida?

### Long Answer Questions

1. Write a critical note on Derrida's essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'.
2. What is Derrida's point of view on the binary opposition of nature / culture in 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'? Do you agree with him? Give reasons for your answer.
3. What is 'différance'? Write a critical note on it.
4. Do you agree that Derrida's Deconstructive reading strategies have opened up the possibilities of infinite signification? How?

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## 11.8 FURTHER READINGS

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**BLOCK - IV**  
**CRITICISM XII - XIV**

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**UNIT 12 MARK SCHORER**

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**Structure**

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 ‘Technique as Discovery’: Summary and Critical Comments
- 12.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.4 Summary
- 12.5 Key Words
- 12.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.7 Further Readings

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**12.0 INTRODUCTION**

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Mark Schorer (May 17, 1908 – August 11, 1977) was an American writer, critic, and scholar born in Sauk City, Wisconsin. Schorer earned his Post-graduate degree at Harvard University and his Doctorate in English at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in the year 1936. During his academic career, he held positions at different universities -- Dartmouth, Harvard, and the University of California, Berkeley, where he chaired the Department of English from 1960 to 1965. He was a principal critic of his time and was well known for his work on American nobel laureate Sinclair Lewis – *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*. Schorer was authored many short stories, which appeared in magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Harpers*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *Esquire*.

The essay ‘Technique as Discovery’ originally appeared in the Hudson Review, Spring in the year 1948. In the essay ‘Technique as Discovery’, Mark Schorer takes up few novels written in English to point out how technique is the most important thing that a writer should be concerned about. Mark Schorer is of the opinion that technique is what makes the writer. Though this idea can be debated, yet technique remains one of the most significant issues that a writer should deal with so as to produce good literature. In this unit, we will discuss the important elements of the essay.

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**12.1 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Critically analyse Schorer’s essay ‘Technique as Discovery’
- Describe the authors and works referred to by Schorer in the essay ‘Technique as Discovery’

## 12.2 ‘TECHNIQUE AS DISCOVERY’: SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS

In some ways, the essay ‘Technique as Discovery’ by Mark Schorer can be talked about as a significant contribution to the New Criticism, a brand of criticism which was much prevalent in the early twentieth century.

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#### *Box 12.1 A Short Note on New Criticism*

New Criticism refers to a movement in Literary Criticism, developed in 1920s which advocated ‘close reading’ of literary texts and detailed textual analysis of poetry rather than focusing on the mind and personality of the poet to analyse poems or the socio-political history of the time when the text was written. This brand of criticism also did not take into account the socio-political and cultural backdrop of the readers in their interpretation of texts. It can be said that New criticism was obsessed with ‘the text itself’, the text(s) as supposed icons of human values which is deployed against twentieth-century cultural barbarism. Moreover, New Criticism being scientific in its approach of looking at the texts focused on objectivity as a criterion of analysis and favoured disinterested criticism of the text(s), primarily poems.

The term New Criticism was coined in 1910 in a lecture of the similar title by Joel Spingarn. Spingarn was influenced by Expressionist theory of art and aesthetics (expounded by the Italian Scholar and philosopher Benedetto Croce) who advocated a creative and imaginative criticism of literature which gave no importance to historical or psychological considerations. Spingarn was not directly related to the movement which developed in the next decade.

In the works of early twentieth century critics of England, such as of T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, William Empson and others the critical movement of New Criticism finds its origin. Thomas Stearns Eliot’s critical works are thought to be the prime influence on New Criticism.

#### **The American New Critics**

American New Criticism emerged in the 1920s and became dominant mode of critical activity in the U. S. academia in the 1940s and 1950s. It established itself as the new professional criticism in the emerging discipline of ‘English’ first in England (as discussed earlier) after the First World War and in 1940s it took the US academy by storm. Though the practitioners of New Criticism in U.S. has a varied outlook, yet there are certain features of American New Criticism which are enumerated below:

1. The proponents of New Criticism were all from the Agrarian South (also known as Fugitives). Therefore, New Criticism is often thought as a traditional, conservative, Southern-oriented movement which was hostile to the industrialism and materialism of a United States dominated by ‘the North’. Thus, the proponents of New Criticism were in his opposition to modern ‘inorganic’ civilization. The cultural barbarism of the industrial modern society was seen by the new critics as a threat to the organic nature of life and representation. Consequently, they focused on the organic nature of the texts and dealt only with it.
2. New Criticisms was at its peak during the Second World War and the Cold War which immediately succeeded it. Therefore, it privileged the literary

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texts (order, harmony and transcendence), rather than focusing on the context and had its thrust on impersonal, scientific and objective analysis of literary creations.

3. As stated earlier New Criticism also helped in the democratization of literary studies. Students from different cultural, political and economic background were pouring in the US academic world. With the huge expansion of the student population in the United States, New Criticism with its 'practical criticism' became a necessary pedagogic tool, as it was difficult to get to the diversity of the Cultural and socio-political background of the students and then interpret the texts according to their background and ideological leanings. Therefore, instead of looking at the context and the ideology of the reader/ students, New Criticism focused on the texts and its practical criticism
4. Therefore, New Criticism is ahistorical and neutral in nature as it is only concerned with the study the words on the page. Ahistorical in the sense that New Criticism is not concerned with the *context*, whether historical, biographical, intellectual, nor is it interested in the fallacies of 'intention' or 'affect'; it is concerned solely with the 'text in itself', with its language and organization; it does not seek a text's 'meaning', but how it 'speaks itself'; it is concerned to trace how the parts of the text relate, how it achieves its 'order' and 'harmony', how it contains and resolves 'irony', 'paradox', 'tension', 'ambivalence' and 'ambiguity'; and it is concerned essentially with articulating the very 'poem-ness'

Mark Schorer is of the opinion that technique is the most significant thing for a writer as it is the technique which decides everything else – 'technique is the only means he (the writer) has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it.' So, when one speaks of technique of a writer, one is actually talking about almost everything which makes Schorer comment – 'Modern Criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it only when we speak of the achieved content, the form, the work of art, that we speak as critics.' So according to Mark Schorer, a critic's role therefore is not to look much at the content of the writing, but mostly one has to look the technique of the writer as it is the technique which makes the writing what it is. The same content can take up different shape based on the technique. So according to Schorer, technique is of supreme importance and in the essay 'Technique as Discovery', he is showing how if the technique is right, then the work of art succeeds and if the technique is not right then how it is forgotten very quickly even if the content is very significant.

Mark Schorer, therefore, is of the opinion that the prime job of the critic while reading a literary text is to look at how far the technique of the writer suits the purpose of his writing. Similar to that of New Critics, who harped on the technical and linguistic aspects of a literary text, Mark Schorer is of the opinion that the role of a critic is to look at the technique from as close quarters as possible in trying to decipher the meaning of the literary texts.

Many people/scholars try to think and tend to believe that technique is not a primary, but a supplementary element in writing – but one has to

remember that it is the technique which gets the supreme significance – ‘As for the resources of language, somehow, we almost never think of as a part of the technique of fiction – language as used to create a certain texture and tone which in themselves state and define themes and meanings ...’ What Schorer is probably trying to say here is that it is the language which is of supreme significance when one talks of writing literature. What is said is not as important as how you say it. How one says things becomes the style of the writer and it is this what defines what the literary text means.

Let us discuss an example here. Most of William Shakespeare’s plays are not original in the sense that the stories of the plays are all borrowed from different sources. But today when one thinks of these stories no one thinks in terms of the original stories, but people think in terms of Shakespeare’s plays. For example, *As You Like It* is borrowed from *Rosalynde*. The popularity of the text of *Rosalynde* is not much in comparison to *As You Like It*, which is read with much pleasure and attention. What is it that William Shakespeare did to the story that his play is still read and the original story is not being read? Probably the answer lies in Mark Schorer’s idea that ‘technique’ is the chief concern of the writer which makes his or her works immortal. Shakespeare’s works are immortal primarily because, Shakespearean technique was so sound that even today people find it important to read his works to understand the world and the human nature as well as for the purposes of entertainment.

Though, we are discussing, Shakespeare in the present circumstances for the sake of convenience. Mark Schorer just focuses on the works of three twentieth century novelists when he discusses things in his essay ‘Technique as Discovery.’ The three novelists and their respective works are –

- H. G. Wells’ *Tono Bungay*
- D. H. Lawrence’ *Sons and Lovers*
- James Joyce’ *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*.

The reasons that Mark Schorer provide for choosing these novels are –

- (a) All three are considered great pieces of literature from the twentieth century
- (b) All three are to some extent autobiographical in nature
- (c) All three are modernist in trying to present the modernist angst in some way or the other.

In this context, Mark Schorer mentions that the novelists like Henry James, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce are so popular because they changed the course of the novel by changing the form – the technical changes that they made to the genre found its manifestation in changing the whole conception of novel as a genre. Though Mark Schorer talks highly about these three novelists – Henry James, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce – he merely discusses Joyce’s novel in detail to present how his technique suffices for the material that he was dealing with in the novel. The other two novelists

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that Mark Schorer discusses – H. G. Wells and D. H. Lawrence – they are taken as examples where the novelists did not harp so much on the technique.

Even though, all the three novels (*Tono Bungay*, *Sons and Lovers* and *A Portrait of a Artist as a Young Man*) are considered to be great pieces of literature, they are not received in the similar fashion by the people because of the difference of techniques of these three writers. These three writers worked on their material from a different perspective which makes them very unique. Mark Schorer goes into details of these three works to discuss how they are different and how H. G. Wells and D. H. Lawrence could not achieve much because their techniques were not up to the mark; while Joyce is still remembered as canonical as he has mastered the technique and made justice towards his material through his techniques ‘Technique alone objectifies the materials of art; hence technique alone evaluates those materials.’

Let us now discuss the three works of these three novelists in detail as done by Mark Schorer in the essay ‘Technique as Discovery.’

### 1. H. G. Wells – *Tono Bungay*

According to Mark Schorer, H. G. Wells held no grand opinion about the significance of technique in fiction writing. H. G. Wells had enormous literary energy, but never showed any respect for the techniques of his medium, as he himself says that ‘I have never taken any very great pains about writing. I am outside the hierarchy of conscious and deliberate writers altogether.’ This lack of respect for the technique of H. G. Wells had a great toll on his words as ‘he escaped, he disappeared from the literature into the annals (archives) of an era.’ About *Tono Bungay*, Mark Schorer writes: ‘He (H.G. Wells) gives us in the end not a novel, but a hypothesis; not an individual destiny, but a theory of the future; not his theory of the future, but a nihilistic vision quite opposite to everything that he meant to represent. With a minimum of attention to the virtues of technique, Wells might still not have written a good novel; but he would at any rate have established a point of view and a tone which would have told us what he meant.’

### 2. D. H. Lawrence – *Sons and Lovers*

D. H. Lawrence believed that novels have a great therapeutic function, as he says – ‘One sheds one’s sickness in books, repeats and presents again one’s emotions to be master of them.’ When one thinks of it one figures out that probably Lawrence is trying to shed his own problems through the character of Paul Morel. Mark Schorer is of the opinion that ‘Merely repeating one’s emotions, merely to look into one’s heart and write, is merely to repeat the round of emotional bondage.’ So, if a book becomes an application of self-analysis, then technique must take the place of the absent analyst. But Mark Schorer feels that Lawrence’s failure in *Sons and Lovers* is because of his not giving importance to the technical aspects of the novel. The novel *Sons and Lovers* has two themes—



- (a) the crippling effects of a mother's love on the emotional development of a son and
- (b) the split between two kinds of love, physical and spiritual, which the son develops, the kind represented by two young women, Clara and Miriam.

Paul should have been shown at the end of the novel to be 'drifting towards death'; yet at the end of the novel the novel takes a different direction when D. H. Lawrence makes Paul turn towards life as he heads towards the city. Schorer is of the opinion that Lawrence's personal life interferes with the characterization – 'Lawrence could not separate the investigating analyst, who must be objective, from Lawrence, the subject of the book; and the sickness was not healed, the emotion not mastered, the novel not perfected.'

### 3. James Joyce – *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses*

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, similar to *Tono Bungay* and *Sons and Lovers* is an autobiographical novel of James Joyce where the young artist's alienation from his environment is represented by the author. The theme is explored and evaluated in three stages as Stephen, the protagonist of the novel moves from childhood through boyhood into maturity. A highly self-conscious use of style and method defines the quality of experience in each of these sections. The progress of Stephen's alienation is complete at the final portion of the novel, as Mark Schorer states – 'The opening pages are written in something like the stream of consciousness of *Ulysses*, as the environment impinges directly on the consciousness of the infant and the child, a strange opening world which the mind does not yet subject to questioning, selection, or judgment. But this style changes very soon, as the boy begins to explore his surroundings, and as his sensuous experience of the world is enlarged, it takes on heavier and heavier rhythms and a fuller and fuller body of sensuous detail, until it reaches a crescendo of romantic opulence in the emotional climaxes which mark Stephen's rejection of domestic and religious values. Then gradually the style subsides into the more austere intellectuality of the final sections, as he defines to himself the outlines of the artistic task which is to usurp his maturity.' According to Schorer, a highly self-conscious use of style and method defines the quality of experience of each section of Stephen's life.

Stephen in *Ulysses* (Joyce's next novel) is a little older and the environment of urban life finds a separate embodiment in the character of Bloom, and Bloom is lost as Stephen, though touchingly groping for moorings. Each of the two is weakened by the inability to reach out to the other. Schorer says, '...*Ulysses* is like a pattern of concentric circles, with the immediate human situation at its centre, this passing on and out to the whole dilemma of modern life, this passing on and out beyond that to a vision of the cosmos, and this to the mythical limits of our experience. If the novel is

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read with more satisfaction than any other novel of this century, it is because its author held an attitude towards technique and the technical scrutiny of subject matter which enabled him to order, within a single work and with superb coherence, the greatest amount of our experience.'

Thus, through James Joyce, Mark Schorer shows how a writer can use his technique effectively to put out his or her experience in art. In other words, if a writer has discovered the right technique then it can help him in developing the subject and convey its meaning fully which the readers will find easy to grasp leading to the popularity and depth of the novel. In other words, art is the technique itself.

### Check Your Progress

1. According to Schorer, what is the prime job of the critic?
2. List the authors and works referred to by Schorer in the essay 'Technique as Discovery'.
3. What are the two themes of the novel *Sons and Lovers*?
4. Which author held no grand opinion about the significance of technique as per Schorer?

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## 12.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Mark Schorer is of the opinion that the prime job of the critic while reading a literary text is to look at how far the technique of the writer suits the purpose of his writing.
2. The three novelists and their respective works are:
  - H. G. Wells' *Tono Bungay*
  - D. H. Lawrence' *Sons and Lovers*
  - James Joyce' *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*.
3. The novel *Sons and Lovers* has two themes:
  - the crippling effects of a mother's love on the emotional development of a son and
  - the split between two kinds of love, physical and spiritual, which the son develops, the kind represented by two young women, Clara and Miriam.
4. H. G. Wells is the author who held no grand opinion about the significance of technique in fiction writing. H. G. Wells had enormous literary energy, but never showed any respect for the techniques of his medium.

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## 12.4 SUMMARY

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- Mark Schorer was an American writer, critic, and scholar.
- Schorer's essay 'Technique as Discovery' originally appeared in the Hudson Review, Spring in the year 1948.
- New Criticism refers to a movement in Literary Criticism, developed in 1920s which advocated 'close reading' of literary texts and detailed textual analysis of poetry rather than focusing on the mind and personality of the poet to analyse poems or the socio-political history of the time when the text was written.
- Mark Schorer is of the opinion that technique is the most significant thing for a writer as it is the technique which decides everything else – 'technique is the only means he (the writer) has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it.'
- Mark Schorer therefore is of the opinion that the prime job of the critic while reading a literary text is to look at how far the technique of the writer suits the purpose of his writing.
- Mark Schorer just focuses on the works of three twentieth century novelists when he discusses things in his essay 'Technique as Discovery.' The three novelists and their respective works are –
  - o H. G. Wells' *Tono Bungay*
  - o D. H. Lawrence' *Sons and Lovers*
  - o James Joyce' *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses*.
- Mark Schorer goes into details of these three works to discuss how they are different and how H. G. Wells and D. H. Lawrence could not achieve much because their techniques were not up to the mark; while Joyce is still remembered as canonical as he has mastered the technique and made justice towards his material through his techniques 'Technique alone objectifies the materials of art; hence technique alone evaluates those materials.'

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## 12.5 KEY WORDS

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- **New Criticism:** It refers to a movement in Literary Criticism, developed in 1920s which advocated 'close reading' of literary texts and detailed textual analysis of poetry rather than focusing on the mind and personality of the poet to analyse poems or the socio-political history of the time when the text was written.

- **Autobiographical Novel:** It is a form of novel using autofiction techniques, or the merging of autobiographical and fictive elements.

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### 12.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. What do you think is the position Mark Schorer takes in terms of the role of a critic in reading literature?
2. 'William Shakespeare's plays are not original in the sense that the stories of the plays are all borrowed from different sources. But today when one thinks of these stories no one thinks in terms of the original stories, but people think in terms of Shakespeare's plays.' Comment.
3. List the reasons that Mark Schorer provides for choosing the selected novels for discussion in his essay 'Technique as Discovery'.
4. What is the problem Schorer finds in the D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*?

#### Long Answer Questions

1. Mark Schorer in the essay 'Technique as Discovery' emphasizes on technique of the writer as the most significant aspect of any writing? Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Do you agree with Mark Schorer's evaluation of H. G. Wells, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Do you agree with the proposition that Mark Schorer depoliticized the reading of literature as did the New Critics? Give reasons in support of your stance.
4. Make an evaluative assessment of Mark Schorer's essay 'Technique as Discovery' by closely reading the essay.

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### 12.7 FURTHER READINGS

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Ransom, John Crowe. 1947. *The New Criticism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Brooks, Cleanth and Warren, Robert Penn (eds). 1943. *Understanding Fiction*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Mulhern, Francis. 1979. *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'*. London: Verso.

Newton, K. M. 1990. *Interpreting the Text: A Critical Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Literary Interpretation*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

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## UNIT 13 ELAINE SHOWALTER

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### Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 Elaine Showalter: An Introduction
- 13.3 ‘Toward a Feminist Poetics’
- 13.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.5 Summary
- 13.6 Key Words
- 13.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.8 Further Readings

### NOTES

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### 13.0 INTRODUCTION

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In ‘Towards a Feminist Poetics’, Elaine Showalter discusses the problem faced by the feminist critics in articulating a theoretical framework. Thus, the objective of Showalter’s *Toward a Feminist Poetics* is to provide a theoretical framework to the feminist criticism.

Moreover, Showalter tries to question the male canon. As a result, she discovers a feminist canon of writing from 19th century onwards. This helped her point out how female writers shared their experiences through literature to the way in which the female writers perceived themselves and the male-chauvinist society.

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### 13.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Prepare a brief introduction of Elaine Showalter
- List the major works of Elaine Showalter
- Evaluate the literary piece ‘Toward a Feminist Poetics’

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### 13.2 ELAINE SHOWALTER: AN INTRODUCTION

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Elaine Showalter (born 21 January 1941) is a major American feminist literary theorist and critic on cultural and social issues.

Showalter was born as Elaine Cottler in Boston, Massachusetts. Against the wishes of her parents, she undertook an academic career. She earned a bachelor’s degree at Bryn Mawr College, a master’s degree at Brandeis University and a Ph.D. in 1970 at the University of California, Davis. Her

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first academic appointment was at Douglass College at Rutgers University. In 1984, she joined Princeton University's faculty, and took early retirement in 2003.

At age twenty-one, Showalter's parents had disowned her for marrying outside the Jewish faith. Her husband, English Showalter, is a Yale-educated professor of 18th century French literature. The Showalters have two children, Michael Showalter, an actor and comedian, and Vinca Showalter LaFleur, a professional speechwriter.

Showalter is an expert in Victorian literature and the Fin-de-Siecle (turn of the 19th century). Her most innovative work in this field is in madness and hysteria in literature, particularly in women's writing and in the representation of female characters.

Her academic honours comprise of a Guggenheim Fellowship (1977–78) and a Rockefeller Humanities fellowship (1981–82). She is also the past-president of the Modern Language Association (MLA). In 2007, Showalter was chair of the judges for the prestigious British literary award, the Man Booker International Prize.

Showalter's book *Inventing Herself* (2001), a survey of feminist icons, appears to be the result of a long-time interest in communicating the significance of understanding feminist tradition. Showalter's early essays and editorial work in the late 1970s and the 1980s review the history of the feminist tradition within the 'wilderness' of literary theory and criticism. She worked in the field of feminist literary theory and criticism, which was just coming up as a serious scholarly pursuit in universities in the 1970s. Showalter's writing reveals a conscious effort to express the significance of mapping her discipline's past in order to both ground it in substantive theory, and accumulate a knowledge base that will be able to inform a path for future feminist academic pursuit.

In 'Toward a Feminist Poetics', Showalter outlines the history of women's literature, with a suggestion that it can be divided into three phases as follows:

- Feminine: In the Feminine phase (1840–1880), 'women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature' (New, 137).
- Feminist: The Feminist phase (1880–1920) was characterized by women's writing that protested against male standards and values, and advocated women's rights and values, including a demand for autonomy.
- Female: The Female phase (1920) is one of self-discovery. Showalter says, 'women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as

the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature' (New, 139).

Showalter supports imminent feminist criticism from a cultural perspective in the current Female phase, rather than from perspectives that traditionally come from an andocentric perspective such as psychoanalytic and biological theories. In the past, feminists have worked within these traditions by revising and criticizing female representations, or lack thereof, in the male traditions (that is, in the Feminine and Feminist phases). In her essay 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' (1981), Showalter says, 'A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space' (New, 260).

Showalter does not support replacing psychoanalysis, for example, with cultural anthropology; preferably, she proposes that approaching women's writing from a cultural perspective is one among many suitable perspectives that will expose female traditions. However, cultural anthropology and social history are especially productive because they 'can perhaps offer us a terminology and a diagram of women's cultural situation' (New, 266). Showalter warns that feminist critics must use cultural analysis as ways to understand what women write, rather than to dictate what they ought to write (New, 266).

Showalter does not support a separation of the female tradition from the male tradition. She claims that women must work both inside and outside the male tradition simultaneously. According to her, the most constructive approach to future feminist theory and criticism lies in a focus on fostering a new feminine cultural perspective within a feminist tradition that at the same time exists within the male tradition, but on which it is not dependent and to which it is not answerable.

Her book *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) is a significant study of women's fiction. Her articles 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' and 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' are significant attempts at theorizing Feminist Critical practice. Showalter proposed a separate and independent model of feminist literary theory by rejecting the inevitability of male models and theories, and by recalling the history of women's writing. The major writings of Elaine Showalter are as follows:

- *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977)
- *Toward a Feminist Poetics, Women's Writing and Writing about Women* (1979)

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- *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* (1981)
- *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–198*. (1985)
- *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de siècle* (1990)
- *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997)
- *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage* (2001)
- *Teaching Literature* (2003)
- *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (2005)

### Check Your Progress

1. Why was Showalter disowned by her parents?
2. Name the articles by Showalter that attempt at theorizing Feminist Critical practice.

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## 13.3 ‘TOWARD A FEMINIST POETICS’

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Elaine Showalter has classified feminist literary critical activity into broadly two categories, ‘Feminist Critique’ (Woman as Reader) and ‘Gynocritics’ (Woman as Writer), a term which she herself coined. Let us look at each of these two categories in detail.

The feminist critique, according to Showalter, focuses on the woman as a reader, primarily of male-written and male-oriented texts. The male-authored literature portrays women either as subservient to men or to be silent figures obeying patriarchal dictates. If a female abides by the patriarchal customs and conventions, and stays silently within the household bearing the pains of patriarchal oppression, she is considered as ‘a goddess within the household’. But anyone who tries to break free of the patriarchal shackles is represented as a ‘whore in the marketplace’. Thus, women are usually portrayed in either of these two ways without ever considering their real material and psychological existence. Moreover, women are manipulated to provide significance to the male characters to realize their true potential, without showing any concern for the women characters. These different kinds of stereotypical representation of females done by male authors need to be questioned/probed/critiqued. Feminist critique primarily focuses on this aspect. Thus ‘women as reader’ offers feminist readings of male-authored texts by portraying how male authors have always represented women from their chauvinist point of view, without ever regarding them as human beings having desire and life of their own. These readings ‘consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions



about women in criticism, and women as sign in semiotic systems'. In other words, the feminist critique probes the ideological assumptions of literary texts produced by males and reinterprets literature from a female perspective. This act of reading relates to the life of females directly as it makes them understand their political, social and cultural reality in a better way. Thus, feminist critique can be a liberating experience for females, as it may open the eyes of females to the patriarchal oppression who are so seeped into patriarchal education that they do not realize their subservience to men.

Feminist critique is essentially political and serves feminist purpose to some extent. However, Showalter points out that it is still male-oriented as it is not about woman's experience, but about what men have thought about woman. To counter male stereotypical representation of females is to undo the injustice done to females, which does not in any way help in getting the women's perspective into focus. What Showalter prescribes and advocates is that women should bring forth the discourse that talks about their own experience, so that the world knows what their life/ thought process/ material condition and psychological existence is all about.

Therefore, Showalter is of the opinion that the focus of feminist criticism should not and cannot be delineated by male perceptions and assumptions about women. Rather, it should focus on the woman's experience. Therefore, Showalter provides a new framework which she calls 'gynocritics'; that is women as writers should bring forth their own experiences, instead of merely critiquing male-authored texts. Possibly, the best description of gynocritics, as given by Showalter, is in 'Toward a Feminist Poetics':

'In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the programme of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture.' (New, 131)

Showalter acknowledges the difficulty of '[d]efining the unique difference of women's writing' which she says is 'a slippery and demanding task' in *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* (New, 249). She explains that gynocritics may not be successful ever in understanding the special differences of women's writing, or realize a distinct female literary tradition. However, with grounding in theory and historical research, Showalter sees gynocriticism as a way to 'learn something solid, enduring, and real about the relation of women to literary culture' (New, 249). She significantly stresses on the need to free 'ourselves from the lineal absolute of male literary history'. That is going to be the point where gynocritics make a beginning.

As mentioned earlier, according to Showalter, the goal of feminist criticism is to articulate the female experience. The only obstacle that

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Showalter foresees for gynocritics is ‘our own divided consciousness, the split in each of us’ between the desire for analytic detachment and social engagement. The task of feminist critics, then, is to bridge this female self-division by finding ‘a new language, a new reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision’. In order to find this new language, both the feminist critique and gynocritics are needed, ‘for only the Jeremiahs of the feminist critique can lead us out of the ‘Egypt of female servitude’ to the promised land of the feminist vision’.

In her essay *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* (1981), Showalter says, ‘A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women’s culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space’.

Literature written by women inevitably has to be about the experiences of females which, according to Showalter, are vivid and rich. Like many other feminists, she believes that women’s educational, experiential and biological handicaps enable them to nurture their sympathy, sentiment and powers of observation in order to bring the substance and significance of the female experience to readers. In women’s literature, these qualities become what Virginia Woolf termed the ‘precious specialty’, of a distinctly female vision.

According to Showalter, this ‘precious specialty’ should be the significant focus of gynocritics. She believes that with this ‘precious specialty’, women’s writing as gynocritics can be different from the uncertain male standard of representing women in their narratives. It can be said that gynocritics approaches woman as the producer of textual meaning. From this standpoint, feminist literary criticism should create newer models that are primarily based on female experiences. To some extent, the ‘precious specialty’ of feminist criticism is a result of the relationships shared between women. Therefore, a framework for the new models of analysis can be constructed by describing and evaluating this female subculture. Gynocritics is based upon research in history, anthropology, psychology and sociology, all of which is developed hypotheses of a female subculture.

Thus, one important project of the gynocritics should be to portray the psychological suffering of women in hostile social and cultural environments due to patriarchy. Another would be ‘the alienation from and rejection of the mother that daughters have learned under patriarchy’. In recent years, however, the evolution of the female subculture has noted as ‘the death of the mother as witnessed and transcended by the daughter has become one of the most profound occasions of female literature’.

The focus of feminist criticism, as Showalter recommends, has also been the recovery of a female literary history and tradition. Gynocritics seek 'to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time, and to establish the continuity of the female tradition'. Female writing has been consciously obscured by the canonizers (primarily male) of literature who saw no value in whatever females produced or wrote. This was because females wrote according to the male tradition and were not taken up by the male scholars and readers as something striking and promising. Another reason could be because females wrote to critique patriarchy which for male readers/canonizers/scholars is of no worth as that would question and destabilize their privileged position in the society. Therefore, one of the important critical tasks of the feminist critics would be to seek to 're-create the chain of writers... the patterns of influence and response from one generation to the next'. The need for doing this is paramount as by establishing a female tradition of writing the canonization of the literature by males can be questioned. Moreover, it would portray how women have produced literary masterpieces where they laid down their experiences to share with others to motivate them to end their subjugation to men. Showalter tries to build up the female tradition of writing by looking at the literary history of female writing from early 19th century onwards.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

3. What is the goal of feminist criticism according to Showalter?
4. State one important objective of gynocritics.

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## 13.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Showalter's parents had disowned her for marrying outside the Jewish faith.
2. Showalter's articles 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' and 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' are significant attempts at theorizing Feminist Critical practice.
3. According to Showalter, the goal of feminist criticism is to articulate the female experience. The task of feminist critics is to bridge the female self-division by finding 'a new language, a new reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision'.

4. One important objective of gynocritics is to portray the psychological suffering of women in hostile social and cultural environments due to patriarchy.

## NOTES

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### 13.5 SUMMARY

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- Elaine Showalter is a major American feminist literary theorist and critic on cultural and social issues.
- At age twenty-one, Showalter's parents had disowned her for marrying outside the Jewish faith. Her husband, English Showalter, is a Yale-educated professor of 18th century French literature.
- Showalter's book *Inventing Herself* (2001), a survey of feminist icons, appears to be the result of a long-time interest in communicating the significance of understanding feminist tradition.
- Showalter supports imminent feminist criticism from a cultural perspective in the current Female phase, rather than from perspectives that traditionally come from an andocentric perspective such as psychoanalytic and biological theories.
- Showalter does not support replacing psychoanalysis, for example, with cultural anthropology; preferably, she proposes that approaching women's writing from a cultural perspective is one among many suitable perspectives that will expose female traditions.
- Her book *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) is a significant study of women's fiction.
- Elaine Showalter has classified feminist literary critical activity into broadly two categories, 'Feminist Critique' (Woman as Reader) and 'Gynocritics' (Woman as Writer), a term which she herself coined.
- The feminist critique probes the ideological assumptions of literary texts produced by males and reinterprets literature from a female perspective.
- Feminist critique is essentially political and serves feminist purpose to some extent. However, Showalter points out that it is still male-oriented as it is not about woman's experience, but about what men have thought about woman.
- Showalter is of the opinion that the focus of feminist criticism should not and cannot be delineated by male perceptions and assumptions about women. Rather, it should focus on the woman's experience.
- Literature written by women inevitably has to be about the experiences of females which, according to Showalter, are vivid and rich.

- Showalter tries to build up the female tradition of writing by looking at the literary history of female writing from early 19th century onwards.

Elaine Showalter

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## 13.6 KEY WORDS

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- **Androcentric:** It implies focused or centred on men.
- **Discourse:** It is spoken or written communication between people, especially serious discussion of a particular subject.
- **Patriarchy:** It is social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line.

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## 13.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short biographical sketch of Elaine Showalter.
2. Identify the major works of Elaine Showalter.
3. What is Showalter's opinion about the history of women literature in 'Toward a Feminist Poetics'?

### Long Answer Questions

1. Showalter sees gynocriticism as a way to 'learn something solid, enduring, and real about the relation of women to literary culture. Discuss.
2. What is the difference in perspective between women as reader and women as writer?
3. 'Gynocritics is based upon research in history, anthropology, psychology and sociology, all of which is developed hypotheses of a female subculture.' Elucidate the statement.

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## 13.8 FURTHER READINGS

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Showalter, Elaine. 1979. *Toward a Feminist Poetics, Women's Writing and Writing About Women*. London: Croom Helm.

Showalter, Elaine (ed.). 1989. *Speaking of Gender*. London: Routledge.

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## UNIT 14 LINDA HUTCHEON

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 Linda Hutcheon: An Introduction
- 14.3 Postmodernism: A Discussion
  - 14.3.1 Modernism versus Postmodernism
  - 14.3.2 Simulacrum – Baudrillard
  - 14.3.3 Late Capitalism – Frederic Jameson
  - 14.3.4 Postmodernism and Literature
- 14.4 ‘Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological’: Summary and Critical Comments
- 14.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.6 Summary
- 14.7 Key Words
- 14.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.9 Further Readings

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### 14.0 INTRODUCTION

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This unit examines Linda Hutcheon’s essay ‘Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological’. Before going into a discussion of ‘Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological’, it is essential that one understands in short what postmodernism stands for and what are the primary facets which postmodernism as a theory deals with.

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### 14.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Prepare a brief biographical sketch of Linda Hutcheon
- Define modernism and postmodernism
- Critically analyse the essay ‘Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological’

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### 14.2 LINDA HUTCHEON: AN INTRODUCTION

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Linda Hutcheon is a Canadian critic and a Professor in the Department of English and of the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. She is known for her work on postmodernism. According to Hutcheon, postmodernism works through parody to subvert what it parodies. Her famous works include the following:

- *A Theory of Adaptation*
- *Rethinking Literary History: A Forum on Theory*
- *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*
- *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies*
- *The Politics of Postmodernism*
- *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*

In the essay ‘Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological’, Hutcheon concentrates on Canada as a nation to show how Canada has progressed from a colonial nation to a postmodern one. To provide an account of the same, she takes up the case of writings of Northrop Frye, a Canadian scholar and tried to show how the colonialist, the mercantilist and the humanist discourses within Frye’s works sketch a possible postcolonialist, ecological and postmodern perspective of the literary criticism of Canada today. Thus, ‘Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological’ is not only essential for our understanding of the Canadian experience as a nation but also from the perspective of postmodernism as a theoretical construct which tries to build upon modernist by subverting and questioning the very basis of modernity.

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### 14.3 POSTMODERNISM: A DISCUSSION

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Postmodernism is a complicated term, hard to define because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, technology and many others. Dick Hebdige gives a list of the ways in which the term postmodernism is used – “when it becomes possible for people to describe as ‘postmodern’ the décor of a room, the design of a building, the diegesis of a film, the construction of a record, or a ‘scratch’ video, a television commercial, or an arts documentary, or the ‘intertextual’ relations between them, the layout of a page in a fashion magazine or critical journal, an anti-teleological tendency within epistemology, the attack on the ‘metaphysics of presence’, a general attenuation of feeling, the collective chagrin and morbid projections of a post-War generation of baby boomers confronting disillusioned middle age, the ‘predicament’ of reflexivity, a group of rhetorical tropes, a proliferation of surfaces, a new phase in commodity fetishism, a fascination for images, codes and styles, a process of cultural, political and existential fragmentation and /or crisis, the ‘de-centering’ of the subject, an ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’, the replacement of unitary power axes by a plurality of power/discourse formations, the ‘implosion of meaning’, the collapse of cultural hierarchies, the dread generated by the threat of nuclear self-destruction, the decline of universality, the

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functioning and effects of the new miniaturized technologies, broad societal and economic shifts into a 'media', 'consumer' or 'multinational' phase, a sense (depending on who you read) of 'placelessness' or the abandonment of placelessness ('critical regionalism') or (even) a general substitution of spatial for temporal coordinates – when it becomes possible to describe all these things as 'postmodern' then it's clear we are in the presence of a buzzword." ('Postmodernism and "the other side"', in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, Second Edn. Edited by John Storey, Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall, 1998, pp. 371-2).

Due to the multi-faceted nature and multiple use of the term in different arenas of life and its representation, the term 'postmodernism' has gained immense recognition not only in the academic world but everywhere else. Yet, it remains a term which is least understood by its users.

Moreover, it is hard to locate postmodernism historically as it is unclear exactly when postmodernism begins, though many believe it to have started since 1960s. Frederic Jameson argues that postmodernism was born in the 1960s out of "the shift from an oppositional to a hegemonic position of the classics of modernism, the latter's conquest of the university, the museum, the art gallery network and the foundations, the assimilation ... of the various high modernisms, into the 'canon' and the subsequent attenuation of everything in them felt by our grandparents to be shocking, scandalous, ugly, dissonant, immoral and antisocial." (Frederic Jameson, *The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate*, in *The Ideologies of Theory Essays*, Volume Two, London: Routledge, 1988, p.104) yet the term gained popularity since 1980s and became subject of many academic and non-academic debates and discussions.

### 14.3.1 Modernism versus Postmodernism

The easiest way to start pondering over postmodernism is by comparing it with modernism, the movement from which postmodernism seems to grow or emerge. Scholars vary in their opinion whether postmodernism is a continuation or a radical break from modernism. Modernism is usually thought to be an aesthetic movement of the early twentieth century in visual arts, music, literature, and drama which rejected the old Victorian standards of how art should be constructed, consumed, and what it should signify. In the period from around 1910 to 1930, which is generally known as the era of High Modernism, the major figures of modernism (Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Marcel Proust, Mallarme, Franz Kafka, Rilke and others) literature radically redefined what poetry and fiction could be.

Though modernism refers to the aesthetic movement in the first half of the twentieth century, yet when we talk about modernity, it is usually thought that modern era started with the European Enlightenment, which began in



the eighteenth century. In that sense, modernity is about order, rationality and totality. Jean Francois Lyotard, the postmodern scholar in his famous book *The Post Modern Condition* (1979) argues that modern societies maintained or tried to maintain the supposed order, rationality and totality by means of 'grand narratives.' According to Lyotard, grand narratives or meta narrative operate through marshalling heterogeneity into order, and thereby silencing, suppressing and excluding other discourses to derive at a universalist approach. Thus, from eighteenth century, Enlightenment associated science or scientific discourse and knowledge with the role of emancipating mankind from darkness, leading to supposed progress. Science / rationality assumed the status of grand narrative which became or is championed by the modernists as the only valid means of attaining knowledge, thereby suppressing and obliterating all others means of knowledge formation. Even the grand narrative of Marxism is being critiqued by Lyotard by advocating an alternative philosophy of desire, following Nietzsche.

But Lyotard claims that since the end of the Second World War, the status of meta narratives were waning out. For Lyotard, postmodernism is expressed in terms of western societies' "incredulity towards meta narratives." In the process, the meta narrative or grand narratives are rejected and the postmodern societies favoured mini narratives or local narratives which neither claimed universality, not absolute truth as the enlightenment science did.

Another aspect of enlightenment was scientificity of language which meant that the signifier (sound pattern) always refers to the signified (concept) and that reality can be represented through signifiers. But with the questioning of science and the breaking down of the meta narratives the signifying process also started falling apart. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the modernist poet, W. B. Yeats writes in the poem *The Second Coming* – 'things fall apart, centre cannot hold.' If modernists are anxious about the falling apart of the signifying process(es) then the postmodernism celebrates this falling apart as the postmodern societies do not lament fragmentation, provisionality and incoherence. In other words, postmodern art celebrates the 'decentering' of the subject and instead of going into the depth, it is merely about surfaces; about the signifiers with no signified. Basing his argument of Nietzsche's critique of the totalizing claims of reason, Lyotard argues that the 'truth claims of knowledge' is not possible anymore and that when a writer writes he is primarily playing a 'language game' (dealing only with the signifier(s) and not the signified) where there is no absolute standard or rules. In the phase of modernity, whereas meta narratives provided legitimacy to the narratives and in the process achieved their own legitimacy; in postmodernism, art or literature celebrates difference and heterogeneity and explores the 'unsayable' and the 'invisible'. Thus, whereas for Baudrillard and Jameson, Postmodernism is a decisive break from modernism, but for

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Lyotard, ‘the Postmodern is undoubtedly a part of the modern; it would be that which in the modern puts forward as the unrepresentable in presentation itself.’

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### 14.3.2 Simulacrum – Baudrillard

For Jean Baudrillard, postmodern is not about the ‘sign’ but about the ‘simulacrum’. Whereas Walter Benjamin claimed that mechanical production has destroyed the ‘aura’ of the work of art, Baudrillard feels that the distinction between the original and the copy itself is destroyed in today’s world and he calls this process ‘simulation’ – “the generation by models of a real without origins or reality; a hyperreal.” In this realm of the hyperreal (which Baudrillard thinks to be the most important characteristics of post modernism) the distinction between the hyperreal and the real is imploded – where simulations are often regarded and experienced as more real than the real itself. Therefore, Baudrillard sees postmodernity in terms of disappearance of meaning, of inertia, exhaustion, whether of history or subjectivity.

To explain the idea of simulacrum or hyper real, Baudrillard gives the example of the hyperrealism of the Disneyland, which Baudrillard calls ‘a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation’ as Disneyland is not merely an arena of fantastic escape for the Americans, but is somehow an experience of the real America – “Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America, which is Disneyland. Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real.” Thus, Baudrillard’s thesis about the hyperreal is in tune with Lyotard’s arguments that postmodernism is all about the collapse of certainty, about the dissolution of the metanarrative.

### 14.3.3 Late Capitalism – Frederic Jameson

For American Marxist cultural scholar, Frederic Jameson (most famous work, *Post Modernism and Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*), postmodernism is a ‘periodizing concept.’ Jameson talks about three phases of capitalism – (i) market capitalism (ii) monopoly capitalism and (iii) late or multinational capitalism. These three phases of capitalism dictate the cultural practices, in terms of what kind of art and literature would be produced in these different stages of capitalism. Market capitalism which happened in the eighteenth century and carried on even in the nineteenth century is characterized by technological advancements which gave birth to particular kind of literary genre which we know as realism. Monopoly capitalism which started, according to Jameson sometime around the late nineteenth century and carried on till the Second World War is synonymous with the era of modernism. The

third phase, multinational capitalism or consumer capitalism or late capitalism is the most interesting phase for Jameson, as it is the age when “the purest form of capital entered into hitherto uncommodified areas” and the resultant impact is that of postmodernism. Having said that Jameson goes into the discussion of the constitutive features of postmodernism – (i) Postmodernism celebrates the culture of Pastiche (ii) it is a culture of depthlessness, of superficiality in the literal sense.

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### 14.3.4 Postmodernism and Literature

Different theorists have tried to approach postmodernism from different perspectives and provided newer ways of looking at things. The decentering of the subject, the decentering of language, the incredulity towards meta narratives has produced playful, self-reflective and self-parodying fiction which is being referred by many as postmodernist literature. Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Ishmael Reed, Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco, Salman Rushdie, John Fowles and others are thought to be postmodernist writers as their writings are self-reflexive where the traditional orders and conventional boundaries of discourse are broken down and a self-parodying narrative is constructed where the distinction between fiction and history or autobiography, between realism and fantasy is probed. Linda Hutcheon is of the opinion that one of the important characteristic features of postmodernist fiction is a productive intertextuality which neither simply repudiates the past nor does it reproduce the past as nostalgia. In the process, it raises questions about the ideological construction of the past and the ‘truth’ of the narratives in terms of whose truth it is.

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## 14.4 ‘ERUPTIONS OF POSTMODERNITY: THE POSTCOLONIAL AND THE ECOLOGICAL’: SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS

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In the essay ‘Eruptions of Post modernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological’, Linda Hutcheon looks at postmodernity as a response to “modernity’s rage for order and its consequences.” Modernity in the West gave rise to the following:

- (a) Cartesian Rationality
- (b) Enlightenment ideals of liberty and progress
- (c) Industrial Revolution
- (d) European Imperialism

Even though these aspects of the modernity were prevalent from the eighteenth century, it is in the early twentieth century that some kind of a questioning of these started happening as the world was falling apart with

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the constant effort of the writers and scholars to put it in order. So W. B. Yeats in the poem *The Second Coming* mentions that the centre cannot hold as the world is falling apart. Whereas these falling apart of the western world was something that the modernists were worried about and the angst of this worry is prevalent in the writings of the early twentieth century writers, in postmodernism we see that the scholars celebrate the falling apart of the world, the decentralization process whereby more liberating forces were unleashed by the society at large in different corners of the world rather than being bound by the Eurocentric discourses. This makes Hutcheon state in 'Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological':

Of course, from the perspective of modernity's faith in system and reason, in universal truth, beauty and goodness, the postmodern is scandalous (and literally unthinkable) response because it challenges precisely those modern foundational discourses in the name of contingency, provisionality, and the "situatedness" of both knowledge and morality. ... in Bauman's terms, the "ethical paradox of the postmodern condition is that it restores to agents the fullness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of the universal guidance that modern self-confidence once promised.

It is in these terms that Linda Hutcheon highlights that postmodernism goes on to question and shatters the very foundations of modernity and thereby dismantles it. Linda Hutcheon is of the opinion further that it is the women and the blacks who were among the first 'to challenge modernity's claim of emancipator universality.' The West tried to believe and make the world think that there are certain universal things which are applicable to all places and all times and those universal values need to be upheld so as to make a progress of civilization. But these notions led to nothing but more and more imperialistic tendencies which needed to be questioned by the people who belong to the third world, by the people who are the victims of the Eurocentric approaches. As women and blacks were at the receiving ends of the modernity, therefore, they were the ones who reacted against it vehemently. The civil rights and women's movements in North America is an example of it and often it is termed as 'postcolonial' and 'ecological.'

Next, Linda Hutcheon goes into discussion of Canada as a nation and remarks:

Historically, Canada has been – has had to be – sensitive to issues of difference and exploitation; it defined itself as a nation (a bilingual and a bicultural one) in 1867, but it continued to be colony of Britain until, some would say, it graduated to being a colony of the United States. ... Canada is more likely to think of itself in postcolonial than colonial terms, though the continuing economic and cultural hegemony of the USA over the continent cannot be ignored.

To discuss, Canada as a nation further, Linda Hutcheon takes the works of Northrop Frye as an example as he is the one who has 'always been rooted in Canada' and has 'drawn its essential characteristics from there.' She is of the opinion that much of the postcolonial studies from Canada and Australia

are very new and provocative and they are doing a lot in questioning the hegemonic universalist claims of the West. The question now which Hutcheon wants to ask is that what role did Northrop Frye play in the development of the ecological and post-colonial thinking in Canada?

In 1971, Northrop Frye wrote that Canada was ‘practically the only country left in the world which is a pure colony, colonial in psychology as well as in mercantile economics’ (*Bush Garden*, iii). Moreover, Frye is of the opinion that Canada has gone from a “pre-national to a post-national phase without ever having become a nation” as the Canadian imagination had passed from the stage of exploration directly to that of settlement. Further it is added that “An Immature colonial Canada might once have seen Britain as the “mother” country, but it has never viewed the US parentally: the usual image that it has constructed for its historically expansionist and often aggressive neighbor has been an imperial one.”

This makes, Linda Hutcheon come to the conclusion that Canada may be the postmodern nation par excellence given that it is pragmatic, compromising, ad hoc and ramshackle in its tradition of thinking about itself as a nation. When United States was defining itself as a nation in the eighteenth century; Canada was defining itself as a colony. When America was writing its constitution, Canada was participating itself in the Enlightenment project of modernity. So Canada flourished in a completely different way than that of its neighbour America. The physical setting of Canada was such, according to Frye, that ‘Canadians were held by the land, before they emerged as a people on it.’ When Canadians were absorbed with the modern consciousness, there was a moment when Canada tried its best to impose human control and order of nature. This humanization of nature, according to Frye, was synthesizing and it led to creative powers of the human mind. Frye further suggested that as days progressed, the feelings of Canadians towards nature changed from terror to guilt as pollution violated the nature.

Then huge changes came into being when the postmodern paradigm came into existence and Linda Hutcheon writes – ‘I think that ... a shift from the ordering impulse of rationality, the totalizing power of system, and the universalizing drive of liberal humanism toward an acceptance of provisionality, contingency, heterogeneity, and difference is more than just an accident ...’ Canada experienced all these in the postmodern paradigm as it could grasp the significance of these challenges that modernity had to offer to it and in the process came up with exemplary moments of postmodern celebration which challenged and led to the “crisis of modernity.”

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**Check Your Progress**

1. State one important characteristic features of postmodernist fiction as per Linda Hutcheon.
2. List the prominent works of Linda Hutcheon.

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**14.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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1. Linda Hutcheon is of the opinion that one of the important characteristic features of postmodernist fiction is a productive intertextuality which neither simply repudiates the past nor does it reproduce the past as nostalgia.
2. The prominent works of Linda Hutcheon include the following:
  - *A Theory of Adaptation*
  - *Rethinking Literary History: A Forum on Theory*
  - *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*

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**14.6 SUMMARY**

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- Linda Hutcheon is a Canadian critic and a Professor in the Department of English and of the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto.
- Postmodernism is a complicated term, hard to define because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, technology and many others.
- Modernism is usually thought to be an aesthetic movement of the early twentieth century in visual arts, music, literature, and drama which rejected the old Victorian standards of how art should be constructed, consumed, and what it should signify.
- Though modernism refers to the aesthetic movement in the first half of the twentieth century, yet when we talk about modernity, it is usually thought that modern era started with the European Enlightenment, which began in the eighteenth century.

- The grand narrative of Marxism is being critiqued by Lyotard by advocating an alternative philosophy of desire, following Nietzsche.
- Another aspect of enlightenment was scientificity of language which meant that the signifier (sound pattern) always refers to the signified (concept) and that reality can be represented through signifiers.
- For Jean Baudrillard, postmodern is not about the 'sign; but about the 'simulacrum'.
- Baudrillard sees postmodernity in terms of disappearance of meaning, of inertia, exhaustion, whether of history or subjectivity.
- For American Marxist cultural scholar, Frederic Jameson (most famous work, Post Modernism and Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism), postmodernism is a 'periodizing concept.'
- Different theorists have tried to approach postmodernism from different perspectives and provided newer ways of looking at things.
- In the essay 'Eruptions of Post modernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological', Linda Hutcheon looks at postmodernity as a response to "modernity's rage for order and its consequences."
- The West tried to believe and make the world think that there are certain universal things which are applicable to all places and all times and those universal values need to be upheld so as to make a progress of civilization.

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### 14.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Meta narrative:** In critical theory, and particularly postmodernism, a meta narrative is global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which supposedly orders and explains knowledge and experience.
- **Enlightenment:** The term is applied to the intellectual and cultural movement in Western Europe during the seventeenth century which reached its height in the eighteenth century.
- **Hegemony:** It is defined as power exerted by a dominant group over others. It requires the consent of the majority to keep the dominant group in power. Hegemony is achieved through consensus not force.

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### 14.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short Answer Questions

1. Define the term 'postmodernism'.

2. Name the major literary figures of modernist and postmodernist literature.
3. Name the phases of capitalism as defined by Frederic Jameson.

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### Long Answer Questions

1. Differentiate between modernism and postmodernism.
2. 'For Jean Baudrillard, postmodern is not about the sign but about the simulacrum.' Explain the statement.
3. What are the ways in which Linda Hutcheon shows that the modernity was being questioned?
4. Do you agree that Northrop Frye was a central figure in understanding the postcolonial and the ecological concerns of the Canadian Nation from the point of view of postmodernity as pointed out by Linda Hutcheon? Give reasons for your answer.

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## 14.9 FURTHER READINGS

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- Barry, Peter 1995. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. UK: Manchester University Press.
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- Eagleton, Terry. 1983. *Literary theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
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