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M.A. ENGLISH, SEMESTER-II
PAPER II: (APPROACHES TO LITERATURE-II)

- Introductory Letter (i)

L.No.	Topic	Author	Page
Unit I			
1.	‘The Beginning’ and ‘Readers and Reading’	Ms. Kanika Bhalla	
2.	‘The Author’ and ‘The Text and the World’	Ms. Kanika Bhalla	
Unit II			
3.	Literature and History	Dr. Rajesh K. Jaiswal	
Unit III			
4.	Feminism and Gender Studies	Mr. Satnam Singh	
5.	Three Waves of Feminism	Mr. Satnam Singh	
Unit IV			
6.	Cultural Studies: An Introduction	Dr. Rajesh Kumar Jaiswal	
7.	The Formation of Cultural Studies	Dr. Rajesh Kumar Jaiswal	
Unit V			
8.	The Play of Meaning(s)	Dr. Nipun Kalia	
9.	The Poetics of the Open Work	Dr. Nipun Kalia	

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Introductory Letter

Dear student,

We are sending you the study material for M.A. English, Semester-II Paper-II, titled as **Approaches to Literature-II**. Critical approaches and theories are integral to the pedagogy of literary studies, especially at higher level. They help in achieving a better understanding of literature and closely connect literature with our lives. They do so by making we look critically at what we often take for granted to see if it is valid, true and justifiable. They make us examine values and practices that exist most of the times beyond our questioning and evaluations.

There are five units in the paper including excerpts from *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory, Literature and History, Feminism and Gender Studies, Three Waves of Feminism, Cultural Studies, The Formation of Cultural Studies, The Play of Meanings, and The Open Work*. You are expected to study the prescribed texts closely and also some secondary material available on these texts. During the Personal Contact Programme (PCP), the prescribed texts are discussed at length. So, try not to miss the PCP.

To bring you into your comfort zone, complex concepts and theories have been discussed in an accessible language. There is a move from simple to complex critical approaches. We are providing you the study material in **self-learning mode**. The lessons of this block contain a comprehensive summary of the text, an introduction to the critic/theorist, glossary of difficult words, illustration of how theories work into practice, model questions and list of books for further reading. For further clarification and to clear your doubts, do visit the department.

Happy reading!

Course Leader

Beginning and Readers and Reading

by A. Bennett and N. Royle

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 What is Literary Criticism

1.3 What is New Criticism

1.4 Reader-Response Theories as a reaction to New Criticism

1.5 Overview of the text

1.5.1 Critical Analysis of “The Beginning”

1.5.2 Background to “The Beginning”

1.5.3 Critical Analysis of “Readers and Reading”

1.5 Summary

1.6 References

1.7 Further readings

1.9 Model Questions

1.0 Objectives

After reading the lesson, you should be able to:

- understand the working of a text
- know how does a text begins
- define what reading a text means
- analyse the relationship between author, reader and the text
- examine various literary theories for criticism of a text
- analyse literary texts from various critical angles

1.1 Introduction

The study of literature is incomplete without the study of literary theory and criticism. To develop a better understanding of the literary texts that you will encounter, you are prescribed in your syllabus Chapters 1 to 4 of the book *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (namely “The beginning”, “Readers and reading”, “The author”, and “The text and the world”) by Andrew Bennett and Nicolas Ryle. The book presents beautifully what is strange in literature and aims to stimulate the mind of the reads towards thinking what is it

that makes a literary text powerful, complex, and different from others. Andrew Bennett is a Professor of English. He has written extensively on poetics and literary theory, and literature and affect, ignorance, philosophical skepticism, philosophical pessimism, the body, suicide, the sublime, posterity, letters, the historical novel, Englishness, and the ordinary. Nicholas Royle is an English novelist, editor, publisher, literary reviewer and creative writing lecturer. He has written seven novels: *Counterparts*, *Saxophone Dreams*, *The Matter of the Heart*, among others, and more than 100 short stories, which have appeared in a variety of anthologies and magazines.

The current lesson deals with the first two chapters of the book, as prescribed in your syllabus.

1.2 What is Literary Criticism

Literary criticism (or literary studies) is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature or literary works. Modern literary criticism is often influenced by literary theory, which is the philosophical discussion of goals and methods of literature. Examples of some types of literary criticism are:

1. Biographical
2. Comparative
3. Ethical
4. Historical
5. Psychological
6. Textual
7. Mimetic
8. Expressive
9. Feminist
10. Pragmatic
11. Social
12. Theoretical

Literary criticism is thought to have existed as long as literature. In the 4th century BC, Aristotle wrote the *Poetics*, a typology and description of literary forms with many specific criticisms of contemporary works of art. *Poetics* developed for the first time the concepts of mimesis and catharsis, which are still crucial in literary studies. Plato's attacks on poetry as imitative, secondary, and false were formative as well. The Sanskrit *Natya Shastra* includes literary criticism on ancient Indian literature and Sanskrit drama. Later classical and medieval criticism often focused on religious texts, and the several long religious traditions of hermeneutics and textual exegesis have had a profound influence on the study of secular texts.

The literary criticism of the Renaissance developed classical ideas of unity of form and content into literary neoclassicism, proclaiming literature as central to culture, entrusting the poet and the author with preservation of a long literary tradition. The birth of Renaissance criticism was in 1498, with the recovery of classic texts, most notably, Giorgio Valla's Latin translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. The work of Aristotle, especially *Poetics*, was the most important influence upon literary criticism until the late eighteenth century. Lodovico Castelvetro was one of the most influential Renaissance critics who wrote commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1570.

In the Enlightenment period (1700s to 1800s), literary criticism became more popular. During this time period literacy rates started to rise in the public; reading was no longer exclusive for the wealthy or the scholarly. With the rise of the literate public and swiftness of printing, criticism too arose. Reading was no longer viewed solely as educational or as a sacred source of religion; it was a form of entertainment. Literary criticism was influenced by the values and stylistic writing, including clear, bold, precise writing and the more controversial criteria of the author's religious beliefs.

The British Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century introduced new aesthetic ideas to literary studies, including the idea that the object of literature need not always be beautiful, noble, or perfect, but that literature itself could elevate a common subject to the level of the sublime. German Romanticism, which followed closely after the late development of German classicism, emphasized an aesthetic of fragmentation that can appear startlingly modern to the reader of English literature, and valued *Witz* – that is, "wit" or "humor" of a certain sort – more highly than the serious Anglophone Romanticism. The late nineteenth century brought renown to authors known more for their literary criticism than for their own literary work, such as Matthew Arnold.

However important all of these aesthetic movements were as antecedents, current ideas about literary criticism derive almost entirely from the new direction taken in the early twentieth century. Early in the century the school of criticism known as Russian Formalism, and slightly later the New Criticism in Britain and in the United States, came to dominate the study and discussion of literature, in the English-speaking world. Both schools emphasized the close reading of texts, elevating it far above generalizing discussion and speculation about either authorial intention (to say nothing of the author's psychology or biography, which became almost taboo subjects) or reader response. This emphasis on form and precise

attention to "the words themselves" has persisted, after the decline of these critical doctrines themselves.

1.3 New Criticism

New Criticism is a name given to a style of criticism advocated by a group of academics writing in the first half of the 20th century. New Criticism, like Formalism, tended to consider texts as autonomous and "closed," meaning that everything that is needed to understand a work is present within it. The reader does not need outside sources, such as the author's biography, to fully understand a text. While New Critics did not completely discount the relevance of the author, background, or possible sources of the work, they did insist that those types of knowledge had very little bearing on the work's merit as literature. Like Formalist critics, New Critics focused their attention on the variety and degree of certain literary devices, specifically metaphor, irony, tension, and paradox. The New Critics emphasized "close reading" as a way to engage with a text, and paid close attention to the interactions between form and meaning. Important New Critics included Allan Tate, Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, William Empson, and F.R. Leavis. William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley coined the term "intentional fallacy"; other terms associated with New Criticism include "affective fallacy," "heresy of paraphrase," and "ambiguity."

1.4 Reader-Response Theories as a reaction to New Criticism

A theory, which gained prominence in the late 1960s, that focuses on the reader or audience reaction to a particular text, perhaps more than the text itself. Reader response criticism, in modern academics, is another literary theory, focusing on the audiences or readers' experience of any literary work. The theory gained popularity because of its contrastive ideology. The traditional theories primarily focused on the form or content of the literary work. Reader-response criticism can be connected to poststructuralism's emphasis on the role of the reader in actively constructing texts rather than passively consuming them. Unlike text-based approaches such as New Criticism, which are grounded upon some objective meaning already present in the work being examined, reader-response criticism argues that a text has no meaning before a reader experiences—reads—it. Reader Response theory argues that a text does not have any meaning in isolation unless the reader experiences it or reads it. The modern criticism has changed the critic's job to analyze the text's structure. The reader-response critic examines the reader's reaction and its scope to evaluate distinct ways in which

readers or interpretive communities, deduce the meanings. The reader's interpretation can be a personal reaction. It can be a culturally inherited way of interpreting things. The reader-response critic's job is to examine the scope and variety of reader reactions and analyze the ways in which different readers, sometimes called "interpretive communities," make meaning out of both purely personal reactions and inherited or culturally conditioned ways of reading. The theory is popular in both the United States and Germany; its main theorists include Stanley Fish, David Bleich, and Wolfgang Iser.

The theory of Reader Response questions the existence, indulgence, and participation of the reader in joining the writer and helping him creating the text meaning. Their work is to determine the specific reader's community that literary work caters and helps to create meanings. Not only this, the modern critics examine the importance of various interpretations that reader undergoes during a reading process.

1.5 Overview of the text

1.5.1 Critical Analysis of "The Beginning"

Bennett and Royle begin the text by questioning the very beginning of the text itself by asking "Where— or when— does a literary text begin?" This is indeed a serious question that needs profound consideration in literary theory and criticism. Bennett and Royle wonder whether a text begins when the author puts the first mark on the paper, or in the age of technological advancement when every work is carried on through computer or other digital media, whether a text begins when the author presses the first key on the keyboard. It may be that the text begins when the idea about the creation of some text occurs in the mind of the author. Or, it can also be that when a reader picks up the text to read, the text begins, as every author writes with the intention to be read by an audience. Bennett and Royle say that they will try to begin the text with the first sentence of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the twenty-six line sentence, which is "all about beginnings":

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top

Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the beginning how the heav'ns and earth
Rose out of chaos: or if Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th'Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

Milton's opening sentence attempts to begin in *Medias res*, that is, in the middle. Bennett and Royle contend that the beginning of the *Paradise Lost* is a beginning, but also "not a beginning" at the same time, because:

1. it refers back to other texts
2. the muse he invokes is "a second hand muse"
3. it establishes the poem to be "first" poem on the theme of the "first" disobedience
4. It is a beginning as it is the "first" time such project would be undertaken.
5. the origin of the poem comes after the "beginning" of the poem
6. It refers to a time before the "beginning" (blissful seat), the restoration of which would be the "beginning" of a new age.

Thus, Milton's beginning of the poem unsettles the usual notions about how a beginning should be. Another way to begin a text is to begin in the middle, that is *in medias res*. Dante's opening to his most famous *The Divine Comedy* is an example of the "in medias res" technique of beginning a text. Dante's beginning suggests that there are "no absolute beginnings", as all narratives, all journeys, all lives have in some sense already begun before they begin. This is shown quite well in Laurence Sterne's *The life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, who blames his parents of not creating him properly, or in other words, he blames his incompetence in the world to his conception, or the very "beginning", and confirms that he might have been a different individual if he could have a different "beginning". What one can learn from the opening to *Tristram Shandy* is that beginnings determine the outcome, or what comes afterwards. For example, the opening of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen ("This is a truth universally

acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife”) sets the mood for the whole of the story in the novel. Similarly, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* begins with a witty notice, prohibiting the readers of the narrative not to find any motives and morals in the novel, as it is universal practice: “Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.” Sentences like these are both an entrance as well as a barrier to the entry in the text. Apart from such beginnings, there are some texts like Herman Melville’s *The Moby Dick*, which contain multiple beginnings, which Gerard Genette terms as “peritexts”. *Moby Dick* contains a contents page, then a dedication, then an etymology of the word ‘whale’, after that several pages of “extracts”, before it finally begins with the most famous words “Call me Ishmael”. Texts such as these show that one of the peculiarities of literary texts is that their complexity lies in their having more than one beginnings.

Another example given by Bennett and Royle for depiction of the complexity of a text having multiple beginnings is by analysing the beginning of T.S. Eliot’s long poem *The Wasteland*, which is suggestive of the fact that the notion of beginning, and the originality of the text (as being definable and singular), both the terms are highly problematic. Bennett and Royle even comment, “Eliot’s poem begins is to meet with a series of questions concerning the identity of the author, the text and reader, and finally of the Western literary tradition generally”. Eliot’s poem is a classic example of intertextuality, that is, there is no original beginning, and every text is derived from some other text, which in turn, is derived from yet another text.

The persistent myths of literary texts

According to Bennett and Royle, there are two most compelling and persistent myths of almost all literary texts that concern their origins. First is somewhat similar to “intentional fallacy”, that is the common belief that the real meaning of the text is what had actually been intended by the author during the creation of the text, and it is the duty of the reader or the critic to reach to that meaning. So, the myth that “an important aspect of any reading is an imagined meeting of the reader’s mind with that of the author” should be busted. It is because it is extremely difficult to trace the beginning of the text, and the burden to locate the meaning of the text cannot be shifted entirely on the author.

The second myth regarding the literary texts is the extreme importance given to the reader's interpretation of a text. Bennett and Royle say that the myth gives priority to the "individual's first reading of the text", and accordingly believes that "all literary criticism involves a corruption of the original 'experience' of reading". Many critics reject the idea of the single reading of a text and suggest "rereading" it multiple times. For instance, Roland Barthes writes that "the first reading is a primary, naive, phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to 'explicate', to intellectualize. . . .". T.S. Eliot also says that the "critical reading is inevitable as breathing". Therefore, what the authors summarise is the claim that any reading begins with a text or the reader or the author.

1.5.2 Background to "Readers and Reading"

The writer begins by citing P. B. Shelley's one of the most famous sonnet poems named "Ozymandias" and tells the reader that it is somewhat difficult to handle such a poem. As the writers exemplify their theoretical statements through this poem, it becomes mandatory to read thoroughly the poem in order to build up the context. The poem Ozymandias and its analysis has been presented below:

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away'.

This sonnet from 1817 is probably Shelley's most famous and most anthologized poem. The sonnet is somewhat strange because it is an atypical poem for Shelley in many ways. It

touches little upon the most important themes that usually are dealt with by Shelley, for example, beauty, expression, love, imagination. “Ozymandias” is a masterful sonnet. Essentially it is devoted to a single metaphor: the shattered, ruined statue in the desert wasteland, with its arrogant, passionate face and monomaniacal inscription. The poet says, “Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”. The once-great king’s proud boast has been ironically disproved. Ozymandias’s works have crumbled and disappeared, his civilization is gone, all has been turned to dust by the impersonal, indiscriminate, destructive power of history. The ruined statue is now merely a monument to one man’s pride, and a powerful statement about the insignificance of human beings to the passage of time. Ozymandias symbolizes not only political power—the statue can be a metaphor for the pride and hubris of all of humanity, in any of its manifestations. It is significant that all that remains of Ozymandias is a work of art and a group of words. As Shakespeare does in the sonnets, Shelley demonstrates that art and language long outlast the other legacies of power.

Of course, it is Shelley’s brilliant poetic rendering of the story, and not the subject of the story itself, which makes the poem so memorable. Framing the sonnet as a story told to the speaker by “a traveller from an antique land” enables Shelley to add another level of obscurity to Ozymandias’s position with regard to the reader—rather than seeing the statue with our own eyes, so to speak, we hear about it from someone who heard about it from someone who has seen it. Thus the ancient king is rendered even less commanding; the distancing of the narrative serves to undermine his power over us just as completely as has the passage of time. Shelley’s description of the statue works to reconstruct, gradually, the figure of the “king of kings”: first we see merely the “shattered visage,” then the face itself, with its “frown / And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command”; then we are introduced to the figure of the sculptor, and are able to imagine the living man sculpting the living king, whose face wore the expression of the passions now inferable; then we are introduced to the king’s people in the line, “the hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.” The kingdom is now imaginatively complete, and we are introduced to the extraordinary, prideful boast of the king: “Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” With that, the poet demolishes our imaginary picture of the king, and interposes centuries of ruin between it and us: “‘Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’ / Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, / The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

1.5.3 Critical Analysis of “Readers and Reading”

The writer begins the chapter by “reading” Shelley’s poem. He says that the poem is about multiple issues simultaneously, but interestingly, it is about readers and reading also. The traveller reads the inscription in a desert and “the inscription commands the reader”. Both the sculptor of the statue and the traveller are readers, and the “I” in the beginning of the poem is yet another kind of a reader who listens to someone else’s experience. Therefore, the poem presents a series of framed acts of reading. The writer then comes to the most important question: How to tell if a particular reading or interpretation of a text is valid or not? This is a much debated question which is discussed every time a literary text is critically evaluated. Because Shelley’s poem presents multiple levels of reading, therefore, it presents before the readers central paradoxes of reading. If one reads accurately or faithfully, it is considered that he reads “well”, but the question that then arises is that which reading of the text is the most accurate. The writer says that the poem raises a number of questions, for example:

- Who is this traveller who reads the inscription?
- And who is the ‘I’ who listens to, or ‘reads’, his story?
- Is the sculptor’s ‘mocking’ of the king’s face a kind of reading?
- What do such questions lead us to think about the power relations of any reading?
- Is it in the king’s power to command his readers to despair? Or to make them obey?
- Is the traveller’s reading of the inscription different from how that inscription might have been read while the king was alive?
- And does reading therefore change over time – is reading historically specific?

The chapter basically summarises a few of the developments in literary criticism and theory over the past decades with reference to Shelley’s poem Ozymandias.

Developments in literary theory and criticism

The writer comments that many of the developments in literary theory in the second half of the twentieth century can be clubbed in the bigger category of reader-response criticism. These developments are seen as a response to the Anglo-American “new-criticism” of the post war period which puts excessive focus on the author. Reader-response theories suggest that texts should be examined from the viewpoint of the reader rather than the author. The New Criticism theories involved reading a text with the focus on the “form” of the text. Factors like historical and social context, life of the author and his intentions (psycho-analytic

elements), response of the reader to the text, ideological context, all was sidelined. What was important for the New Critics was to look at the “words on the page”. Shelley was deliberately kept out from the list of the canons of New Criticism’s works and authors, as F.R. Leavis famously commented that Shelley is almost “unreadable”.

Reader-response criticism had begun in the late 1960s and became influential in the 1970s and the early 1980s. The critics related to this movement had quite different approaches to literary texts, but they all agree that the meaning of the text is created through the process of reading only. They oppose the generally prevalent notion that there is a certain meaning in the text which lies hidden in the text and is revealed when the reader approaches it. It is due to the fact that every reader will have a different response to a text and therefore, there is no definite singular meaning of the text. It is necessary to read a text before attempting any interpretation of it therefore, the Reader response critics try to chalk out and explain the process of reading and the role of the reader in it.

Reader response criticism has led to another type of criticism, which is often referred to as “subjective criticism” or “personal criticism”. It arises because every individual has personal psychic dispositions, and every individual will respond to a text on the basis of his personal desires, needs, experiences, resistances and so on. If there are ten different readings of a text done by ten different persons, it would be useless to debate which of the ten readings is the correct reading of the text. Norman Holland suggested that “interpretation is the function of identity” and that “all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves”. Thus, a person who hates authority-figures will rejoice in the treatment of Ozymandias, whereas one who has come to associate father-figures with absence will see the poem as a confirmation of the disappearance of all fathers.

Theorists like Stanley Fish argue that an individual reader is compulsorily a part of a “community of readers”. Every reader will read a text according to the conventions followed by his community. In other words, every reader is conditioned to read a text within a certain socio-historical context. For example, a reading of Ozymandias is determined by the fact that the readers or the critics are taught to look for ambiguity and polysemia in the literary texts.

Then, there are critics like Wolfgang Iser, who contend that no literary text or the reader must be studied in isolation, as the process of reading involves an interaction between the elements of a text and the act of reading itself. Iser tries to explore the ways in which a text is “concretized”, that is, given a meaning in the process of reading. He says that every text

produces certain “gaps” or “blanks” and it is on the part of the reader to fill and complete those gaps and spaces. For example, no writer or poet fully tells everything, the reader must compulsorily imagine certain things, like in *Ozymandias*, the reader can think who is the traveller?, whether he is a male or a female, and why? and so on.

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was the inclusion of political dimension too in the critical debates about literature. Michel Foucault suggested that “power is everywhere”, and accordingly, literary texts started to be read in terms of power relations. The writer again explains this with the help of *Ozymandias* and says that there are multiple representations of the relationship between power and reading in Shelley’s poem. Also, the power relation of reader and the text are not stable, they keep changing with time. As Robert Young comments, “Shelley’s poem ‘demonstrates that meaning, like power, is not stable or fixed, and that even power cannot guarantee a tyranny of meaning: although authors may have intentions when they write, once they have written they cannot control and fix the meaning of any reading’”. Therefore, reading survives the command of the text.

Apart from power relations, gender relations also play an important role in the reading of the text. Critics like Judith Fetterley argues that the “female readers have been immasculated, by which she means that they have traditionally been taught to read as men”. Fetterley suggests that women should stop thinking like a man and should liberate themselves from the notion of a “universal reader”, who is by default a male. She argues for female models of reading. Critics like Jonathan Culler raise further questions like what would it mean to read like a woman, and the difference between a reading a text as a woman and reading a text as a man. Shelley’s poem is full of male pride, if one was to read as a woman, because, firstly the traveller is a male, talking about the power and the subsequent powerlessness of a certain male. There is no woman in the text and the poem is overwhelmingly masculine.

Critics concerned with the issue of race and ethnicity have also come up who have now developed specific strategies of reading and criticism of a text. Theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said have transformed literary studies through their emphasis on colonisation, ethnic difference, racial oppression and discrimination. They talk about the position of the subaltern, the binaries between East and the West, the construction of the “other”. *Ozymandias* deals with the racial “other”, it might be an Egyptian or African, a land referred to as “antique”, and nothing but “lone and level sands”.

Finally, a poststructuralist or deconstructive reading of a text would raise questions like what comes first: the reader or the text? Does the reader transform the text or leave it fundamentally unaltered by its reading? Therefore, a text might be totally unaltered by the reading, and in fact, instructs the reader how to read it, or it might get fundamentally incomplete in the process of reading. Therefore, a text is renewed every time it is read. Rather than choosing between these two extreme models, the deconstructive critics argue that both the models operate simultaneously, binding the reader and the text in a strange kind of relationship: the reader makes the text and the text makes the reader. Thus, Ozymandias is both about readers and reading; not only do we read the poem but the poem reads us.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)

1. Who composed the poem “Ozymandias”?
2. Name any two feminist critics?

about the key concepts in criticism, we have moved to complex theories that have evolved in criticism. The book *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* has presented beautifully what is strange in literature and aims to stimulate the mind of the reads towards thinking what is it that makes a literary text powerful, complex, and different from others. In the first chapter, Bennett and Royle begin the text by questioning the very beginning of the text itself by asking “Where– or when– does a literary text begin?” The second chapter of the book basically summarises a few of the developments in literary criticism and theory over the past decades with reference to Shelley’s poem Ozymandias. After reading the lesson, you are acquainted with what literature is, and how to read any text.

1.7 References

1. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Pearson, 2004)
https://www.academia.edu/5832284/Literature_Criticism_and_Theory_by_Andrew_Bennett_and_Nicholas_Royle

1.8 Further Readings:

1. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Pearson, 2004) (Third edition is available online)

2. Edward Said, *The Beginnings* (1975)
3. Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (2000)

1.9 Model Questions

1. How does a literary text multiply its beginning or beginnings? Explain in context to your reading of Bennett and Royle's *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*.
2. What are the two persistent and the most compelling myths of literary texts according to Bennett and Royle?
3. What is meant by "framed acts of reading"? Discuss the number of frames suggested by Andrew Bennett in this context.

“The Author” and “The Text and the World”

Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.3 Some key concepts

2.3.1 What is an Author?

2.3.2 Death of an Author

2.3.3 Intentional Fallacy

2.3.4 Affective Fallacy

2.4 Overview of the text

2.4.1 Critical Analysis of “The Author”

2.4.2 Background to “The Text and the World”

2.4.3 Critical Analysis of “The Text and the World”

2.5 Summary of the lesson

2.6 References

2.7 Further Reading

2.8 Model Questions

2.0 Objectives

After reading this lesson, you would be able to:

- know about the role of author in the text
- debate whether the text needs an author or not
- estimate how a critic or a reader alters the text
- understand the relationship between the text and the world
- Discuss about various fallacies or mistakes committed by critics in interpreting a text
- Discuss who is more important to a text: the author or the reader?

2.1 Introduction

To develop a better understanding of the literary texts that you will encounter, you are prescribed in your syllabus Chapters 1 to 4 of the book *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (namely “The beginning”, “Readers and reading”, “The author”, and “The text and the world”) by Andrew Bennett and Nicolas Ryle. The book presents beautifully what is strange in literature and aims to stimulate the mind of the reads towards thinking what is it that makes a literary text powerful, complex, and different from others. Andrew Bennett is a Professor of English. He has written extensively on written on poetics and literary theory, and literature and affect, ignorance, philosophical skepticism, philosophical pessimism, the body, suicide, the sublime, posterity, letters, the historical novel, Englishness, and the ordinary. Nicholas Royle is an English novelist, editor, publisher, literary reviewer and creative writing lecturer. He has written seven novels: *Counterparts*, *Saxophone Dreams*, *The Matter of the Heart*, among others, and more than 100 short stories, which have appeared in a variety of anthologies and magazines.

The current lesson deals with the chapters 3 and 4 of the book, namely “The Author” and “The text and the World” as prescribed in your syllabus. A brief introduction to the basic concepts and terms is provided in the lesson. A detailed summary of the two chapters is given to facilitate understanding. Model questions are provided in the end to help you know about the types of questions that you would be asked in the exam.

1.3 Some key concepts

2.3.1 “Death of the Author”

"The Death of the Author" is a 1967 essay by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes (1915–1980). Barthes' essay argues against traditional literary criticism's practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in an interpretation of a text, and instead argues that writing and creator are unrelated. Barthes's "The Death of the Author" is an attack on traditional literary criticism that focused too much on trying to retrace the author's intentions and original meaning in mind. Instead Barthes asks us to adopt a more text oriented approach that focuses on the interaction of the reader, not the writer, with it. This means that the text is much more open to interpretation, much more fluid in its meaning than previously thought. Barthes writes:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture . . . Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.

Thus, according to Barthes, readers must separate a literary work from its creator in order to liberate the text from interpretive tyranny. Each piece of writing contains multiple layers and meanings. In a well-known quotation, Barthes draws an analogy between text and textiles, declaring that a "text is a tissue [or fabric] of quotations," drawn from "innumerable centers of culture," rather than from one, individual experience. The essential meaning of a work depends on the impressions of the reader, rather than the "passions" or "tastes" of the writer; "a text's unity lies not in its origins," or its creator, "but in its destination," or its audience.

2.3.2 "What is an Author?"

Foucault's "What Is an Author?" was originally delivered as a lecture in 1969, two years after the first English publication of Barthes' famous essay "Death of the Author, 1967)". According to Foucault, his primary concern is not to analyse the concept of authors throughout the ages but to how their relationship with the text. He tries to figure out how a text points to a figure that is outside and proceeds with it.

Both Barthes and Foucault agree the "Author" is an unnatural, historical phenomenon that has unfortunately obtained mythological, heroic status. And both aim to contradict and complicate this status. However, their methods are drastically different. If "Death of the Author" actively attempts to kill the Author from the position of full-frontal attack, then "What is an Author?" casually submits to the inevitability of this death and opts instead to further problematize the foundational definitions underlying author and text. Foucault poses a series of ontological questions regarding a text. He then goes on to question and complicate the author in a similar vein. "First, we need to clarify briefly the problems arising from the use of the author's name. What is an author's name? How does it function? Foucault then makes a distinction of an "author function" and how it relates to an individual work versus an entire discourse. Authors who operate in the latter category are what he calls "founders of discursivity" and operate in the unique position of the "transdiscursive". These are authors like Freud and Marx who "...are unique in that they are not just the authors of their own

works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts."

By the end of "What is an Author?" it becomes clear that Foucault is interested in exhaustively complicating the notion of what it means to be an author through the articulation of "author" alongside its many historical and discursive formations rather than, like Barthes, singling out a generic "Author" to attack.

2.3.3 Intentional Fallacy

Intentional fallacy is a term used in 20th-century literary criticism to describe the problem inherent in trying to judge a work of art by assuming the intent or purpose of the artist who created it. Introduced by W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley in *The Verbal Icon* (1954), the approach was a reaction to the popular belief that to know what the author intended—what he had in mind at the time of writing—was to know the correct interpretation of the work. Although a seductive topic for conjecture and frequently a valid appraisal of a work of art, the intentional fallacy forces the literary critic to assume the role of cultural historian or that of a psychologist who must define the growth of a particular artist's vision in terms of his mental and physical state at the time of his creative act.

2.3.4 Affective Fallacy

Affective fallacy, according to the followers of New Criticism, is the misconception that arises from judging a poem by the emotional effect that it produces in the reader. The concept of affective fallacy is a direct attack on impressionistic criticism, which argues that the reader's response to a poem is the ultimate indication of its value. Those who support the affective criterion for judging poetry cite its long and respectable history, beginning with Aristotle's dictum that the purpose of tragedy is to evoke "terror and pity." Edgar Allan Poe stated that "a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul." Emily Dickinson said, "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry." Many modern critics continue to assert that emotional communication and response cannot be separated from the evaluation of a poem.

2.4 Overview of the text

2.4.1 Critical Analysis of "The Author"

The writer begins the chapter with the opening sentence of J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* published in 1951, which is as follows: "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it." Here, Salinger suggests that there are a number of ways in which we can think about the author. This sentence is strange yet very straightforward at the same time. He is very candid in expressing his opinion, that is, that we as the readers might not be interested in "David Copperfield kind of crap". Bennett and Royle assert that the most important word in this sentence is "it", and question whether the "it" at the beginning of the sentence is the same "it" which Salinger talks about in the end of the sentence.

The sentence plays a sort of literary game with the conventional style of starting a novel. The Speaker or the Writer of the sentence is ambiguous, though later one knows that the speaker is a 16 year old boy, but it is not made clear in the first sentence. The relationship of the author and the narrator is revealed in the first sentence, as well as the relationship between a novel, which is fiction and biography or autobiography, which is truth. Also, it establishes a relationship with another literary text, that is *David Copperfield*. Both the novels are a mixture of autobiography and novel. They raise fundamental questions about the relationship between literary texts, narrators, characters and authors. Most importantly, they raise the most significant question, "Who is the speaker?"

There are many passages in the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* that are delightfully straightforward yet extraordinarily suggestive, for example:

What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it. That doesn't happen much, though. I wouldn't mind calling this Isak Dinesen up. And Ring Lardner, except that D.B. [Holden's brother] told me he's dead. You take that book *Of Human Bondage*, by Somerset Maugham, though. I read it last summer. It's a pretty good book and all, but I wouldn't want to call Somerset Maugham up. I don't know. He just isn't the kind of a guy I'd want to call up, that's all. I'd rather call old Thomas Hardy up. I like that Eustacia Vye.

This passage presents one of the most curious effects of literature that is, the tendency of literary texts to generate powerful feelings of identification, not only between the reader and

the character but between the reader and the author also. So much so, that the reader is compelled to think that the author is a “terrific friend” of his, who is capable of understanding and expressing the reader’s feelings and desires even better than the reader himself. The reader feels the connection between the author and himself as so much intense that it extends to the level of telepathy. Bennett and Royle presents the idea beautifully, they say, “The author is an absent presence, both there and not there.” The reader feels that he understands the author like no one else could, and the author is expressing the opinions and thoughts of the reader better than the reader himself could do. This is the peculiarity of literature and it is the way that the greatness of a writer can be described.

But there is a lot of complexity in the idea of the two-way friendship that the reader enjoys with the author. One of the issues is that the author is not as approachable as he may seem to be, he can never become a reader’s “terrific friend” as Caulfield suggests. It is because the author is not “actually” an author, he is merely the personal projection, that is, it is the “idea” of the author that exists in the mind of the reader. Secondly, the author may be physically dead. Even he is physically alive, he might be dead in some other respects. Salinger’s passage is ironic in the respect that he cannot call the author Ring Lardner, since he is dead, but wants to call Thomas Hardy, who is long dead, because according to him, he still lives through his text.

The writers then discuss the concept of death of the author. Death of the author does not mean the physical death of the author, but it refers to the statement that the author is absent from the text. The most commonly used phrases while criticising a particular text during the time of Roland Barthes (and still today) are “Is that what Shakespeare (or Bronte, or Dickens) really meant?”, “ Is that what the author intended?” The idea that the real meaning of the text is what the author intended is referred to as “intentional fallacy”, a term coined by Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946. The death of the author implies that the critic must not go to the author to find the meaning of the text. Just because the text comes from the author, like the phrase “coming from the horse’s mouth”, it does not mean that the author is telling the truth, or that the author knows the truth, or that what the author has to say is any way more interesting than what anyone else might have to say about that subject.

But another complexity arises when we discuss a text in the light of psychoanalytic theories. One has to discuss the intentions of the author in the text from the viewpoint of psychoanalysis, which says that it is the conscious or subconscious mind of the author that

works while he or she is creating a text. Also, sometimes, it is the authorial intention to say something else and mean something else. It is a commonplace activity that a layman also does, for example, “I didn’t mean to hurt you” can always mean that “I did”, or people usually say “Take no offense” before saying something offensive. Thus, as much as the author is in control of a language or an idea, the idea or language is also in control of the author. The system and rules of language is already predetermined, all the author has to do is to take his designated place in that system.

Roland Barthes essay “Death of the Author” does not answers the question about the origin and meaning of the text, it simply transfers the burden on to the reader. He ends his essay by declaring that “the death of the author” coincides with the “birth of the reader”. Such a claim is already problematic as we have discussed in detail in the previous chapter. The reader cannot be credited with the responsibility of finding the true meaning of the text because every reading of a text by a single person is different and no reading is accurate. Then, multiple readers will interpret the same text in multiple ways. Therefore, one cannot openly declare that the author has died, because the author simply cannot die. He is present as a ghost throughout his text. If Barthes’s essay is compared with Foucault’s essay “What is an Author”, then one knows a new perspective which suggests that the author is a “historical construction”. The author is not a timeless figure, but its significance varies from time to time, across cultures and discourses. Every author can be seen as the mouthpiece of his age and time period. Foucault makes the relations between “author” and “authority” visible and asserts that in the contemporary times, authorship is bound up in legal and copyright issues. This practice transforms the author into a locus of authority who confines meaning into a “single univocal strand”, and it makes the presence of the author important in order to associate some kind of meaning with the text.

The presence of the author cannot be totally ignored in many other respects. For example, in case of women writing, non-heterosexual writing or non-white writing, etc. Everything that is unconventional and supposedly non-mainstream has to assert the author’s presence in a dominant manner. This comes under identity politics. How we read and understand a particular text is determined by way what we know about the author, or what we think we know about the author. But at the same time, simply deducing the meaning of the text with relation to the personal life of the author is also inappropriate. For example, the fact that Ezra Pound made fascist propagandist comments on Italian media should not affect the way we read his works.

We cannot outwardly remove an author from the text, but simply reduce his presence to a ghost in the text. In this regard, one might say that the author is dead right from the start. Also, as Jacques Derrida has argued that the author is “dead insofar as his text has a structure of survival even if he is living”. Texts have an extraordinary ability to outlive their authors. This capacity to survive without the survival of its author is what makes a text a text, and it is something that no author can control. Also, no author owns the meaning of the text, because it assumes a new meaning in the hands of the reader who is reading it.

The writer ends the chapter by saying that no matter how much the role of the author in a text is de-limited, one can never stop giving God-like reverence to him. This is evident in the fact that every reader has its own favourite author. It does not affect anything that the author may be present in the text in the form of a ghost. In fact, the greatest literary works are those in which there is minimum presence of the author, or the texts which say a little or nothing at all about their authors, for example, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, etc.

2.4.2 Background to “The Text and the World”

As the writers exemplify their theoretical statements through Andrew Marvell’s poem “To his Coy Mistress”, it becomes mandatory to read thoroughly the poem in order to build up the context. The poem and its analysis have been presented below:

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love’s day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;

Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust;
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

The poem is spoken by a male lover to his female beloved as an attempt to convince her to sleep with him. The speaker argues that the Lady's shyness and hesitancy would be acceptable if the two had "world enough, and time." But because they are finite human beings, he thinks they should take advantage of their sensual embodiment while it lasts. He tells the lady that her beauty, as well as her "long-preserved virginity," will only become food for worms unless she gives herself to him while she lives. Rather than preserve any lofty ideals of chastity and virtue, the speaker affirms, the lovers ought to "roll all our strength, and all / Our sweetness, up into one ball." He is alluding to their physical bodies coming together in the act of lovemaking.

The speaker begins by constructing a thorough and elaborate conceit of the many things he "would" do to honor the lady properly, if the two lovers indeed had enough time. He posits impossible stretches of time during which the two might play games of courtship. He claims he could love her from ten years before the Biblical flood narrated in the Book of Genesis, while the Lady could refuse his advances up until the "conversion of the Jews," which refers to the day of Christian judgment prophesied for the end of times in the New Testament's Book of Revelations.

The speaker then uses the metaphor of a "vegetable love" to suggest a slow and steady growth that might increase to vast proportions, perhaps encoding a phallic suggestion. This would allow him to praise his lady's features – eyes, forehead, breasts, and heart – in increments of hundreds and even thousands of years, which he says that the lady clearly deserves due to her superior stature. He assures the Lady that he would never value her at a "lower rate" than she deserves, at least in an ideal world where time is unlimited.

Marvell praises the lady's beauty by complimenting her individual features using a device called an erotic blazon, which also evokes the influential techniques of 15th and 16th century Petrarchan love poetry. Petrarchan poetry is based upon "rarifying" (the process of making someone rare) and distancing the female beloved, making her into an unattainable object. In this poem, though, the speaker only uses these devices to suggest that distancing himself from his lover is mindless, because they do not have the limitless time necessary for the speaker to praise the Lady sufficiently. He therefore constructs an erotic blazon only to assert its futility.

The poem's mood shifts suddenly when the speaker asserts that "Time's winged chariot" is always near. The speaker's rhetoric changes from an acknowledgement of the Lady's limitless virtue to insisting on the radical limitations of their time as embodied beings. Once

dead, he assures the Lady, her virtues and her beauty will lie in the grave along with her body as it turns to dust. Likewise, the speaker imagines his lust being reduced to ashes, while the chance for the two lovers to join sexually will be lost forever.

The third and final section of the poem shifts into an all-out plea and display of poetic prowess in which the speaker attempts to win over the Lady. He compares the Lady's skin to a vibrant layer of morning dew that is animated by the fires of her soul and encourages her to "sport" with him "while we may." Time devours all things, the speaker acknowledges, but he nonetheless asserts that the two of them can, in fact, turn the tables on time. They can become "amorous birds of prey" that actively consume the time they have through passionate lovemaking.

2.4.3 Critical Analysis of "The Text and the World"

The questions that are dealt in the book *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* are mostly about the relationship of texts with the world. For example:

1. How do texts represent the world?
2. Where does a text begin and end?
3. Is an author an inhabitant of the world or the creation of a literary text?
4. To what extent is history a kind of text?
5. And what implications does this have for thinking about literature?
6. Can literary texts do things to the world as well as simply describe it?

These questions exist from the time since Plato had banished poets from his Republic because they misrepresent the world and serve no good purpose. The very phrase "text and the world" suggests two binaries with a clear distinction: the text, as opposed to the world. This distinction is implicit in understanding about the mimetic theory, that is, the text is the imitation of the world. Most of the literary theories assume the separation of world and the text, they make one believe that a text is not essentially a part of the world. Writers over the centuries have tried to break down this dichotomy but to no avail. Post-structuralism (along with new-historicism, feminism, post-colonialism, etc) is one such theory which tries to break down this dichotomy. Post-structuralists refuse to believe that the literary texts are imitation or duplication of the real world, instead, they say that the literary works make up the real world.

The writers then move to Andrew Marvell's poem "To his Coy Mistress" to exemplify their theoretical statements. The questions that arise after reading the poem are should the poem be read as a poem of seduction? Is the speaker Andrew Marvell himself or someone else, and is the woman to whom the poem is addressed a real woman? Or is the speaker some fictional character speaking to a real woman, or maybe the woman is fictional. It may even be that the woman is not actually a woman, but the poem is addressed to us, the readers of the poem. Most of the critical readings of the poem assume that the poem is not actually about the seduction of a real woman, but merely a fictional representation of the attempt. This makes the poem distinct from the "real world and real people". But, nonetheless, whether the people in the poem are real or fictional, the poem puts an effect on the readers. Therefore, the poem is not only a poem of "sexual seduction", but also "textual seduction". The poem does not only employ various literary themes and motives, but also includes biblical, post-colonial, philosophical, military, classical and scientific discourses.

The writers suggest that instead of viewing the texts and the world as different entities, we must consider that everything living that happens in the world is mediated by language. Therefore, when Derrida says that "there is nothing outside the text" or "there is no outside-text", his point is that there is no access to the real world except through the language of the text, for example in the case of Marvell's poem. One cannot reach the mistress of Marvell through any other means than the poem. Derrida suggests that there is no existence of the world other than through language. Language here does not mean only verbal language, it can be non-verbal also, for example, through the system of signs. Critics of Derrida argue that Derrida's stance is of "a 'pure' textualism which cannot account for power or politics are simply failing to recognize—or choosing to ignore—the extent to which political, social, economic and historical forces are bound up in language, in discourse, in representation."

Some of these points are clarified if we look closely at the poem. The poem begins by saying that if the speaker had enough time and world, he would spend many hundreds of years praising the woman's beauty. The poem argues for action, not for talk, and the action is the joining of the bodies of the lovers. But, the lover fails to achieve this end, as he could not go beyond the talk to the body of the woman.

Nevertheless, the woman's presence is felt throughout the poem, the poet is a spectator to the changes that are happening to the woman's body. For example, he talks about the blush that

sits on the woman's cheeks like morning dew on grass. The speaker "interprets" the woman's blush as we as readers "interpret" his lines.

The writers conclude the chapter by saying that the "text and the world" is a false opposition, as the texts cannot be anything but a part of the world. If one says that a certain text "represents" reality, then it is again a wrong statement because literary texts "produce" reality and they are already a part of the reality. The writers move on to the feminist critiques of the poem. According to them, the woman is seen as a passive object, dead "as a corpse", who is just a subject of aesthetic contemplation of a man. Many female critics of the poem like Elisabeth Bronfen find the treatment of woman in the poem almost violent. The critics suggest that "like other representations of the death of a beautiful woman, the poem exemplifies patriarchy's repression of the fact of the (male) subject's own death by the displaced representation of that death in the 'other' (the woman)." Therefore, if the poem is read as an expression of the cultural construction of femininity, then the distinction between the text and the world is dissolved.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)

1. Which is Derrida's most famous work?
2. Name the author of "Death of an Author".

2.5 Summary

You have now read a detailed summary of the Chapter 3 titled "The Author" and 4 titled "The Text and the World" of the textbook prescribed in your syllabus. You are now acquainted with the ongoing debates revolving around the author and the text in the literary circles. The writers suggest that no matter how much the role of the author in a text is de-limited, one can never stop giving God-like reverence to him, and that the texts cannot be anything but a part of the world. But at the same time, no author owns the meaning of the text, because it assumes a new meaning in the hands of the reader who is reading it. Model questions in the end of the lesson will help you think more deeply about the concepts that you have just studied in the chapter.

2.6 References

4. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Pearson, 2004)
<https://www.academia.edu/5832284/Literature_Criticism_and_Theory_by_Andrew_Bennett_and_Nicholas_Royle>

2.7 Further Reading

1. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Pearson, 2004) (Third edition is available online)
2. Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller, eds, *What is an Author?* (1993)
3. Sean Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author* (2nd edn., 1998)
4. Edward Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983)
5. Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1972)

2.8 Model Questions

1. Who is the author according to the writers Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle and what are his functions?
2. Explain the relationship between the text and the world as suggested in the book *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* with help of any literary text that you have read.

“LITERATURE AND HISTORY”

by Terry Eagleton

STRUCTURE

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Marx and Marxism

3.4 Marxist Literary Criticism

3.5 Terry Eagleton: An Introduction

3.6 Critical Exposition of Terry Eagleton’s Text, *Literature and History*

3.6.1 Base and Superstructure

3.6.2 Literature and Superstructure

3.6.3 Literature and Ideology

3.7 Marxist Reading: Some Suggestions

3.8 My Last Duchess: A Marxist Reading

3.9 Critical Concepts in Marxist Literary Criticism

3.10 Summary of the Lesson

3.11 References

3.12 Further Readings

3.13 Model Questions

3.0 Objectives

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- Discuss Marx, Marxism and Marxist Literary Criticism and explain why this school of thought/criticism is of utmost significance.
- Highlight the key concerns of Eagleton’s text, ‘*Literature and History*’
- Elucidate seminal terms as ideology, hegemony associated with the approach
- Interpret and analyse a text in the light of Marxism

3.1 Introduction:

In this lesson you will get introduced to an approach that relates literary text to the society, to the history and cultural and political systems in which it is created. It does not consider a literary text, devoid of its writer and the influences on the writer. This approach foregrounds how economic conditions give birth to a way of life. As a political movement, which began with a German thinker named Karl Marx, tries to understand why poverty and inequality is widespread in the world and how the same can be rectified. “The philosophers

have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.” The approach gives priority to economic factors for understanding literature and culture. It also advocates that a literary text is not immune to ideological and hegemonic formations. Literature is considered as inevitably economic and political entity and historically situated. To understand literature in Marxist terms, an understanding of the political, economic, and philosophical ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are essential. Karl Marx was highly critical of capitalism. The ultimate goal of Marxism is to create classless societies with fair distribution of goods.

3.2 Marx and Marxism:

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a student of Hegel who went on to found modern communism. Broadly speaking, Marx was sharply critical of the way in which society was organized. He argued that capitalist or free-market economic production was riven by inequalities which allowed the minority to accumulate vast wealth at the cost of the oppression and wretched domination of the majority. The injustice of these divisions was, according to Marx, then disguised, promoted and ratified by the cultural, political and legal framework of society, or what he termed the superstructure. For Marx, the superstructure was, in large measure, determined by the very ruling classes who stood to benefit from maintaining inequality in the first place. Marx proposed an alternative to capitalism – borrowing the term ‘communism’ to describe it – in which there would be no divisions or inequalities and in which each individual would be allowed to realize his or her creative potential.

The crucial point about Marx’s philosophy is that it is materialist, unconcerned with philosophical abstracts like ‘truth’, ‘beauty’, ‘spirit’, and always concerned with the actual world in which people live attempting to make the world a better place in which to live. ‘The philosophers,’ Marx wrote in 1845, ‘have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.’ The world needs to be changed, according to Marx, because society is inequitable and oppressive, and millions live in misery and poverty when they need not do so. Philosophers, he argues, ought to work out why society works so badly to be able to suggest ways to make it work better, and in order to do that they need to determine the organizing principle behind society. Marx was very clear on what he thought this organizing principle was: economics. Clearly, there is a lot more to society and culture than just economics, but Marx believed that all the things we observe in human life, from poverty and wealth to religion, art, politics, and even sport, are all determined by the economic relations between

people. 'Determined' means that these things derive from economic roots, so that, if you analyze them in enough depth, you will eventually discover that they are the expression of underlying economic relations. For example, a priest in a religion might claim to have nothing to do with economics or politics but instead to be focused on spiritual things, but Marx argued that this was just a kind of smoke-screen. Religion, Marx thought, was designed to distract people from the miseries of their life, to stop the working classes rising up against the injustices of the world by indoctrinating them into obeying authority (with 'God' as the ultimate authority figure) and by promising a better life after death (so that they wouldn't rock the boat in this life). In this respect Marx thought all religions were like a drug, stupefying the populace – 'religion' as he famously remarked, 'is the opium of the people'. So, although religion doesn't admit this on the surface, its real nature is determined by economics, or more precisely by the need to make capitalism work more smoothly.

In the Marxist frame of thinking, human beings are considered primarily as historical beings and all human expressions as historical expression. In it, the material circumstances and the bodily conditions of our existence shape our ideas and consciousness. Historical Materialism, a central concept in Marxist theory, foregrounds the premise that humanity is the subject of history. Human life is a web of social relations between individuals within a community. History is basically the history of the transformations in relations and modes of productions. "Men make their own history" writes Marx, "but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past". This may help us understand why the various modes of productions were necessary stages of development towards an egalitarian society.

Marxist criticism analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produce it and Marxist critical practice changes as the history in which it is rooted, changes. Since Marxism is a systematic theory of human societies and the practice of transforming them, so that men and women may make themselves free from certain forms of exploitation and oppression. By trying to understand and critique ideologies of the past and the present and since such an understanding contributes to our liberation, a comprehensive knowledge of history/ historical context becomes indispensable for such an emancipatory project.

Although Marx wrote little by way of literary or cultural criticism, we can see how the same principle might be applied to art. All art grows out of economic realities: artists are real people who live out economic relations with other people. Some art tries to disguise this basic

fact, and creates an imaginary universe in which these economic factors – class, money, oppression, and so on – miraculously do not apply. Other art – for some Marxists, better art – makes people aware of the realities of society.

In the realm of literature and Art, Marx's views are somewhat piecemeal and inconclusive, generating a rich variety of attempts by Marxist critics to assemble his insights into coherent theories. A nucleus of elements can be distinguished as the common starting point of most Marxist theories. First, art is a commodity and like other commodities can be understood only in the fullness of its connections with ideology, historical class-conflict, and economic substructure. Second, art is one aspect of man's self-creation through labor. It is part of the process whereby an "objective" world is created out of a collective human subjectivity. Third, language is not a self-enclosed system of relations but must be understood as social practice, as deeply rooted in material conditions as any other practice. Having said this both Marx and Engels appear to have granted a relative autonomy to art, acknowledging that there was not a relation of simple reflection between art and its material substructure.

3.3 Marxist Literary Criticism

An approach to literary analysis founded on the principles articulated by Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. Marxist critics believe that they must go beyond the usual analysis of literary devices, themes and styles and concentrate on determining an author's world view, the historical context of the work and the sociological concerns of the text to see if such an analysis of the author's ideology advances either the bourgeoisie's or the proletariat's concerns. Most Marxist theorists believe that their approach to study literary-cultural texts is more comprehensive and more explanatory. Even for Eagleton, Marxism is not just another approach to literature to be taken alongside Freudian or mythological criticism and he is against supplementing Marxism with some form of idealist thought. This is a matter of firmly held political belief: that Marxism as a theory has a political priority in that its aim is to change the world, not interpret it, (the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is, to change it) and that its transformative ambitions must be defended. While few Marxist theories today would claim to reveal absolute truths, they do assert a situated argument of what is true or false, for that specific historical moment. For example, Marxism argue that all viewpoints are socially determined, but that does not entail that all viewpoints are equal in value. A prisoner is more likely to recognize the oppressive nature of a particular judicial system than a judge. In classical Marxist terms, the working classes will recognize the injustices of capitalism rather than the capitalists. All Marxist theories continue

to assert that certain inequities – such as class exploitation and poverty – will always be ‘wrong’, and Marxist literary theories continue to assert that these issues are not unrelated to literature. Marxist approaches to culture believe that they have a commitment to argue on behalf of those social classes which suffer under capitalism: not only the working classes, but those non-working classes, the unemployed, travelers, single parents, the elderly poor whose place in capitalist society is far from comfortable. While this commitment makes Marxism appear pious and humorless to its detractors, it is also a necessary reminder that there is a world beyond the academy to which Marxists/ critics are inescapably connected:

Men and women do not live by culture alone, the vast majority of them throughout history have been deprived of the chance of living by it at all, and those few who are fortunate enough to live by it now are able to do so because of the labor of those who do not. Any cultural or critical theory which does not begin from this single most important fact, and hold it steadily in mind in its activities, is in my view unlikely to be worth very much. (Eagleton 1983)

There are at least two fundamental premises in Marx from which any Marxist criticism must begin. In the first place all forms of consciousness – religious, moral, philosophical, legal, as well as language itself – have no independent history and arise from the material activity of men. Eagleton identifies a twofold specificity of Marxist criticism; material production is regarded as the ultimate determining factor of social existence, and class struggle is viewed as the central dynamic of historical development. Eagleton adds a third, Marxist-Leninist, imperative, namely a commitment to the theory and practice of political revolution. Eagleton is aware of the highly mediated and complex relation between base and superstructure, but his aptly Marxist insistence on the primacy of material production can be seen, to be the basis of virtually all his attacks on non-Marxist literary theory.

The second premise is Marx’s view that the class which is the ruling material force is also the ruling intellectual force; it owns the means of production both materially and mentally. In the light of this we can better understand Eagleton’s statement of the tasks of a “revolutionary literary criticism.” Such a criticism

would dismantle the ruling concepts of ‘literature,’ reinserting ‘literary’ texts into the whole field of cultural practices. It would strive to relate such ‘cultural’ practices to other forms of social activity, and to transform the cultural apparatuses themselves. It would articulate its ‘cultural analysis with a consistent political intervention. It would deconstruct the received hierarchies of

'literature' and transvaluate received judgments and assumptions; engage with the language and 'unconscious' of literary texts, to reveal their role in the ideological construction of the subject; and mobilize such texts...in a struggle to transform those subjects within a wider political context. (*Walter Benjamin*)

But all of this subserves the 'primary task' of Marxist criticism, which is "to actively participate in and help direct the cultural emancipation of the masses". Eagleton repeatedly stresses that the starting point of theory must be a practical, political purpose and that any theory which will contribute to human emancipation through the socialist transformation of society is acceptable. He effectively develops Marx's premise when he emphasizes that the 'means of production' includes the means of production of human subjectivity, which embraces a range of institutions such as 'literature'. Eagleton regards the most difficult emancipation as that of the 'space of subjectivity', colonized as it is by the dominant political order. The humanities as whole serve an ideological function that helps to perpetuate certain forms of subjectivity. Eagleton's views here imply that for Marxist criticism, 'ideology' is a crucial focus of the link between material and mental means of production. And if literary cultural theories fail to articulate their connections with the material infrastructure, they have a tendency to be in complicity with ruling ideologies.

3.4 Terry Eagleton: An Introduction

Terry Eagleton was born in Salford, England, and educated at Cambridge University. While at Cambridge, he was a student of Raymond Williams, the most important Marxist critic of the 1960s and one of the founders of British cultural studies. Eagleton earned his doctoral degree in his early seventies and became a tutor of English at Wadham College, Oxford University. He has proven to be Williams' successor not only in Marxist literary theory but also, especially since the 1990s, in cultural studies.

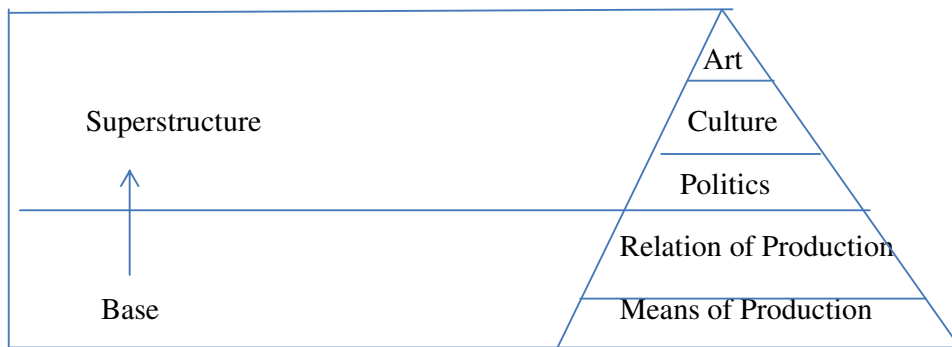
Eagleton's early works were devoted to literature and society, with a focus on Shakespeare and the Brontes. His *Myths of Power* (1975) was a Marxist reading of the Brontes' works that made his reputation as a theorist. At the same time, he also published important works on Marxist theory, including *Criticism and Ideology* (1976). In the 1980s, he produced monographs on a number of literary and theoretical figures, notably Walter Benjamin and Samuel Richardson. He also published his most widely read book, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983). No simple primer, *Literary Theory* begin by examining critically the concept of literature and the institutional setting in which it is intertwined. It then offers historically grounded survey of the major theoretical fields, concluding with an

appeal for ‘political criticism.’ In 1999, Eagleton published an authoritative study of the Kantian aesthetic regime, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, which was followed by two volumes of essays on Irish literature and culture, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995) and *Crazy John and the Bishop* (1998), both of which bear the distinct hallmarks of Williams and the English Marxist tradition. In the twenty-first century, Eagleton continues to write on a broad array of topics, including questions of faith, tragedy, literary theory, and the ‘idea of culture.’ And he continues to explore the relevance of Marxist theory.

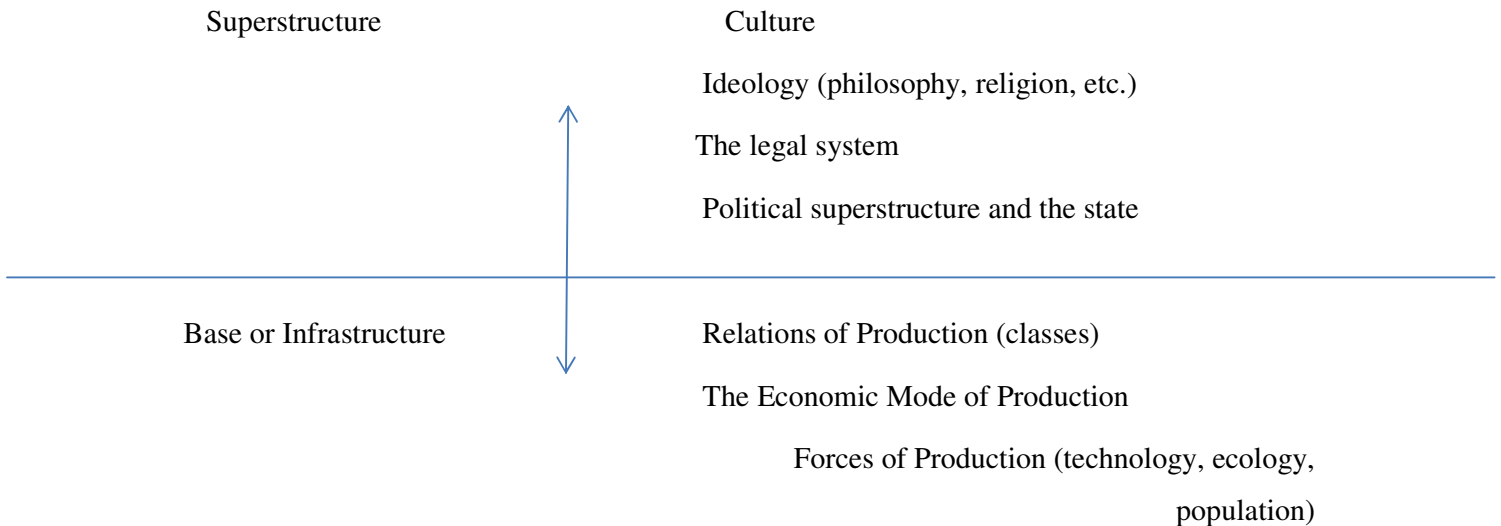
3.5 Literature and History: A Critical Exposition

3.5.1 Base and Superstructure

Base and superstructure are the most common set of concepts in Marx’s materialist philosophy, which claims that human belief and ideas are determined by the material circumstances in which they arise and develop. The concept of base and superstructure are used as models to explain the relationship between economic and productive forces in a society on one hand and legal cultural, educational religious and political forces on the other. Because individuals must meet their material needs before anything else, and because they accomplish this in association with other people, these relations form the foundation – or base – of society on which all other forms of life – the superstructure – are built. The base/superstructure model is a corner stone of Marx’s philosophy, which claims that social relations determine consciousness, in contrast to the idealism, which privileges transcendental immaterial concepts such as thought and spirit as the driving forces of human civilization.



Base/ Superstructure Relation in Orthodox Marxism



Base / Super Structure Relation in Frederic Jameson’s the *Political Unconscious*.

To make a fuller and comprehensive understanding, Eagleton quotes Marx from the latter’s book, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859):

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, the political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

Taken together, the ‘forces’ (Land, labour, capital, machines etc.) and relations (class-antagonism) of productions, constitute the economic structure of a society (base/infrastructure). From this economic base, in energy period/age, emerges a superstructure certain forms of state, law, politics, whose functions are to legitimate the power of the social class owning the means of production. However, superstructure also consists of certain forms of social consciousness (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic etc.), which is what Marxism terms as ideology. Ideology refers to the ways in which individuals within a particular class make sense of, manage, and represent the social relations of production, dominant ideologies are those formed by the ruling class and can be coercive and repressive in nature. The superstructure, though it often appears neutral, natural and universal, predominantly serves the interest of the dominant economic class.

Art and Literature are for Marxism a part of the superstructure of society, a part of society's ideology (though there are tremendous variations and debates regarding the nature of relationship between art and productive forces of a social set-up). To understand literature means understanding the total social processes of which it is a part. The most Marxist thinkers would agree that the literary/cultural analysis must adhere to a historicist methodology, a formulation summed up by Fredric Jameson's imperative, "Always historicize" The base/superstructure model constitutes a method that rejects any purely formal critique. Instead, any literary/ cultural text, as an element of the superstructure, must be understood in relations to material conditions of its production, distribution and consumption, as well as its engagement with the social relations of production. To understand King Lear or Ulysses, one must try to understand the complex relations between these works and the ideological worlds they inhabit and the structure of perception which underpin the power of particular class. Readers of these texts must not limit themselves to the analysis of style, image plot and characterization etc. alone. As aware and informed readers, they are also required to identify whether the ideologies inscribed in the texts are political progressive/reactionary (as in the case of the writings of Maxim Gorky, Conrad or Mahasheweta Devi) or conservative/status quoist (as in the case of the writings of Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence etc.) hostile to radicalism and socialism.

There is, however, not a complete agreement among Marxists as whether the superstructure simply reflects the base or it can also affect and influence the base. The group known as reflectionists, who subscribe to what is called vulgar/ orthodox Marxism, see the superstructure as formed by the base, making literature (and other arts) a mirror of the society's consciousness. In a capitalist society it would exhibit the alienation, reification and fragmentation that the economic system produces.

Other Marxists, who assume that the superstructure is capable of shaping the base and consider literature and other arts as a means for the working class to change the system. It can also be a means of ideological perspectives which can penetrate to the realities of men's experience in a certain situation and may be instrumental in subverting the oppressive power structures. From their past practices are actively influences on-going society and one can turn to art for the prognostic values. According to a leading Marxist art theorist Ernst Fischer, "Art is necessary in order that man should be able to recognize and change the world Art must both reflect existence in all its flaws and imperfections and help show how change and empowerment might be brought about." Thus, the unorthodox Marxists demonstrate that the

superstructure is not a mere reflection or reaction against the base. Even Marx and his Colleague Engels admitted that some aspects of the superstructure such as philosophy and art, are “relatively autonomous”, making it possible to use them to alter ideologies.

In an article, *Base and Superstructure Revisited*, (2000). Terry Eagleton, however, reasserted the basic premise of the base/superstructure model maintains that it defines a hierarchy in which the economic takes priority over the cultural. One cannot understand the function or place of art in society without understanding its relationship to the material conditions, maintains Terry Eagleton.

3.5.2 Literature and Superstructure

The previous section should make it clear that the ‘Superstructure’ of society incorporates non-economic forms of production including, legal, political, philosophical, religious and aesthetic formations and literature as an ideological apparatuses belonging to the superstructure. Literature, in spite of its super-structural dimension, must not be taken as merely the passive reflector/ reflection of the economics base. Engels makes this quite clear, in a letter written to Joseph Block in 1890:

According to the materialist conception of history, the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that economic element is the only determining one, he transforms into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase.

There is not thus one-to-one correspondence between the economic base and ideological superstructure; elements of the superstructure consistently react back upon and influence the base. “The Materialist theory of history denies that art can in itself change the course of history; but it insists that art can be an active element in such a change.” Stressing the view of Marx in this regard, Eagleton notes that there is an “unequal relationship of the development of material production ... to artistic production.” In other words the economic base (infrastructure) changes more quickly than the superstructure (people’s consciousness). The highest development of the productive forces does not insure the greatest artistic achievement and the contrary is equally true. The Greeks, for instance, produced major art and philosophy in an economically underdeveloped society. This proposition, however, should not be taken to imply that literature should be understood only in terms of a narrow definition of ‘superstructure’, belonging only to the sphere of thought and relationships. This would also amount to neglecting literature to situate within the economic and political context of production. To be more accurate, the relationship between art and economic

structure, politics and ideologies are always reciprocal. Literary text is not merely a product of its time, but also in turn influences the context. The dialectic of interaction between the aesthetic and material forces are continually in play. If the production of literature reflects the demands of the reading public, it (literature) also creates them. Moyra Haslett explains this dialectic more appropriately:

Literature continues to be intrinsically social, but its connections, forms and content may also be partly produced by specifically artistic traditions of which they form a part. In this way, literature might be said to be 'relatively' free of economic determination. But such 'relative autonomy' does not contradict the arguments that literature is inevitably a product of its times..."

Terry Eagleton thus rejects a crude, vulgar Marxist determinism between economic base and cultural superstructure. He takes the position of cultural materialism. According to it, a text is not as simply determined by economic base, but not as wholly autonomous, either. He sets out a series of complex levels of determination which condition literary textual production. "Art has 'a very high degree of autonomy'; it is not tied in any simple one-to-one way to the mode of production. And yet Marxism claims too that, in the last instance, art is determined by that mode of production." Terry Eagleton explains this point with a reference to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The poem may be taken as "directly determined by ideological and economic factors – by the spiritual emptiness" and barrenness of modern western civilization, resulting "from that crises of imperialist capitalism known as the First World War." The poem may be understood as an immediate 'reflect' of those conditions; but this explanation clearly fails to take into account a whole series of levels which mediate between the text itself and capitalist economy. It says nothing about the social situation of Eliot himself with English society, as an 'aristocratic' American expatriate yet identifying himself deeply with conservative, traditionalist ideology of spiritualism (which is partly Christian and partly Buddhist), which the poem offers to the readers in terms of 'Give', 'Sympathize' and 'Control'. Orthodox Marxist position of economic determinism of art says nothing about the form of the poem – techniques, styles, devices, structures and complexity of the poem. It is silent about the form and language of *The Waste Land* – about why Eliot, despite his extreme right wing political conservatism, was an avant-garde poet who selected certain 'progressive experimental' techniques from the history and literary forms available to him, and on what ideological basis he did this. Any comprehensive understanding of *The Waste Land* would need to take into consideration all the elements including the author's class position, ideological forms and their relation to literary forms, spirituality and

philosophy, techniques of literary production. All these constituents of the text are relevant to understand the intertwined relation of the base/ superstructure model. Thus, *The Waste Land*'s relation to the real history of its time is highly mediated, and the same is true in the contexts of all other works of art.

Another issue that Eagleton raises in the section of the text is human beings' relation with the past art. How can it be that we modern still find aesthetic appeal in the cultural products of past, vastly different societies? Invoking the views of Marx, Eagleton maintains that we moderns respond to the art/sculpture of ancient societies because our own history is connected to the past societies. It is the historical sense (as suggested by Bertolt Brecht), i.e. a sense of continuity between the past and present. According to Eagleton, "We ought to think of history in wider terms than our own contemporary history. To ask how Dickens relate to history is not just to ask how he relates to Victorian England, for that society was itself the product of a long history which includes men like Shakespeare and Milton. It is a curiously narrowed view of history which defines it merely as the 'contemporary moment' and relegates all else to the 'universal'."

3.5.3 Literature and Ideology

'Ideology' is a word that was first used to name a 'Science of ideas' in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, the word began to be used in its modern sense as a systematic body of doctrines or ideas. People are frequently speaking of as liberal, conservative, racist, casteist ideologies. The modern use of the term is slightly derogatory as it refers to a doctrine that is overly prescriptive and unsupported by rational argumentation. In literary and cultural studies, the word is primarily used in the Marxist sense to address a way of thinking that supports the interest of the dominant economic class. Characterizing ideology as "ruling ideas", Karl Marx writes in *German Ideology*:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class that has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.

Thus, the ownership of economic power means that one has some control over the production of ideas in a society. The ideas in dominance exert force against those in subordinate position in that society. Such ideas, according to Marx, appear as "eternal and incontestable", they thus provide authority to the social institutions that are human inventions

but as a result of ideology, seem unchangeable and eternal. When such ideological conditioning lead the dominated people to accept a system that is unfavorable for them and to accept it as the natural/logical way for things to be, they have developed “false consciousness.” Marxism works to rid society of such deceptions by exposing the ideological trappings that have been concealed. It takes responsibility for making people aware of how they have unconsciously accepted the subservient powerless roles in society prescribed for them by others. For the Marxist critics, the function of literature is to make the populace aware of social ills by depicting the negative aspects of a socio-economic system – injustice, oppression and alienation. Thus, literature can awaken those who are unfavorably treated. It can be a means of changing the superstructure and the base as it can arouse people to resist their ill treatment and overthrow unfair systems. At the very least, it can make social inequities and imbalances of power public knowledge.

Eagleton, as a committed Marxist literary critic, relates the study of literature to critique ideologies and ideas that serve to maintain the existing hierarchical social relations. He finds literature as a means of ideological conditioning in our culture:

From the infant school to the University Faculty, literature is a vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the perceptual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological formation, able to accomplish this function with a ‘naturalness’, spontaneity and experiential immediacy possible to no other ideological practice. (*Criticism and Ideology*).

Outlining an alternative programme for the Marxist critic, he writes in his book *Walter Benjamin*:

The primary task of the Marxist Critic is to actively participate in and help direct the cultural emancipation of the masses. The organizing of the writers’ workshops, artist studios and popular theatre; the transformation of the cultural and educational apparatuses...a concern with the quality of quotidian life all the way from public discourse to domestic ‘consumption’....”

Coming back to the Literature and Ideology’ section of the text, Eagleton attacks two opposed concepts of the relation of literature to ideology. According to the classical Marxist philosophy, art is far richer than economic and political ideology. Engels suggests that art has a more complex relationship to ideology than law and political theory. On the contrary, Plekhanov comments that “all arts spring from an ideological conception of the world, there is no such thing as a work of art entirely devoid of ideological content.” Then, two extreme, opposite positions emerge regarding the relationship of art to ideology. One that literature is

nothing but ideology in certain artistic form, that works of literature are just expressions of the ideologies of their time and space. To vulgar Marxist critics literary works merely reflect dominant ideologies. This position, as such, is unable to explain, why so much literature actually challenges the ideological assumptions of its time.

The other view that authentic art, as Ernst Fischer argues in his significant work, *Art Against Ideology* (1969), always transcends the ideological limits of its time, yielding us insight into the realities which ideology hides from view.

Both of these positions seem quite simplistic and partial. Eagleton rejects both the orthodox view and the position identified by Ernst Fisher. In an attempt to go beyond such as over simplified view of ideology, Eagleton draws on the works of Althusser and Macherey for an account of the particular relation of art to ideology; one in which art “is held within ideology, but also manages to distance from it, to the point where it permits us to ‘feel’ and ‘perceive’ the ideology from which it springs.” Art does not make truth claims about reality or it does not give us knowledge about a situation, it gives an experience of that situation. Thus, Marx’s *Capital* rather than Dickens’s *Hard Times* gives us scientific knowledge about capitalism.

A Colleague of Althusser, Pierre Macherey in his work, *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966), explains how literature distances/ escapes ideology. By giving ideology determinate form, fixing it within certain fictional limit, literature is able to distance from it, thus revealing to us the limits of that ideology. Specificity of literature consists in distancing from the categories of ideology.

The trouble with such a formulation is that, by employing the abstraction ‘ideology’ and ‘text’, it glosses over the fact that different text, have very different relations to ideology. For instance, literary texts by Brecht and Samuel Beckett do not relate to ideology in the same way. In practice, theory must be guided by its treatment of particular text. And in fact Eagleton’s critical writings tend to stress the pervasive, inescapable nature of ideology. The relation between text and ideology is not determined one; there is ceaseless reciprocal operation of text on ideology and ideology on text.

3.6 Marxist Reading: *Some Suggestions*

Believing that all products of a culture, including literature, are the results of socioeconomic and ideological conditions, the Marxist critic must have not only an understanding of the subject matter and the form of a work but also some grasp of the

historical context in which it was written. He must also be aware of the worldview of its author, who wrote not as an individual but as one who reflects the views of a group of people. Such grounding helps the reader identify the ideology that inevitably exists in a text, so that she can then analyze how that ideology supports or subverts the power structure it addresses.

To make a Marxist analysis, then, you can begin by asking questions such as the following:

- Who are the powerful people in the society depicted in the text? Who are the powerless people? Are they depicted with equal attention?
- Why do the powerful have that power? Why is it denied to others?
- Do you find evidence of class conflict and struggle?
- Do you find repression and manipulation of workers by owners?
- Is there evidence of alienation and fragmentation?
- Does the bourgeoisie in the text, either consciously or unconsciously, routinely repress and manipulate less powerful groups? If so, what are the tools they use? News? Media? Religion? Literature?
- What does the setting tell you about the distribution of power and wealth?
- Does the society that is depicted value things for their usefulness, for their potential for resale or trade, or for their power to convey social status?
- Do you find in the text itself evidence that it is a product of the culture in which it originated?
- What ideology is revealed by the answers to the preceding questions? Does it support the values of capitalism or any other 'ism' that institutionalizes the domination of one group of people over another – for example, racism, sexism, or imperialism? Or does it condemn such systems.
- If the work consistent in its ideology? Or does it have inner conflicts?

Your answers should lead you to an understanding of the ideology expressed in the text. It should make a case for social reform, pointing out where the literary work under consideration has either supported or rejected social change.

- **3.7 My Last Duchess: A Marxist Reading**

Marxist doctrine posits the existence in every society of a base and a superstructure. In each society, the economic base (capitalism or communism, for example) affects and is affected by the superstructure (art, politics, the psychological views of individuals and

classes, etc.). Much Marxist literary criticism is therefore directed toward the class influences of the society in which a particular author lives and writes; such criticism, however, can be applied to an author's secondary world' i.e., in this case Browning's created social order established in 'My last Duchess.'

Browning's dramatic poem 'My Last Duchess' contains four characters of differing social class: the envoy of the Count of Tyrol, a working class man; Fra Pandolf the artist, a monk; the deceased duchess, a female aristocrat; and the Duke of Ferrara who voices this dramatic poem. Placing himself at the top of the economic chain, the duke perceives himself, others, and the world around him in relation to his own social position. Without question, his membership in the bourgeoisie and his perception of himself within this socioeconomic class affects his attitudes toward and treatment of the people and the arts in his world.

Apart from the duke, the characters in 'My Last Duchess' exist in sub-servient socio-economic positions, representing the lower classes of society, the envoy of the Count of Tyrol listens to the extensive speech of the duke. Unlike the duke, the envoy works for his living (in this case arranging a marriage between the duke and the count's daughter), and therefore the envoy must listen to the duke (all emphases added). We, the readers, see this envoy only through the eyes of the duke, a person we thoroughly mistrust by the end of the poem; but through the unintended revelations of the duke's speech we learn the reactions of the envoy. Immediately after the duke reveals his murder of the duchess, the duke says, "will't please you rise?" perhaps indicating that the envoy has risen in horrified disgust. Although of a lower class, the envoy seems to possess a higher moral standard than the duke; wanting to get away from the murderer, he forgets his social 'place' and starts to leave the room ahead of this aristocratic duke. To reassert his position, however, the duke says, "Nay, we'll go/ Together down, sir." Because his ideology defines and controls acceptable social behavior, he commands the right to leave the room ahead of the envoy. Although the envoy may be morally superior to the duke, the envoy's oppressed social situation required that he defer to the wishes of the aristocracy and do as the duke commands.

Socially greater than the envoy but subordinate to the duke, Fra Pandolf comes from the class of the clergy. Conversing with the duchess in a class-conscious manner, Fra Pandolf comes from the class of the clergy. Conversing with the duchess in a class-conscious manner Fra Pandolf addresses her as 'my lady.' And he says (according to the duke), "Paint/ Must never hope to reproduce the faint / Half-flush that dies along her throat." In complimenting a

woman of higher economic status than he, the monk fulfills his social obligations to his moneyed superiors.

In societal rank, the duchess is second only to the husband. By the standards of her time, she exists as both a social and a sexual inferior to the duke. Her true nature, however, can be discerned through the warped speech of the duke: she seems to be young, naïve, and accepting (“She had/A heart...too soon made glad / too easily impressed”). She is a woman trained according to her social position to flatter others with thanks and to blush at the praise of men (“such stuff / was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough / for calling up that spot of joy”). Like the monk and the envoy, the duchess performs as her economic rank dictates.

With his past and present monetary wealth (or, as he puts it, his “nine-hundred-years-old name”), the duke commands the ultimate socioeconomic position in Browning’s poem. His self-worth derives from this position. Since birth, he has possessed power by virtue of his wealth and the resulting family prestige. Because he is used to such power, he chooses “never to stoop.” He, like his sculpture of Neptune taming the sea-horse, must control his world. His economic status and his ideology apparently demand that he reign over the world around him: the envoy, the monk, his wife and even art itself. When he discovers, however, that he cannot control his youthful wife as he does everyone else, he destroys her. Unquestionably, his bourgeoisie opinion of himself and his accompanying economic wealth directly affect his desire to manipulate and control his world.

The duke’s language betrays this obsession with power. Throughout his conversation he uses numerous first-person pronouns (“my last duchess”) and references to himself (I call”, “none puts by /the curtain I have drawn for you, but I”). Emphasizing his power over others, he states that people ask him about his painting only “if they durst.” And when he speaks of his relationship to the duchess, he expresses his role in terms such as “will” and “commands” and ‘lessoned.”

Beyond word choice, the duke’s language expresses socioeconomic dominance in more subtle ways. In the midst of what he well knows to be an overwhelming and lengthy speech, the duke professes to lack eloquence; he uses pretended self-deprecation to emphasize the power he is exercising even at that moment over the envoy; i.e. the duke says he has no skill in speech, when, in reality, the power of his crazed speech allows the envoy no opportunity to respond, the duke thus manipulates the envoy by subjecting him to this long, artificial, maniacal speech, at the end of which he reasserts his social position over the envoy, as discussed earlier.

Acting upon his hunger for power, the duke manipulates not only the envoy but also the monk, the duchess, and nay art in his possession. Perhaps the duke chose Fra Pandolf to paint the portrait because of the monk's artistic skill; more likely, however, he chose the monk because of this clergy's specific social position as a sexually powerless male. Fra Pandolf presents no threat to the duke, unlike all the other men who bring a 'spot of joy' to the cheek of the duchess. Because of his own social predilection of power, the duke relates to the monk on a social class level rather than an aesthetic or personal one.

As part of a society's superstructure, art exists on an aesthetic level and as such can be assigned value, however, that may be defined. But for the duke, art (good or bad) is simply another thing to control he does not perceive or care about the aesthetic quality of art. His perception of good art seems erroneous: he believed the portrait of the duchess to be "a wonder", but that is difficult to accept when he tells us that Fra Pandolf completed it in a mere day. Compounding his misunderstanding of art, the duke makes himself the only person who may reveal the portrait to observers, thereby controlling the viewing of his art. When he refers the envoy to another piece of art, the duke says, "Notice Neptune, though, taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!" In emphasizing himself as the motivation behind an artist's creation, the duke reveals that he possesses art not for art's sake, but so that he might control it.

The center of the duke's class power struggle ultimately revolves around the duchess. Like the duke's art, the duchess, the duke believes, existed to be controlled by him. Because she, as his wife, reflected his control to the general public, he needed mastery over her love, her emotions, and even her words. He demanded that his physical love elicit more gratitude from her than flowers given by "some officious fool." Behaving as a lady of her class should have behaved the duchess played the coquette with the courtiers around her, seemingly placing the duke's gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name with anybody's gift." Unfortunately for her, something in her "depth and passion," her youthful joy, and her blushing thankfulness to all who praised her angered the duke: he saw her behavior as existing apart from his authority. To subjugate his wife, the imposed his will on her, and when he thought she refused to bend to it, "all smiles stopped together." Having been murdered, the duchess ceased to exist except on canvas. Now the duke has achieved total control over his framed wife' others can see her only when he chooses to pull the curtain away from her portrait.

Revealed through the language of his conversation, the duke's lust for economic and class power pervades his relationships both with artistic matters and with the people around

him. With his bourgeoisie attitudes and beliefs, he believes he deserves to be respected, obeyed, and loved while at the same time he oppresses, belittles, and even murders those around him.

3.8 Glossary of Terms

Base: The process and relations of production in a given society.

Bourgeoisie: The name given by Marx to the owners of the means of production in a society.

Commodification: The attitude of valuing things not for their utility but for their power to impress others or for their resale possibilities.

Conspicuous consumption: The obvious acquisition of things only for their sign value and/or exchange value.

Dialectical materialism: The theory that history develops neither in a random fashion nor in a linear one but instead as struggle between contradictions that ultimately find resolution in a synthesis of the two sides. For example, class conflicts lead to new social systems.

Exchange value: An assessment of the worth of something based on what it can be traded or sold for.

False consciousness: People's acceptance of an unfavorable social system without protest or questioning, that is, as the logical way for things to be.

Historical situation: The ideological atmosphere generated by material circumstances. To understand social events, one must have a grasp of the material circumstances and the historical situation in which they occur.

Ideology: A belief system.

Interpellation: A term used by Louis Althusser to refer to the process by which the working class is manipulated to accept the ideology of the dominant one.

Material circumstances: The economic conditions underlying the society. To understand social events, one must have a grasp of the material circumstances and the historical situation in which they occur.

Production theory: The name given to Louis Althusser's ideas about the ability of literature and art to change the base of a society. By creating and celebrating its own cultural artifacts, the proletariat can produce a revolution that replaces the hegemony of the dominant class with its own.

Proletariat: The name given by Marx to the workers in a society.

Reflectionism: A theory that the superstructure of a society mirrors its economic base and, by extension, that a text reflects the society that produced it.

Sign value: An assessment of something based on how impressive it makes a person look.

Superstructure: The social, political and ideological systems and institutions – for example, the values, art, and legal processes of a society – that are generated by the base. Some disagreement exists among Marxists about the manner and degree of influence the base and superstructure have on each other.

Use value: An appraisal of something based on what it can do.

Vulgar Marxism: Another name for reflectionism. Those who practice it try to determine the true and complete nature of a given society.

Weltanschauung: The worldview of the author.

Self-Assessment Questions

2. Who introduced the term false consciousness?
3. Who coined the term hegemony?

3.10 Summary

In this lesson you got introduced to a seminal western thinker Karl Marx and his theories essential to understand literature and culture. The lesson stressed the point that literature is a social institution. It is born out of a society. Literature has a particular ideological function. Marxist critics are of the view that literature is “not a work created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as ‘products’ of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era” (M. H. Abrams). Literature reflects an author’s own class or analysis of class relations, however piercing or shallow that analysis may be. In this lesson, you also had an outline of Terry Eagleton’s text “*Literature and History*” and such critical concepts as base, superstructure, ideology, false-consciousness with regard to Marxist Literary Criticism. At the end Robert Browning’s poem *My Last Duchess* is discussed in the light of Marxism.

3.11 References

1. Eagleton, Terry: *Marxist Literary Theory*, Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
2. Singer, Peter *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996

3.12 Further Reading

1. Eagleton, Terry: *Marxist Literary Theory*, Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
2. Eagleton, Terry: *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1976.
3. Elster, John: *Making Sense of Marx*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985.
4. Bressler, Chales: E. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1984.
5. Singer, Peter: *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

3.13 Model Questions

1. How does Terry Eagleton in this essay explain the relationship between literature and history?
2. What is Marxism? How is it useful in the study of literature?
3. Do you appreciate Marxism's political intervention in literary cultural studies?
4. What, according to you, is the relation between literature and ideology?
5. Write **short notes** on the following:

Base and Superstructure, Ideology, Historical Materialism, Marxist criticism, Alienation, Reification, Dialectics, Hegemony, Class and Class-Struggle.

FEMINISMS AND GENDER STUDIES

Structure

4.1 Objectives

4.2 Introduction to Feminist and Gender Studies

4.3 Critical Summary of the Prescribed Text

4.3.1 Feminisms and Feminist Literary Criticism: Definitions

4.3.2 Women: Created or Constructed

4.3.2.1 Feminism and Psychoanalysis

4.3.2.2 Multicultural Feminisms

4.3.2.3 Marxist Feminism

4.3.2.4 Feminist Film Studies

4.3.3 Gender Studies

4.3.4 Feminism in Practice

4.3.4.1 The Marble Vault: The Mistress in “To His Coy Mistress”

4.3.4.2 Frailty, Thy Name is Hamlet: Hamlet and Women

4.3.5 The Future of Feminist Literary Studies and Gender Studies: Some Problems and Limitations

4.4 Summary

4.5 Glossary

4.6 References

4.7 Further Readings

4.8 Model Questions

4.1 Objectives:

Reading this chapter will enable you to:

- Understand the major arguments of feminist literary theory and gender studies.
- Discuss the different concepts and ideas of the feminist theory.
- Comprehend a feminist and gender analysis of works of literature.
- Critically examine literary works from a feminist and gender perspective.

4.2 Introduction to Feminist and Gender Studies:

Feminism is the socio-cultural and political movement which gives rise to the rights and voices of women. The feminists start challenging the **patriarchal** social order and the biases

and discrimination which women suffer at the hands of this **ideology**. They demand equal rights in terms of education, job opportunities and almost all the spheres of life. In academic world, the feminist thinkers start examining the psychological and philosophical issues of gender **identity**. With the emergence of poststructuralism and postmodernism, feminist and gender studies acquire central position to interrogate almost all the aspects of human life in order to deconstruct the stereotypical gender roles and identities.

4.3 Critical Summary of the Prescribed Text

In the following sections a critical summary and discussion of the prescribed text is provided.

4.3.1 Feminisms and Feminist Literary Criticism: Definitions

Feminisms, in its plural form, mean the recognition of the differences and diversity which can be traced down to all the feminist movements around the world. There are different groups of feminists who focus on different issues like biological, economic, psychological, linguistic, socio-cultural, ethnic, racial and sexual. These diversities reduce the possibility of a single and monolithic movement known as feminism and opens the possibility of multiplicity and plurality. Feminist criticism begins with an intention to explore the forgotten works by women. But now the issue is to find out the entire cultures organized by, for, and of the women. Feminism is a political movement which can challenge all other literary and cultural approaches for their gender bias. Because of the intervention of Feminist movement, the trends in literary and cultural fields are changing. The beginning of feminism can be traced down to Mary Wollstonecraft's work along with other writers like Mary Shelley, George Eliot, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Virginia Woolf. In the twentieth century Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics*, and Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* discussed how literature represent women from a male point of view and hence works as a tool of gender discrimination, especially in the classic and canonical writers. De Beauvoir discussed that women are constructed entities and this construction takes place in the male hands. Friedan in her work criticizes the image of a happy, middle-class, white, American woman. She demands equal rights for women in each field of life. Millet in her book criticizes four famous male writers D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, and Jean Genet because their works deal with male supremacy. She also criticizes the different tools of patriarchy like **capitalism**, male power, **sexuality**, and violence.

In this way feminist criticism starts with exploring how male writers represent women. The next step begins with finding out the lost works by female authors from the past. The collection of lost female writers and their works are anthologized in *The Norton Anthology of*

Literature by Women. The first female African-American novelist Harriet E. Wilson and her novel *Our Nig* is given special recognition in this anthology. In order to find out the prominence of female writings and to critically evaluate the works of male authors, feminist critics like Elaine Showalter, Annette Kolodny, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar criticized the patriarchal norms which regulate all the aspects of society.

4.3.2 **Women: Created or Constructed**

The argument, whether we have any natural gender identity or this identity is constructed by social and cultural norms, has always been a point of discussion among feminists. There are some feminists who believe that women are essentially different from men. But there is another group of feminists who do not believe in any essential or natural difference among people. According to this group, all the differences are socially constructed.

Showalter discusses the development of feminist literature into three different phases. The first is the Feminine Phase (1840-80), second is Feminist Phase (1880-1920), and the third is the Female Phase (1920-present). The first phase of feminist literature imitates the male literary traditions; the second deals with the rights of women; and the third with the rediscovery of women's writings and women. Showalter discusses four different models adopted by the feminists around the world to raise the gender issues: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical, and cultural.

The biological framework of women's writings discusses the biological or physical experience of the body by women. In this way women's writings become a direct mirror of their bodies and bodily experiences. The linguistic model discusses how women have always been colonized by men's language. So the feminists talk a women-centered language through which they would be able to express themselves more appropriately. The very act of speaking is an empowering act for women to raise their voices. The psychoanalytical model advocates how the gender difference emerges from the psyche of the people. Likewise the cultural model finds the socio-cultural contexts as the base of gender differences.

Following these different threads of argument there are two schools: **essentialists** and **constructivists / anti-essentialists**. The essentialist school of feminist tries to find the essential difference of women from men in terms of the biology, language or psychology. The anti-essentialists (also known as constructionists) deny all types of essentialism, and focus on the socio-cultural construction of gender differences.

4.3.2.1 **Feminism and Psychoanalysis**

Feminism has used psychoanalysis to discuss and explore the gender identity of women. Essentialists like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explored the works of Jane Austen, Mary

Shelley, Bronte Sisters and George Eliot. They addressed the essentialist topics related to women's bodies and essential identity like motherhood, women's diseases and their treatment, feminized landscapes, doubling of women characters, and enclosure of women. They addressed that the female writers often identify themselves with the monster and madwoman images rather than the heroine and angel types of images. Still these writers seek a female **utopia** where wholeness of females exists.

In the 1980s the French feminists use psychoanalysis for a discussion of female identity in both essentialist and anti-essentialist terms. Essentialists explained that how psychoanalysis discusses gender in its strong assumption in the female biological differences. Freud was accused by some feminists for conceptualizing females vis-a-vis men. Freud, according to these feminists, misunderstood the psychosexual growth of women. Freudian investigation of **hysteria** among women is another factor which contributes to Freud's ill reputation. But at the same time his hysteric investigation among women also makes women's irrational fears, fantasies, desires, and injuries voiced and visible. Freud was able to see how drastic an influence these psychological issues can put on the health of women. During those days women's psychological troubles were looked down upon and were not treated properly. Freud was the first to bring it to the notice of medical as well as psychological communities. He also views the similarity between textual and psychical processes and points out the textual nature of psyche which can be read and decoded by the psychiatrist. Psychoanalysis and literary criticism are two activities which share a lot of similarities because both explore the repressed and hidden aspects to understand the subject properly.

Jacques Lacan's concepts of 'imaginary' and 'symbolic' order of a child's development are also useful to understand a person's **psychosexual** development. According to Lacan the imaginary is that phase of a child when s/he has not yet learned the language. The symbolic order is the phase when a child acquires language and all the ideologies underlying it. The symbolic order teaches the child the binary opposition in which the world is constituted like self-other, male-female, conscious-unconscious etc. Lacan calls this ideological framework of language is '**phallogocentric**' means the language which is dominated by the rule of the father (phallus).

French feminists opposing this structure of language which is controlled by men introduce a form of writing which is particular to convey feminine wishes, desires, ideas, and view to which they call *l'écriture féminine*. Such a language frees women from the confines of the mainstream use of language which is highly subjective to patriarchal system.

The importance of Freud and Lacan can be observed in their attempt to associate psychic patterns to linguistic ones. Lacan describes how the unconscious is structured like language. The unconscious makes sense in the same way as language by associating certain meanings to certain signs. This logical conception of language advocated by patriarchal system can be disrupted by a female-centered language which can point out the uncertainties, irrationalities, and bias of the mainstream language which tries to silence the voice of women.

Luce Irigaray discussed that although French feminist is very theoretical and psychoanalytical; still their main focus remains the body. But their discussion of physical differences is philosophically dealt with by referring to the matter, materiality, maternity and matrix of physical corporeality. Luce Irigaray points out the wrongdoings of male or patriarchal ideology towards the nature and the rest of the world. Male ideology, according to Irigaray, considers an attachment to mother as a backward step towards nature. That's how it detaches the child (male) from the earth and then allows its entry to the patriarchal ideology. An attachment to mother and women is viewed as an attachment to the matter and material world.

Julia Kristeva talks about the semiotic versus symbolic order by following the argument of Jacques Lacan. She calls the semiotic order to that realm of human life which is basically mother-centered. The semiotic is always present in the symbolic order as a silenced aspect or ignored realm. This order, at the same time, is also an opposition as well as contradiction to the symbolic one. Great writers are those who articulate the semiotic order in their writings.

Kristeva challenges the **phallogocentrism** of the mainstream world by promoting the images derived from female-corporeal experiences. She connects the female body with the gender politics and well as artistic expression of female gender. Motherhood becomes the ideal psychic health for a female in Kristeva's later writings.

Another group of feminist critics known as Myth Feminists focus the mythical images of Great Mother, goddesses, Medusa, Cassandra, Arachne, Isis, and others. Adrienne Rich and other feminist myth critics have defined myth as an important approach to study the female gender. Contrasting the feminist myth criticism with the mainstream one highlights how the mainstream myth critics like Northrop Frye and Carl Jung have downplayed the role of female in the constitution of certain myths. An inspection of the female images in the myths explains the types of female representation which has been being circulated in society since a long time. This inspection makes women aware about the diverse ways women have been represented and hence the diverse ways they can act to advocate their own voices.

4.3.2.2 Multicultural Feminisms

Multicultural feminism refers to all the cultural, ethnic, national, linguistic, sexual and other types of difference among women. Women of colour and lesbians are two of the important groups among them. The emergence of black feminists and lesbians revolves around the identity politics. These feminists also talk about their essential difference from the white, middle class, **heterosexual** nature of patriarchal ideology. These feminists target the **racism**, **xenophobia** and **homophobia** of mainstream society and culture. Not only just black and lesbian feminists represent the diverse arrays of feminism rather there are other cultural and ethnic specific groups like Latina American and Chicana feminists, Asian American feminists, Native American feminists, Third World feminists. All these different groups have their particular socio-cultural issues to fight with. But these feminists are also divided on the base of their discussion because some of them follow the essentialist and others the non-essentialist or constructionist line of identity politics.

Black feminists argued the constructionist nature of race as well as gender. They contested the lopsided nature of western literary canon because of the exclusion of black women from that canon. They not only target the white men but the white women as well who ignored the rights and voices of women of colour. Black women and lesbians do not identify with the white middle-class feminists because of their racial, ethnic, and sexual differences.

African American concerns become a part of literary and cultural studies during the 1960s. Even the use of the term 'black feminism' becomes a concern of argument among many of the women of colour who do not want to identify with the concept of 'feminism' and 'feminist' as advocated by the white middle-class feminists. Alice Walker, one of the famous black novelists, used the term '**womanist**' instead of 'feminist' in order to convey that the womanist does not turn her back from the men of her community. Walker praises Zora Neale Hurston for exposing and expressing the authentic black dialect and folklore in her works. Walker considers her a real inspiration for black women authors.

Slave narratives and captivity narratives have been the sources to find out the expression of autobiographical voices for black feminists. These two narrative forms have been used by black women writers to a great extent. Black feminist critics like Maya Angelou and bell hooks have tried to recover the works of forgotten black writers.

Postcolonial studies gives rise to the voices of third world feminists. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak talks about the class and political/national difference among feminists especially in the context of Asian countries.

4.3.2.3 Marxist Feminism

As contrary to the essentialist feminists, the anti-essentialists or constructionist feminists derive their power from Marxism. These feminists argue the political nature of feminist movement and the political issues it should raise. Following Marx's argument that the ultimate determinist factor in the society is the economic structure, the Marxist feminists focus on the male dominance on the economic structure which lead to their subordinate position. For Marxist feminist gender identity and class identity are closely linked. One of the most significant critiques advocated by Marxist feminists is directed towards the capitalist and neo-capitalist model of economic foundations in which the production and consumption are the main factors. Marxist feminists also believe that there is no inherent literary value in any work, just like there is no inherent value of gender. All the values and qualities are socially conditioned and determined. That's how for Marxists and Marxist feminists the social constructionism is the governing principle of their thought.

4.3.2.4 Feminist Film Studies

Feminist film studies is inspired by the Marxist understanding of social construction of identity and the poststructuralist view that the language is determinist factor in the construction of identity. Constructivist critics argue that the subordinate position of women is seen as their natural condition by the essentialist critics. The constructivist critics introduce such concepts as performativity, masquerade, and imitation which are the markers of one's gender identity. Constructivist critics believe that there is no pre-existing and material base of one's identity. More than any physical or biological factors, constructivists believe in the psychological factor which has more bearing on the construction of identity than any other factor. Judith Butler explains the performative nature of gender and almost all other forms of identity. Following her views, the feminist film thinkers try to explore how the genre of film is trying to capture and display the performativity of gender as well as the construction and confirmation of gender identities. Laura Mulvey, one of the famous film critic, gives the concept of '**male gaze**' which refers to the voyeuristic and fetishistic function which films play for the male viewers. For the male gaze, the female body becomes an object to be viewed and consumed. Teresa de Lauretis is another film critic who investigates the portrayal of women in the films.

4.3.3 Gender Studies

Gender studies, a further step in the feminist studies, tries to explore the very nature of gender, not just female gender per say. The investigation of constructivist thinkers gives rise to the development of feminism into gender studies. Gender studies tries to explore all types of gender and sexual roles performed by people in their day to day lives. All forms of

alternative gender and sexual preferences are taken into account in order to understand the construction, confirmation and affirmation of gender and sexual identity. The previously held view that one's gender and sexual identity is natural is deconstructed by pointing out the socio-cultural bases of identity. Gay, lesbian, transgender, transsexual, intersex, and other forms of alternative genders and sexualities questions the binary construction of gender into man and woman, sex into male and female, and gender roles into masculine and feminine. The concept of **homosexuality**, **heterosexuality**, **transsexuality**, and **intersexuality** complicated the issues of binary gender and sexes proposed by **hetero-patriarchal ideology**. Just like the diverse forms of sexuality, the different expressions of gender also attract a lot of attention from the gender thinkers. The binary division of gender roles into masculine and feminine is challenged with the appearance of transgender, transvestite, cross-dressers, cis-gender, and drags. Gender theorists try to understand the performative and constructed nature of all these diverse forms of gender and sexual roles. Teresa de Lauretis explored the social-political construction of gender and sexuality in order to serve the purposes of the dominant class. She argues about the falsity of the naturalness of either gender and sexuality and talks about the ideological frameworks which give rise to both. Sexuality is no more a private and natural thing according to these gender theorists, rather a culturally constructed phenomenon which changes over time.

The Stonewall riots of 1970s attracted the attention of gender theorists who started exploring the history of gays, lesbians and transgenders. Adrienne Rich, following this change, talks about the liberation of people from the compulsory set of heterosexual norms. Sharon O'Brien, Terry Castle, and Lillian Faderman are some of the critics who explored the lesbian identities in literature and culture. These lesbian critics believe that their stance is more authentic and valid because they talk about the primacy of women for women, irrespective of any male involvement. Lesbian feminism also distanced itself from the mainstream feminism on the ground that the latter does not talk about the former's concerns. In order to express the sexual differences among women, lesbian feminists challenged the mainstream feminism for its biases towards them. Another important task performed by lesbian feminists is to bring forth the forgotten and hidden works of lesbian writers. Following the findings of **poststructuralism** and **postmodernism**, the lesbian critics challenge the idea of a unified text and believe in the text which is full of gaps and contradictions. They advocate the primacy of experimentation of narration, disrupted plots, unconventional grammar, and open-endedness, double-meaning, and other such techniques. Gertrude Stein's poetry is considered one of the best examples of such a lesbian writing style and point of view. Lesbian critics also

illustrate the importance of certain genres to express female bonding like the gothic and female utopia. Such famous writers like Woolf, Stein, Radclyffe Hall, Colette, and Djuna Barnes used these genres for the expression of female bonding.

With the emergence of Queer theory, a new term 'queer' appears to refer to almost all deviant types of gender and sexual expressions. Queer theorists also argue how sexuality is disengaged from gender. The postmodern resources, from which Queer theory derived much of its impetus, elaborate the ambiguity, ambivalence and multiplicity of identity. The same multiplicity of identity is utilized by gender and queer thinkers to illustrate the gender and sexual ambiguous identities. Eve Sedgwick, in her works, discusses the homosexual and homosocial bonding among men.

Queers challenge the western morality and hence attract a lot of attention from the opposition. Not only the morality but they also lay bare the sexual mores of western civilization. Desire, especially in its sexual forms, is celebrated by the queer identified people. The open expression of personal sexual desires and preferences disturb the patriarchal morality and social order. Queer critics also explored the mainstream literary works for their queer potential. Shakespeare and Walt Whitman have been discussed widely by the queer theorists.

4.3.4 **Feminism in Practice**

4.3.4.1 **The Marble Vault: The Mistress in "To His Coy Mistress"**

A feminist analysis of the poem can reveal the hidden attack on the female body by using the sexually overloaded images to refer to the "coy mistress" who the poem is addressed. The tone of the poem reveals that the mistress is not willing to surrender to the pleas of the persona. At the same time, it also appears that the lady is quite intelligent otherwise the persona would not have bothered about using a sublime style to impress and convince her. The persona uses all the ways to persuade the mistress to comply with his wishes. The focus of the poem is the body of the mistress. Her body is described by referring to her different body parts as sexual objects like eyes, forehead, breasts etc.

The body of the mistress is also compared to the marble vault. Like the vault, the mistress closes all her doors to the persona. The persona attacks the mistress on the ground that if she does not allow him to enjoy the intimacy with her, her vault will be attacked by the worms. Referring to her skin and pores and the fire which ignites it, the persona uses sexual overtones to indicate the penetrating power of male sexual energy. The image of worms, the pores of the female body, female as fortress and the intention of the persona to penetrate the bodily vault of the mistress is again a set of degrading gestures to the woman concerned. The

male voice of the persona can also be seen in terms of the penalties which he thinks the mistress is going to suffer because of refusing him. Although his own lust will turn into ashes but he does not use the same creepy images to convey it as he uses for the mistress. The body of the mistress is subject to assault, attack, penetration, opening up, tearing apart, and devouring by the male persona.

But the noticeable point about the poem is its indirect reference to the power of women over men and mistress over the persona. The mistress is given the status of a lady and a goddess out of the persona's fear of her. The feminine is expressed as an unattainable entity which is closed, reserved, and protected. The power of the mistress lies in her refusal and her silence. The male persona is powerless despite his long speech, imploration, and verbal attacks. The poem in this way is indicative of the nature of sophisticated men and women at the times of Marvell. The poem not only tries but fails to objectify the mistress but ends up revealing how the persona is satirizing him by trying to scare the lady to comply with his wishes.

4.3.4.2 Frailty, Thy Name Is Hamlet: Hamlet and Women

Oedipus complex is one of the strongest themes in the play *Hamlet*. Hamlet is afflicted with this complex and wants to avenge his father by murdering his uncle who married his mother. Hamlet's efforts are directed to restore his lost male-ego and to heal his psychic injury caused by the death of his father and subsequent marriage of his mother to his uncle. Going through a conflict regarding the two irreconcilable father images, Hamlet directed his anger towards his mother and beloved Ophelia. The conflict of good and bad father images also brought a parallel conflict between the images of male and female, father and mother. A feminist analysis of the play reveals Hamlet's loathing of the feminine in the form of his mother who is the cause of the conflict between his father and uncle, and then his own feminine passive nature. This fear and hatred for women destroyed Hamlet.

Hamlet loathes himself to be born of that woman (his mother) who deserted his father and married Claudius. He accuses her for incestuous union with Claudius but himself displays incestuous desire in his own Oedipus complex. The play is also derived by the politics, not only the politics between a man and a woman, but the bigger politics of states and kingdoms. The play refers to the role of women in that society, like Ophelia has to obey her father, Gertrude her new king, and the maidens have to comply with the young male courtiers. The women in the play depict some universal patterns about how they are viewed psychologically and sexually. The play refers to the politics of masculinity and femininity, the masculine and feminine gender roles along with the politics of one kingdom to the other. One of the feminist critics, Carolyn Heilburn, tries to justify the role and the actions of Gertrude in the play. She

calls Gertrude a realistic figure who observed whatever happens around her and works accordingly. She also admits her involvement in the murder and repents for that. She also accepts her sexual desires for Claudius whereas Hamlet was never able to confront and admit his own sexual desires. Hamlet did not even realize that his mother did not have much power to deny marrying Claudius.

Gertrude's body and soul become the contesting forces for Hamlet to accuse and to lay the entire blame upon. Even the ghost of Hamlet's father directed his anger towards Claudius and not Gertrude herself. He identifies himself with the temple and her with the thorny vegetation, but for Claudius he uses the images of filth and leprosy. He asks Hamlet to take the revenge by punishing Claudius and not Gertrude. It indicates that Gertrude is not responsible for his death and the subsequent consequences. Hamlet's father is the only figure who displays noble attitude towards his wife or women in general. Most of the other male characters use insulting reference to women and their bodies.

Hamlet, instead of venting out his anger at Claudius, uses it against both his mother and Ophelia. He accuses Ophelia and all other women for ruining the life of men by making them monsters. Hamlet himself was going through a war within himself where he was trying to come to terms with his inner weakness and the expected strength which he expected from his gender. Most of the images used to describe the sin of both Claudius are sexual in their nature and calls him a witch and whore. Such images also express the gender discrimination because most of these images are often used for women. At the last scene while fighting with Laertes Hamlet expresses and accepts his love for Ophelia. Ophelia's death transforms him from a victim of women to a lover of women. In this way the play suggests the way women were treated and the gender politics they were involved/

4.3.5 The Future of Feminist Literary Studies and Gender Studies: Some Problems and Limitations

Till the advent of feminist literary studies only a few female writers were introduced in the syllabus of a course in English Literature. With feminist literary studies many of forgotten feminist writers and writings appear. With the feminist literary theory new areas and spaces were opened to the female writers, critics and readers to talk about new concepts related to women's gender and sexual identity, to their biological, psychological, socio-cultural, economic, and ethnic concerns. The model of women's language and writing style is also emphasized by feminist thinkers like Showalter and Cixous.

Feminist and gender studies keep on challenging the mainstream socio-cultural norms and ideologies. Not only these studies function as a political active perspective but also

revolutionize artistic and literary expressions. The social, political, and philosophical issues of righteousness, justice, equality, liberty, and many other such concepts and problematized with the emergence of feminist and gender studies.

But not only has the other areas of discussion alone, feminist and gender studies problematized its own corpus with the emergence of dissident voices from women of different countries, ethnic groups, classes, diverse sexualities, and regions.

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. In the twentieth century the feminist (a).....’s work (b).....laid foundations of constructivist view of gender identity.
2. The feminist (a)..... critiqued four male authors in her famous feminist work (b).....
3. The famous American feminist (a)..... classified the development of feminism into (b)..... different phases.
4. There are two schools of feminists on the basis of their approach to study female identity: (a)..... and (b).....
5. Helen Cixous calls feminist style of writing

4.4 Summary

This chapter has introduced you to one of the major literary and cultural theory known as feminist and gender studies. The lesson has discussed most of the major arguments and critical reflection of feminists in the context of literature. The chapter begins with a general introduction to the emergence of feminist and how it responds to the literary world which was dominated by male writers and patriarchal ideology. The psychological aspects of female identity and the issues of gender identity are problematized by later developments on feminism and gender studies. Students are introduced to the issues of gender and sexual identity throughout the chapter. Last two arts also provide a feminist analysis of two important literary works giving students a practical dimension of feminist literary analysis.

4.5 Glossary

Poststructuralism: It’s a philosophical movement which argues the linguistically constructed nature of human society and reality.

Postmodernism: Just like poststructuralism, this is also a literary and philosophical movement but equally and socio-cultural one. Postmodernism talks about the indeterminacies, contradictions of falseness of the meta-narratives which try to describe human reality in particular terms and standards. It gives voice to the mini-narratives and all the marginalized people.

Patriarchy: It is the ideology of the father / men which controlled the thinking, working, and practicing of human society in terms of male predominance and pushing aside the females.

Ideology: It is a difficult concept which means the ways, beliefs, and values through which human beings understand and recognize themselves in the social reality.

Identity: One's identity is determined by a number of factors i.e. gender, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, language, society, culture, religion and any other affiliations. These are the aspects of a person's individuality, personality and subjectivity.

Capitalism: it is that model of economic structure of society in which one class owns all the means of production and the other class works as a labour force.

Sexuality: Sexuality is the concept discussed by Foucault to understand how a discourse on the sexual identity of human beings is constructed very politically.

Essentialism: It is that school of thought which tries to understand human identity in biological, natural and God-given terms considering there is something essential about a person's identity.

Constructivism: It is that school of thought that opposes and negates the ideas of essentialists and believes that there is no essence of any of human identity. Different the forms of identities are determined and constructed by socio-cultural norms.

Utopia: It is an idea of a world which is perfect from all the flaws of the real world. Utopia provides equality to all its residents and all the residents are fully satisfied from the administrative and all other systems of utopian world.

Hysteria: It is one of the mental / psychological problems which people suffer due to extreme repressions particularly sexual repressions.

Psychosexual: Psychologists consider the growth of a child from birth to the time he understood his gender and sexual difference as the psychosexual growth of the child.

Phallogocentric: It is a term used by Derrida, a poststructuralist thinker, to connote how language is dominated by the power of the male that's why he used the symbol of male power 'phallus' to discuss this concept.

L'écriture féminine: It is a term used by Helen Cixous to refer to a particularly female style of using language and grammar which can allow them to express themselves more appropriately.

Phallogocentrism: Julia Kristeva opposes phallogocentrism with the help of women's writings. This term is used to discuss how our world and social reality is dominated by language, by the logos, the words, and that language system itself is dominated by the male power. So ultimately the power is doubly powered by two systems: language dominance and male dominance.

Heterosexuality: Gender thinkers used this term to refer to the straight people or the people who express their desire for the opposite gender / sex partner.

Homosexuality: It is the term used to refer to the people having sexual desire for the same sex / gender people.

Transsexuality: It is the term used to designate those people who change their biological sex by technical and medical procedures.

Intersexuality: It refers to the people born with ambiguous sexual organs which problematized the people to assign a proper gender and sex to such individuals.

Homophobia: Gender thinkers use this term to explain the hatred which people feel for homosexuals and other sexual-gender identities.

Racism: It is the term which is used by people of different races to express how they are being discriminated on the basis of their race and ethnicity.

Xenophobia: This term refers to the fear which people feel from the people of other countries and nations.

Womanist: Rather than using the term feminist, black thinker bell hooks used the term womanist to express how black women have different issues and problems than the white women.

Male Gaze: This term is used by the famous feminist film critic Laura Mulvey to refer to the male audience and their voyeuristic enjoyment of the female bodies being displayed in the movies which make them objectives and commodities.

Heteropatriarchal Ideology: Another term used by gender thinkers to discuss the associated and double politics which patriarchy, along with its ally heterosexuality, plays to control the gender and sexual expressions of people.

4.6 References

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4.7 Further Readings

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Answers to Self-Assessment Questions:

1. (a) Simone de Beauvoir (b) *The Second Sex*
2. (a) Kate Millet (b) *Sexual Politics*
3. (a) Elaine Showalter (b) three
4. (a) Essentialism (b) Constructivism
5. *L'écriture féminine*

4.8 Model Questions

1. Discuss feminist literary studies and its major arguments by referring to the prescribed text.
2. How does Feminist Literary Studies differ from and develop into gender studies? Illustrate by referring the major thinkers and their concepts.
3. Critically examine Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* from a feminist angle. Give suitable examples from the primary and secondary resources.
4. What different perspective can feminist analysis accord to Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress".

THREE WAVES OF FEMINISM: FROM SUFFRAGETTES TO GRRLS

Structure

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Critical Summary of the Essay

5.3.1 The First Feminist Wave: Vote for Women

5.3.2 The Second Feminist Wave: “The Personal is Political”

5.3.3 The Third Feminist Wave: Transversal Politics

5.3.4 Our Own Situatedness: Transversity

5.4 References

5.5 Summary

5.6 Glossary

5.7 Further Readings

5.8 Model Questions

5.1 Objectives

After reading this paper you will be able:

- To critically discuss all the three waves of feminism.
- To evaluate the arguments of all different waves of feminism.
- To conceptualize the various issues discussed by the different waves.

5.2 Introduction

In the previous chapters, you have read the meaning and history of feminism and its development in different countries. You have also read how feminism disintegrated into different strands and movements. The present lesson deals with the development of feminism into three waves by discussing the major thinkers and ideas of each wave.

Students, you might have seen how the issues of gender regulate our society to such a great extent that most of the times gender bias is visible in all areas and sections. In such a scenario, the discussion of feminism becomes important to understand how our society has tried to regulate the lives of people on the basis of gender structure. Once you are able to understand this structure, you can also try to get liberated from it.

The present essay is written by Charlotte Krollokke and Anne Scott Sorenson. The essay traces the history of the development of feminism in three different waves. The writers have discussed the major arguments raised by each wave. They have discussed the major thinkers and activists of all the three waves. One of the other significant points which these writers have tried to cover is to illustrate how liberalism, radicalism, universalism, and globalism have been the salient features of different waves.

5.3 Critical Summary of the Essay

At the beginning of this essay, the essayists said that they are trying to trace the history of the development of feminisms. They pose a few questions like how feminisms have evolved in time and space. How feminisms respond to the interplay between theory and politics? And how they have dealt with the issues of gender, power, and communication?

The essayists explain that they are going to focus on nineteenth to twentieth century developments in feminism by paying particular focus on the continuities and disruptions. The starting point of the essay is the analysis of the First Wave. The first wave of feminism is influenced by the industrial society and liberal politics. It has strong connection to the liberal women's rights movements and socialist feminism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century especially in the United States and Europe. This movement or wave asks for equal rights, access, and opportunities for women in almost all spheres of life. This wave and its ideas influenced feminism throughout the world for its **egalitarian** ideology.

The first wave develops into the second one in the twentieth century. The approximate time scale of this age is considered 1960-70s. It appears in the context of post-war consequences and changes in the Western countries. This wave proposes the **radical** ideas of women empowerment and differential rights for them. The rise of the women of colour and third-world feminism is another salient feature of second wave. The essay ends with the discussion of third wave of feminism from the mid-1990s onward. This is influenced by the emergence of postcolonial, post-socialist, and global political concerns. In this third wave the third world feminists use the rhetoric of "grrl" to deal with the issues of equality, equity, and differences. It challenges the notion of universal feminism and gives rise to the dissident voices within it. The essayists, here, also mention that they could have gone back to the prehistoric and then ancient civilizations to begin their discussion of feminism where they could have discussed the importance of goddesses and deities. Another possible beginning could have been the Middle Ages which promote the figures of holy women. Renaissance can also serve as a beginning to view the participation of women in the social order. The bourgeois women's struggle for education is also a possible beginning for a discussion on feminism. But they

picked up the three waves for their importance in developing the theoretical and practical dimensions of feminism in all spheres of human life.

5.3.1 The First Feminist Wave: Votes for Women

The First World War is the time when the rights to vote give rise to the **suffragette** movement in feminism. Germany gives the right to vote to its women subjects, the women from USA also start demanding this basic democratic right with politically active means. At first these women were treated badly by the government and put to jails for their protests. But it did not give a good message to the society where educated and middle class women were put to prisons just because of demanding their basic right to vote. National Women's Party (NWP) and its leader Alice Paul were the leading agents in this demonstration and protests. This group of feminists was quite radical as compared to the other group called National American Women's Suffragette Association (NAWSA).

Although women won the right to vote in 1920, it was a long struggle in which the feminist organizations and leaders worked hard to achieve this goal. Some of the renowned spokespersons were Alice Paul, Carrie Chapman Catt, Anna Howard Shaw and the NWP and NAWSA. The beginning of this struggle can be traced back to 1848 when three hundred men and women assembled in New York for the nation's first women's rights convention. The demands of this were the natural equality, equal opportunities and equal access to all the resources for women. This convention gave birth to the suffragette movement. At the beginning, the first wave of feminism was closely associated with other reformist movements like the abolition of slavery, rights of working classes, and rights of the black people. The first wave was also supported by black feminists like Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Frances E. W. Harper. At this time feminists supported the labour parties, black people, and abolition activists and got their support in return.

Women's demand for the right to vote was a controversial issue because it reinforced the black people's demand the same right. Although there were a lot of women of colour who participated and supported the first wave feminism, still this wave is primarily concerned with the issues of white middle class women. World Wars became the great hindrance in women's demands for their rights because these critical wars shifted the focus of people from civil issues to national issues.

The first wave also contested the proper female behaviour and manners. Because involving in activist and political matters was not an arena for women. This wave also brought women out from the confines of homes where they were tied according to the social norms. Public address was considered a manly act, but these first wave feminists were actively engaged in

addressing the public over their issues. It also challenged the Victorian understanding of women as physically and mentally weaker because they have a small brain and fragile body. The feminists of first wave used these mis/conceptions of society to put forth their demands and rights. They claimed that they should be enfranchised so that women may participate and support the society through their innate qualities like tenderness and caring nature. They said that women would be able to perform their roles of housewives and mothers in a better way if they are allowed to vote. By denying them the right to vote, they are being denied the title of citizenship as well.

The first wave believed in the innate morality of women which makes it important that they should be granted equality in all spheres of life. They believed that it's not equality alone but women should be entitled to use all the resources and contribute to the development of society as well. It is also known as 'equal opportunity feminism' or 'equity feminism'. It does not accept the difference of gender and sex rather believes in equal rights. Biological differences were not accepted to rule over the world rather the humanitarian ground of equality for all was believed in.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is the manifestation of the liberal first wave feminism. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) were also considered part of the first wave feminism but they also laid down the foundations of the second wave. Woolf discussed the concept of female bisexuality and a different writing and voice of women. Beauvoir discussed how women are made others through the ideology of patriarchy. It's a social process through which women are made others and different.

Simultaneously another wave emerged in the workers' unions around the world which gave rise to socialist / Marxist feminism. The famous feminists who belong to this wave were Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, Alexandra Kollontai in Russia, and Emma Goldman in USA. Liberal as well as socialist feminists believed in equality. But socialist feminists focused on the condition and rights of working class women. The working class women were fighting on two grounds; class and gender. This wave also touched the issues of abortion, divorce, nonlegislative partnership. Both these traditions of first wave feminism: **liberal** and **socialist / Marxist** continued to develop in the twentieth century. But the second wave and other developments in feminism challenged the ideas of the first wave.

5.3.2 The Second Feminist Wave: "The Personal Is Political"

The second wave begins with the adoption of the slogan "the personal is political" which refers to the idea that the personal experiences of women are no longer devoid of the political

atmosphere. The politics of gender has deep roots which breached the personal life of each member of society, especially women.

The second wave primarily consisted of the radical women's movements of 1960-70s. It is associated with the first event, Miss America Pageant in 1968 and 1969. The radical feminism of second wave was inspired by the first wave liberal feminism. They tried to reveal the oppression faced by women through particular performances like underground and guerrilla theaters. The different feminist groups like Redstockings and New York Radical Feminists joined this movement of 1968-69s to show the unity and solidarity of women. They also tried to deconstruct the images of women created and promoted by the society like a blonde woman, middle-class, high heeled, stylish and full of makeup and makeovers. One of their bigger concern was to acquire equal job opportunities. Their famous slogans were "Boring Job: Women Wanted", "Low Pay: Women Wanted" which they used to express their voices and issues. They revealed how women were oppressed because of patriarchal, consumer and capitalist ideologies.

The source of radical feminist was the leftist movements which emerged in the post war era. The radical feminist movement emerged along with the emergence of students' protests, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the lesbian and gay movements, and the civil rights and Black power movements. All these different groups and movements challenged and opposed the oppressive ideologies of **capitalism** and **imperialism**. They tried to raise the issues, concerns and problems of the oppressed groups, giving them a political platform.

But in these multiple strands of struggle, women found their voice lost and ignored. It was because of the heterosexism that some of the movements become predominant and others shifted to the margins. In order to cope with this trouble, feminists made groups to raise their consciousness. This consciousness-raising process empowered the women both individually and collectively. They used two strategies namely sharing and contesting. On the one hand they share their experiences and on the other they contest the dominant structures of the society which limit their expressions.

The second wave feminists also published *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) which was edited by Robin Morgan. Such publications helped the feminists to present themselves as intellectuals who can debate the political issues of the world. Even the adopted name 'Redstocking' was derived from the 'bluestocking' a term which was used to refer to the educated and strong-minded women during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This radical group was the most influential in the second wave due to their radical slogans like "sisterhood is powerful,"

“consciousness raising,” “the personal is political,” “the politics of housework,” and “the woman line”. Women empowerment by the women is one of the key elements of this wave.

The theoretical bases of the second wave were Neo-Marxist and psychoanalysis. The major works of second wave feminists involve Juliet Mitchell’s *The Subjection of Women* (1970) and Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970). These thinkers claimed that roots of patriarchy are deeply embedded into the capitalist-bourgeois ideology and that gender and sexual differences are more critical than class and racial ones. Talking about women as a separate working class in themselves, who did the unpaid and unrecognized labour work of household and child bearing and rearing, she referred to the productive and reproductive function which women serve to the humanity. These thinkers also tried to deconstruct the Freudian theories of women’s natural and sexual dependency and frigidity. They revealed how these discourses are the construct of the capitalist bourgeois society just to suppress the voices and the rights of women.

Another important second wave feminist thinker who held the central argument of the movement was Kate Millett and her famous work *The Sexual Politics* (1969). Millett argued how the female bodies are the important factors in the discussion of feminist and female identity. She tried to find the lost self-respect of women in their own bodies due to the patriarchal set up of the society. She said that the rights of the women lie in the control and autonomy of women over their own physical bodies. Women, according to Millett, should not be conceived as a wife or a mother. She should be recognized out of these two obligations which patriarchy has imposed upon the lives and bodies of women.

Other radical feminist thinkers are those who tried to raise the voices of lesbian feminists and women. Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde both talked about the ideological frameworks of our societies where multiple strands of power try to suppress any kind of difference (on gender, race, sexual, and ethnic terms). They found out the connections between patriarchy, heterosexuality, sexism, capitalism, and racism. Heterosexuality is the compulsory norm through which patriarchy tried to manipulate the bodies and desires of its subjects. They also talked about the sisterhood, unity, and solidarity among women which can liberate them from the clutches of patriarchal-**heteronormativity**.

The second wave also involves the discussion of the association of women’s movement to the New Left and socialist and Marxist approaches to social equality. Sheila Rowbotham, in her work *Women, Resistance, and Revolution* (1972) discussed how women are engaged in the double labour work (inside and outside the home), their demand for equal pay for equal work, and their resistance to the gender division of education and market. Another feminist Angela

Y. Davis, in her work *Women, Race, and Class* (1981) explored the intersection of the issues of gender, race and class. Capitalism is viewed as the most repressive ideology because of which women's emancipation is delayed. Socialism can bring about that emancipation which women have been looking for since a long time. In socialist society women would get equal job opportunities and equal wages for equal work. But at the same time, liberal humanism can help women to get emancipation in other areas like the sex roles division and beauty myths.

Liberal feminism was inspired by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). These liberal feminists believed that the feeling of discontentment felt by women is the result of their lack of power in social and political spheres. In order to solve this problem, they did not just ask for equal pay alone, but equal representation in public institutions as well. Zillah Eisenstein's book *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (1981) explored the development of liberal feminism from first to second wave and then to neoliberal feminism. In the second wave, the liberal feminists tried to reveal the embedded sexism in the private and public life by exploring children's books, parents' response to girls and boys. They revealed how far sexism is rooted in the conventional thinking of human beings.

Liberal as well as socialist/Marxist feminism tried to change and influence the social institutions. On the other hand, the radical feminism altogether rejected the supremacy of these institutions. They did not favour the women's inclusion into these institutions. Because by accessing these social and political institutions, women participated in the same oppressive system which had suppressed them till now.

There is another part of this second wave represented by such figures and works as Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) and Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979). They believed in the establishment of separate and women-only corporations and zones. Although this view has been at the margins of feminist thought, but now it has held the center of discussion around the world.

This view changed the feminist movement from integration to separation approach. The conflict whether to be integrated or separated from the male orders, also bring about another conflict of equality or difference. Nancy Hartsock, in her article "The Feminist Standpoint" (1983) tried to discuss the theoretical basis of this conflict in the feminist movement and groups. Hartsock also articulated, in her other works, feminist theory and practice to criticize the capitalism and patriarchy after post-war period. There are other thinkers who in their works like Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) discussed a women-friendly psychoanalytical theory to reveal the

productive capacities of women like motherhood and caretaking. These areas of female experiences were neglected by liberal, radical and socialist feminists. But these thinkers try to find a power and importance in these personal and physical experiences of women.

Another feature of the second wave feminism is the emergence of identity politics which gives rise to differences and dissents among women and feminists. These differences are articulated by black women, working class women and lesbians. Bell Hooks' *Ain't I A Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981) and Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989) are two of the representative works of these voices of dissent within feminism. These voices of difference challenged the mainstream feminism because of its middle-class, white, heterosexual agendas. This identity politics gives rise to a new type of feminisms for which Elaine Showalter used the term 'gynocriticism' in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Alice Walker used the term 'womanism' in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). Such new terms and terminology bring about the differences among women to the forefront of the feminist movement. These feminists developed new methods to study, explore and find out the feminist works and the types of different experiences they articulated. These feminists tried to explore the intersection of gender, sexual, class, and ethnic issues.

Black feminism, in USA, raised their voices by establishing such organizations as Black Women Organized for Action (BOFA) and National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). These organizations bring forth the issues of health, work, and welfare of and for the black women. Along with Black feminism, the third-world feminism is another significant factor which distanced itself from the mainstream feminism. Such thinkers as Trinh T. Minh-ha and Gayatri Spivak spoke of the issues faced by third world women. Gayatri Spivak in her work *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987) discussed the politics of the mainstream feminism which tries to speak on behalf of all the women of the world. Such practices are criticized by all the different sections of feminism that did not identify with the mainstream one.

On the other hand, the identity politics was dealt in a philosophical and theoretical way in the European tradition of feminism. Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva are the famous trio who investigated feminist issues in philosophical manner. Helen Cixous's concept *l'écriture féminine* paves the way for a new type of feminine writing style. These French feminists investigated how human world is organized in a hierarchical manner on the basis of binary division in which one of the binary is primary and the other is secondary: mind/body, man/woman, white/black etc. this binary division is incorporated in the

‘phallogocentric’ organization of the human world and understanding. Phallogocentrism is the term used by these French feminists to refer to the dominant position of the father (male) in the manipulation of the languages and the society. This use and control of the signs by the master sign of phallus (the authority and power of male) is deconstructed by French feminists with the introduction of *l’écriture féminine* a method or style of feminine writing in which the authority of the phallus (father) is challenged. Irigaray investigated how the binaries which controlled the human language also controlled the human reality. Women are often associated with body, physicality, and matter as compared to the men who are the soul, intellect, and mind. Irigaray tried to destabilize this very structure of language and reality where women are viewed in inferior terms than men. Irigaray’s investigations also revealed the differences within feminism and other issues of identity politics which were raised by feminism. The issues of gender, sex and sexuality have been some of the important arguments in second wave feminism. These arguments provide a sociological and cultural explanation to the issues of women. Women’s sexual and gender differences were explored in sociological, cultural, and physical terms just to elaborate the cultural politics involved in the construction of these differences.

Julia Wood, a feminist, discussed that there are multiple strands of the second wave feminism. Because to be a feminist is not a matter of concern anymore, but to be a special kind of feminist who supports a particular section within feminism. One characteristics of the second wave is that it is highly theoretical, philosophical and academic. It has produced a wide range of research on the issues of women.

5.3.3 The Third Feminist Wave: Transversal Politics

The third wave of feminism comprises all sorts of postmodern and new trends within feminism like Lipstick feminism, girlie feminism, riot grrl feminism, cybergrrl feminism, trans-feminism, and grrrl feminism. The third world feminists believe in their strength, power, independence, assertion and capability. The young women start using the term ‘girl’ and its different versions rather than feminism to describe themselves in order to attract the new generation of girls who face different types of issues as compared to the mainstream first and second wave feminists. Karen McNaughton is the theorist of this third and young wave of feminism. The groups of these young girls use all sorts of subversive elements like punk style bands to express their differences and voices. These groups used the avant-garde and punk strategies for their empowerment. These young girls also started fanzines (a sort of magazines) and e-zines (online magazines) to express manifestos. The new information technology, cyber world, internet and new media become the tools of political activism for

these young feminists. A good deal of theoretical works emerged out of these practices like *The Cyberpunk Handbook* (1995), *Friendly Grrls Guide to the Internet-Introduction* (1996), and *Cybergrrl! A Woman's Guide to the World Wide Web* (1998). These feminist strands also criticized sexist language and the use of derogatory term for women. In order to change this linguistic politics, they start using new terms and terminology to describe and define themselves. The third wave adopted the same strategies which were used by queer activist groups and Black groups. They start using the derogatory terms in a prideful way, by disassociating the insult and associating the pride to these terms.

The third wave also tries to develop feminist theory and politics which incorporate the contradictory thinking and categorical division of the young feminists. Rebecca Walker in her work *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995) discussed how the young girls are unable to identify with the mainstream feminism and its categorical thinking. Although these younger feminists, argued Walker, respect the work and efforts of earlier feminists, but they felt that their own personal and new issues cannot be properly articulated by the means and tools of the earlier feminism. They did not like the certainty of identity, rather they believe in the ambiguity, plurality, and multiplicity. Their politics involved the opposition to universal womanhood and the favouring the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, class and age differences.

Third wave feminism is concerned with the challenges which emerged out of the new scenarios of globalization, information and biotechnologies, ethnic fundamentalism, and new religious matters. This new feminism is characterized by personal, local, national and international risks face by women like body trafficking, sexual violence, and pornofication of media. Their major challenge to the earlier stages of feminisms was directed towards the universalization of the concept of womanhood, universal definitions of the issues of women, and developing their personal interests by these previous waves.

Another significant thing to note about the third wave of feminism is that it is not one and unified movement rather it is a combination of multiple groups. They try to redefine feminism by acknowledging the traditional feminine issues but at the same time criticizing the attempt of earlier feminists to define narratives of true femaleness, victimization and liberation. They start reusing the derogatory terms like 'slut' and 'bitch' in order to use their shock value to destabilize the patriarchal order of the world by redefining the meaning and connotations of these insulting terms in a positive and proud way. In this way, they try to snatch the power of signification from the male domination. They did not accept the position of opposition and resistance; rather they try to incorporate their ambiguous, confusing, and

chaotic positions in order to oppose by using subversion, performance, mimicry and other such strategies.

Judith Butler discusses the strategies of performance and performativity in her works *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Judith Butler also articulated the voices of gay and transgender people on the basis of gender and sexual identities. Her arguments give rise to the performativity theory of gender and sexual identities. Butler's central argument is the socially constructed nature of gender and sexual identities which are regulated by certain patterns and matrix of behaviour, practices, and performances. Butler argues the constructed identities can be deconstructed and reconstructed by disrupting the patterns of gender or sexual performances. Further she talks about how the social agents are not powerless in the face of social norms and ideologies. Rather they possess the power to subvert the dominant structures of the society. Butler not only destabilized the social division of gender but the so-called biological or physical division of sex as well.

Donna Haraway is another third wave feminist thinker who investigated the new developments in human and feminine reality. She articulated the concept of cyborg which caused the development of cyberfeminism. Haraway's discussion involves the posthuman line of thinking where the clear difference between human and non-human are eradicated because of the technological intervention in human bodies. In this way she tried to eradicate the division between body, subjectivity, materiality, and technology. These thinkers have contested the primary binary division of natural/unnatural.

Third wave is also concerned with the effects of globalization and redistribution of power on feminist theory and politics. At the same time it also invalidates the master stories of women's oppression and liberation and discussed the diversified positions held by women around the world. The postcolonial feminism has tried to find associations of third world, diasporic, and subaltern women. Likewise Queer theory and politics tried to connect gay, lesbian, and transgender interests. Queer and transgender attacks the cause of their problem – heteronormativity. They acknowledge all types of subversive gender and sexual preferences. They tried to define their own identity and demand respect from the society. Transfeminism and queer movement demands the right of an individual to construct his or her gender and sexual identity the way he / she wants to. The social and cultural institutions should not impose any model upon the people. They resist the view that identity is essential.

Nancy Fraser discussed the challenges which confront the third wave feminism. First is to introduce a concept of justice which can be applicable to all different types of women. These differences among women should be recognized by the civil society and it should be regarded

as a matter of redistribution for state and public sectors. Fraser tries to find a balance between the local and global issues of women. Hers is a democratic model for the rights of all women. One of the significant factors of the third wave feminism is the concept “transversal politics” introduced by Nira Yuval-Davis in her book *Gender and Nation* (1997). This concept stands for the interaction and connection between women from different ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds. Yuval-Davis is inspired by the theoretical investigations of Gayatri Spivak and Patricia Hill Collins. She also got inspiration from the working of such organizations as Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) where Christina, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and other women collaborate to oppose the fundamentalism of the religious orders. This concept is a midway approach as compared to the universalism of liberal feminists and particularism of radical feminists. Yuval-Davis also called it transversalism. Third wave of feminism is particularly involved with the politics of performance. Performance theory destabilizes any attempt to naturalize gender and sexual identity. It revealed the power structure of which is embedded in the socio-cultural orders of the world. By giving some control to the subject over his / her agency, this third wave poses one of the strongest challenges to the heteronormative and patriarchal ideology.

5.3.4 Our Own Situatedness: Transversity

The above discussed waves and traditions of feminism has played important role in the emergence and development of feminist theory and politics. Feminism has always been in close association with Western philosophy. Some key issues of these feminist movements have been equity, difference, universalism, and particularism. The third wave of feminism breaks down all the previous held beliefs and views of feminism about gender and sexual identity. From this wave onwards a new line of argument and discussion appears around the theory of transversity which means a theory and practice which welcomes and acknowledges all the differences and diversities within and around feminism. But the contribution of first and second wave is very important for the third wave to emerge and flourish. Transversity seeks respect from and for all the women around the world by respecting their different positions in social, cultural, religious, ethnic, geographical and economic domains. The third wave liberates the gender and sexual politics from the moors of patriarchal and heteronormative clutches. It gives women and other sexually marginalized groups some power over their bodies, desires, and lives.

5.4 References

Peter Barry. *Beginning Theory*. 2nd Edition. Routledge 2002.

Patricia Waugh. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. The title of the essay refers to (a)..... waves of (b)..... ranging from (c)..... to (d).....
2. According to the writers of this essay the three waves span over To centuries.
3. The first wave of feminism is primarily concerned with
4. The second wave of feminism emerges during (a)..... and the third wave from (b).....onwards
5. The slogan of the second wave is

5.5 Summary

The chapter has critically summarized the major issues and points raised by the writers in the prescribed essay. Beginning with the first wave of feminism the chapter has introduced you with all the major thinkers and arguments of the first wave which was primarily concerned with suffragette movement. The second wave was concerned with radical means to achieve equality in economic domain. The third wave destabilized all the natural foundations of identity. Dear students, now you will be able to understand how feminism has developed into three waves and how each successive wave has raised issues which the previous waves were unable to do. All the issues and concerns of these waves deal with the empowerment and welfare of women around the world.

5.6 Glossary

Egalitarianism: It is the principle that all people are equal and deserve equality in this world.

Radicalism: Radicalism means the actions and beliefs of people who try to reform society with active participation.

Suffragette: It means the right to vote. Suffragette in feminism means the movement which demands right to vote for women.

Liberalism: It is the political and moral approach in philosophy which advocates liberty, equality, and justice for all the human beings before law.

Socialism/Marxism: It is that political approach which demands the social equality of classes on all the means of production and fight to achieve this end.

Deconstruction: Deconstruction is always a double movement of simultaneous affirmation and undoing. It started out as a way of reading the history of metaphysics in Heidegger

and Jacques_Derrida, but was soon applied to the interpretation of literary, religious, and legal texts as well as philosophical ones, and was adopted by several French feminist theorists as a way of making clearer the deep male bias embedded in the European intellectual tradition (<https://www.iep.utm.edu/deconst/>). The Poststructuralist idea of deconstruction means the critical evaluation of the beliefs, ideologies and social structure of society. It tries to destabilize the earlier ideologies

Capitalism: It is that political and economic system where the means of production and industry are controlled by the private sector.

Imperialism: It is the policy of extending a country's economic and political power by colonizing other countries by using military and other means.

Sexism: Sexism is that ideology because of which women suffer discrimination, biases and prejudices.

Heterosexism: It is that ideology due to which people with alternative sexual preferences suffer discrimination and prejudices.

Heteronormativity: It refers to the social and cultural norms which preserves and secures the heterosexual lifestyles and negates other alternative models.

Gynocriticism: A term used by Elaine Showalter to refer to the criticism of the women, by the women and for the women.

Phallogocentrism: Julia Kristeva opposes phallogocentrism with the help of women's writings. This term is used discuss how our world and social reality is dominated by language, by the logos, the words, and that language system itself is dominated by the male power. So ultimately the power is doubly powered by two systems: language dominance and male dominance.

Performativity: A term used by Judith Butler to discuss the performative nature of gender and sexual identity.

Transversalism/Transversity: It is the term used by Nira Yuval-Davis to talk about the third wave feminism and its pluralistic and multiple nature where women across religious, ethnic, and sexual and national boundaries join together.

Answers to the Self-Assessment Questions

1. (a) 3, (b) feminims, (c) suffragette, (d) grrl
2. (a) Nineteenth, (b) twenty-first
3. Suffragette or right to vote
4. (a) 1960-70s (b) 1990s onwards

5. “The personal is political”

5.7 Further Readings

Margaret Walters. *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Wilfred L. Guerin et al. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. 5th Edition. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Peter Barry. *Beginning Theory*. 2nd Edition. Routledge 2002.

Patricia Waugh. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

5.8 Model Questions

1. What do you mean by suffragette? How does it become the major concern of the first wave of feminism?
2. The second wave of feminism is primarily concerned with “the personal is political”. In what sense does the personal become political for the second wave feminists?
3. What is transversity? How the third wave of feminism gives rise to this concept and practice of transversal politics?

Introducing Cultural Studies

“Art is dead. Let us create everyday life.”

- A slogan raised in Paris in 1968.

Structure

6.0 Objective

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Understanding Culture

6.3 Cultural Studies: What and Why?

6.4 Cultural Studies: Key Characteristics

6.5 Critical Approaches to Cultural Studies

6.5.0 Cultural Materialism

6.5.1 New Historicism

6.5.2 Postmodernism

6.5.3 Post-colonialism

6.5.4 Feminism

6.5.5 Popular Culture

6.5.6 Multiculturalism

6.6 Cultural Studies: Limitations

6.7 Cultural Studies in Practice

6.8 Summary

6.9 Further Readings

6.10 Model Questions

6.0 Objectives

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand what the term ‘culture’ means and why it is significant.
- Differentiate between cultural studies and the study of culture.
- Discuss different methods/approaches/schools within Cultural Studies.

- Explain Cultural Studies as a political project/agenda.
- Acquaint yourselves with the practices of Cultural Studies in relation to literary texts.
- Highlight the limitations of Cultural Studies.

6.1 Introduction

In this lesson, you will stand introduced to a very distinct approach to studying texts, formations and projects, called cultural studies. As a field of inquiry, cultural studies has challenged the idea of canonical literature and has influenced the way literature is to be theorized and interpreted. It involves interdisciplinary perspectives and seeks to define the work/role of literature and other texts in society in unconventional ways, foregrounding the emancipatory concerns of the wretched and denied.

Unlike the earlier critical practices that focused on texts primarily in terms of civilizational/evaluative concerns, Cultural Studies as an area of study/inquiry, focuses on the study of radio, television, films, gender, sexuality, songs, music, symbols, myths, race, caste, ethnicity, body etc. as political texts, uncovering their ideological concerns and positions. These texts are not considered as neutral sites, free of power-relations, dominations and hierarchies. Cultural studies is interested principally in understanding, interpreting and critiquing the messages/meanings embedded in such media texts and linguistic/literary textual representations, which go impacting the attitudes and behaviours of people. Cultural studies shows that culture is intimately bound up with the study of society, politics and economics. It is context-specific and interdisciplinary study, grounded in the issues of the day. Its overriding concern is an advancement of egalitarianism and democracy. Cultural studies is not interested in texts per se; rather, it takes culture as a site of struggle, contestation and emancipation.

6.2 Understanding Culture

There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture. Culture is inseparable from human life. It is a set of unstated rules by which we live our lives, rules that regulate our practices and activities. It becomes visible when we travel between cultures. Culture as a way of life tends to produce a shared thoughts and behaviour. In this sense, culture means embedded norms all obey without thinking about it. Someone said “culture as the software of our lives. It is the programme we live by, the rules that determine how we think and act.” culture is a form of sense making. Matthew Arnold defined culture as “the best that has been thought and known”. Raymond Williams used the term culture in three senses: “the arts and artistic activity; the learned, primarily symbolic features of a particular way of life; and a process of development” (Brian Longhurst).

6.3 Cultural Studies: What and Why?

However, the study of culture is not the same as ‘cultural studies’, though the two have overlapping concerns. The study of culture is a broader domain than the cultural studies. The latter is a sub-area within the former. Cultural studies has a distinctive history in Great Britain and subsequently in other countries. Its foundation was laid at the Centre for Contemporary

Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1960s, with the key contributions made by Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. Cultural Studies has drawn upon the ideas of Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, deconstruction and postmodernism. In comparison to conventional literary studies, Cultural Studies takes wider and deeper interest in popular and media culture, stressing the issues/questions related to the representation of ideology, power, hegemony, body, race, caste gender, disability, ethnicity, cultural identities etc. Though eclectic and strategic in character, Cultural Studies is an approach, guided by a set of interrogative and interventionist concerns. It sees culture as every day, ordinary, contested and conflicting set of practices; and voices its concern about the exclusions, practised by the selective traditions. Culture, in this sense, is a productive network of power relations of domination and subordination. Cultural Studies explores the politics of representation and different mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. This study aims at to be an engaged critique committed to the moral elevation and evaluation of society and to the possibility of action/transformation.

A distinguished cultural studies scholar, Simon During stressed a point that cultural studies is an “engaged form of analysis” and aims at “emancipating lifestyles.” During further wrote: “...societies are structured unequally, that individuals are not born with the same access to education, money, healthcare etc., and it(cultural studies) worked in the interests of those who have least resources, namely the working class...it differed not only from the (apparently) objective social sciences but from other forms of cultural criticism, especially literary criticism, which considered political questions as being of peripheral relevance to the appreciation of culture.”(The Cultural Studies Reader, P.2) Cultural studies does not treat culture as identical to that of “high culture”, that assumes to have universal values across time and space. It does not ignore division and struggle of the marginalized. Cultural studies’ intellectuals are sceptical of cultural ideologies that justify domination and violence. And insist in creating cultural artefacts that propel humanity towards new forms of life, new identities, new styles, and new ways of being individually and/or collectively. Treating culture as a site of hegemonic formation, cultural studies’ critics contest the socially constructed hierarchical frames and categories (of caste, race, and class etc. gender) that regulate social life. The endeavour of cultural studies is not just epistemological but also political. It insists on advancing more effective ways of seeing and intervening in the world. Highlighting the political character of cultural studies, Stuart Hall wrote: “it sees itself as a practice which always thinks about its intervention in the world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect.” As an engaged mode of cultural analysis/politics, cultural studies stresses in establishing democratic culture by critiquing the dominant discourses.

6.4 Cultural Studies: Key Characteristics

To make the picture of the domains/concerns of cultural studies clearer, salient characters are given below:

- Cultural studies operates with an expanded concept of culture. It rejects the high/elite culture (such as highbrow art and intellectual pursuits) and low/popular culture (the practices of everyday life) binary.
- Cultural studies justifies and celebrates the politicization of culture. Cultural studies critics see themselves as resisting intellectuals, who oppose all inequalities embedded in the social structures and underscore restructuring the dominant discourses.
- Cultural studies underscores the role of mass media and communication in the shaping of cultural identities/subjectivities.
- Cultural studies considers cultural artefacts not as a static, closed system but rather as emergent, dynamic and evolving process.
- Cultural studies is predicated upon the idea of conflict rather than that of an order. It investigates/challenges the hierarchical, socially accepted practices, values and meanings.
- Cultural studies is a democratic and inclusive activity. No part of social life is excluded from its consideration. Fashion, theatre, painting, violence, pub talk, shopping, TV serials and horror films etc., all fall within its reach.
- Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary inquiry. It is an engaged form of analysis.
- Cultural studies questions values considered as absolute. It does not treat culture as an evaluative category only.

6.5 Critical Approaches to Cultural Studies

6.5.0 Cultural Materialism is an approach that developed in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain. Raymond Williams, a key figure, stresses the inescapability of context and materiality in understanding art/literature. Drawing upon the insights from Marxism, the critical approach emphasizes on historical context, ideology analysis and the conjunction of ‘culture’ and ‘materialism’ while reading a text. The approach considers texts embedded in its social, political, material/economic conditions. However, it rejects Marxism’s mechanical reflectionist model of the relationship between ‘Base’ and ‘Superstructure’. It also challenges the idea that literature is timeless. Antonio Gramsci’s concept of ‘cultural hegemony’ is often deployed to read and interpret a text. It believes in committed, political analysis including power relations, while interpreting a text. In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams states that economic forces and mode of production inevitably impinge upon cultural products such as literary works. It also contends that the cultural artefacts including literature functions as a means for subverting social and political norms.

6.5.1 New Historicism is a new trend/development within historicism, highlighting the inseparability of history and literature. New historicism considers texts of all kinds as vehicle of politics insofar as texts mediate the fabric of social, political and cultural formations. Unlike conventional historicism, new historicism does not consider history as a coherent body of objective knowledge which can be applied to a literary text. Literature is a vehicle for the representation of history and it does contain insights into the formation of historical moments. Literature shapes and constitutes historical change. It does not behave

passively towards history. Louis Montrose's quote sets the agenda of new historicism: '**the historicity of texts and the textuality of history**'. It means that all texts are embedded in specific social and cultural contexts and all our knowledge and understanding of the past is accessible through the texts only. No knowledge exists outside of the realms of narrative, writing/discourses. New Historicism, thus, presents a decentred history. Under the influence of Foucault, New Historicism rejects the traditional notions of continuity, progress and underlying historical unity.

6.5.2 Postmodernism: Beginning in the mid-1980, postmodernism including post-structuralism and deconstruction emerged as a critique of the aesthetics and ethics and epistemology of the preceding ages in art, architecture, music, film, literature etc. Postmodernism celebrates the very subverting of traditions. It questions everything considered to be true, real and philosophical, arguing that all is contingent and cultural construct, serving the elite and dominant social group at the expense of the others it. It is very much sceptical about modernist distinctions and certainties. It questioned modernist grand narrative of human progress and liberation, rooted in Enlightenment. Postmodernism is viewed as a release from the traditional hierarchies operating through caste, class, gender, religion and race etc.

6.5.3 Post-colonialism refers to a series of critical practice/inquiry carried out in such diverse disciplines as literature, history, sociology and anthropology. It brought a new mode of inquiry/critique into European colonialism that made traumatic attempts to transform other societies in the image of modernity. The field explores a variety of objects pertaining to culture, language, race, gender, diaspora, migration, nationality and imperialism. Post-colonialism is a study of the ideological and cultural impacts of western colonialism and in particular of its aftermath. Intellectually it has been shaped by a rich heritage of the works of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak. It foregrounds the non-western experience. This study questions the role of western scholarship in constructing notions of the colonial 'other'.

6.5.4 Feminism, understood as a body of theoretical works and a social and political movement, seeks to examine the position of women in society and to further their interests. Feminism has become a major influence within cultural studies and the two shares the view that knowledge production is political and positional. Feminists are of the view that women have been subordinated to men, and bringing to an end to this subordination is their key concern. They are committed to the consciousness raising of women and transforming their self-perceptions.

6.5.5 Popular Culture is based on the tastes of ordinary people rather than educated elites. The term designates the culture of the 'people', especially of the working-class ones. This includes popular genres as gender, sexuality, fiction, film, television, advertisement, songs and fashion shows etc. This is the domain that shapes our sense of self/identity. Collectively, a popular culture is an expression of a society's shared experiences and values, beneficial for that society. It is an important contributor to the formation and growth of a

healthy society. Popular culture influences the lives of million people. It is a site of struggle and resistance between dominant discourses.

6.5.6 Multiculturalism is the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles. Multiculturalism is important because it dilutes and dissipates the divisiveness of ignorance. It is important because it encourages dialogue, often between radically different cultures that have radically different perspectives. Multiculturalism affirms the worth of different types of cultures and cultural groups, claiming for instance, that black, Adivasi, gay, lesbian, and other oppressed and marginal groups have their own validity, voice and importance. Multiculturalism attempts to show how various people's voices and experiences are silenced and omitted from mainstream cultures and struggles to aid in the articulation of diverse views, experiences, cultural forms, from groups excluded from the mainstream. Migration is considered as one of the causes of multiculturalism. Masses of people from particular country or cultural background migrate to one country which has an influence on its demographic structure. Cultural studies promotes multicultural politics to make people sensitive to how relations of power and domination are "encoded" in cultural texts, such as those of television or films. It also specifies how people can resist the dominant encoded meanings and produce their own critical and alternative readings. It thus promotes in developing alternative and critical consciousness.

6.6 Cultural Studies: Limitations

Like other approaches to study literature and other arts, cultural studies too has been subjected to severe criticism. A traditional literary scholar, Harold Bloom is of the view that the replacement of literary studies by cultural studies has led to a lunatic destruction of the latter, that is, literature. He has disputed/questioned the critical framework and methodologies of cultural studies, especially its emphasis on 'political correctness'. Cultural studies practitioners have belied the very cause of literature, Bloom observed. Another critic, Thomas Docherty is highly critical of cultural studies on account of its "complicit with the managerialist ethos that is afraid of history..." Cultural studies has risen at the cost of literature/culture itself. Detractors of cultural studies are unconvinced of its significance outside of the university system, saying it has achieved little in the way of emancipation of people.

6.7 Cultural Studies in Practice

Cultural studies, as an interdisciplinary practice, is primarily concerned with establishing a critique/destabilisation of the cultural biases that lead to the marginalization of a group of people in a given social setup. While reading a literary/cultural text in the light of cultural studies, an attempt is made to explore the cultural codes and the socio-political context of the given text.

You are already familiar with the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, written by Toni Morrison. The novel foregrounds a distressing effect of racism (a culturally constituted wrong) internalized by the

black people. The novel reveals discrimination and intolerance that colored people are subjected to by the white ones in America. The devastating cultural/psychological effects are evident, for example, in the Breedlove's conviction that colored people are ugly because they have African features; in Mrs. Breedlove's devotion to the white family for whom she works, while she neglects her own family; in the self-hatred of the young black boys who mercilessly pick on Pecola for having black skin; in the assumption by black characters as well as white that Maureen Peal, a light-skinned African American girl, is superior in every way to her dark-skinned classmates; and in Geraldine's inability to relax and enjoy her life or to let herself love her husband and son because she fears that the slightest loss of control (whether it be the control of her emotions or of her hair's natural curl) will make her a "nigger", as she calls any black person who does not conform to her standard of dress and behaviour. As these examples illustrate, the novel shows how internalized racism in self-contempt on the part of the black characters and in a projection of the self-hatred onto other members of their race. We see particularly damaging forms of the projection in much of the black characters' treatment of Pecola, whose self-negating desire for the blue eyes is the most striking illustration of the psychological destructiveness of racism. Or,

we might use cultural studies to understand the ways in which the Breedloves illustrate the dynamics of the dysfunctional family, the roots of which can be seen in Pauline and Cholly's youthful experiences of isolation, abandonment, and betrayal. The novelist deals with a serious problem of racism which results into the neglect and exploitation of the black-skinned, a blatant violation of multicultural ethos. If black people are to liberate themselves, they must examine the racist culture entrenched in people and society that furnishes the material for the production of such warped psyches as that of Pecola. (This reading of the novel is an adaptation of an article by Lois Tyson)

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Who coined the term cultural studies?
2. Where did cultural studies begin?

6.8 Summary

This lesson gave you a set of tools and perspectives to deal with literature/culture differently, seeking to make intervention/difference in the world by critiquing the dominant discourses and narratives. Cultural studies works as a critique, aiming at democratizing culture and its class hierarchies and elitism that serve to exclude marginalized groups from the very realm of culture. As an interpretative lens, cultural studies offers readers a critical vocabulary and social philosophy for exploring the ways in which it has had an impact on people's lives. Setting itself free from an elite 'high culture' and its aesthetic biases, cultural studies treats "'culture' as a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour" (Raymond Williams). Cultural studies has a political purpose of expanding the possibilities for everyone

to be active and critical participant in the culture around them. Cultural studies is linked with a question of citizenship, that is, to make an effort to rectify all the culturally constituted hierarchies and wrongs.

6.9 Further Readings

1. Guerin, W. L. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Oxford. University: New York, 2005.
2. Bawma, Paul. *Interrogating cultural studies*, Pluto Press: London, 2003.
3. Brian Longhurst. *Introducing Cultural Studies*, Pearson: New Delhi, 2011.

6.10 Model Questions

1. What is cultural studies? How is it different from the study of culture?
2. Cultural studies requires a multi/interdisciplinary approach. How far do you agree with this?
3. How is cultural studies helpful in reading a text? Discuss.
4. What are the limitations of cultural studies?

Stuart Hall's "The Formation of Cultural Studies"

Structure

- 7.0 Objective
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Stuart Hall: An Introduction
- 7.3 An Overview of the Text
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 Glossary of Terms
- 7.6 References
- 7.7 Further Readings
- 7.8 Model Questions

7.0 Objective

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- Appreciate the role/contribution of Stuart Hall in Cultural Studies
- Focus on the contribution of other seminal thinkers instrumental in making Cultural Studies as a successful project
- Discuss the different facets and forces involved in the making of Cultural Studies
- Elaborate Cultural Studies as an extension as well as a critique of Marxism and postmodernism

7.1 Introduction

You have already been introduced to cultural studies in general in the previous lesson. In this domain of inquiry i.e. cultural studies, culture is taken as a set of practices and representations bound with the formation and reformation of certain groups. Culture, which involves power relations, privileges some at the expense of others; hence a site of contestation.

You will see that cultural studies came into being as a reaction against the way of engaging with literature/culture formulate by a British literary critic F. R. Leavis. The Leavisite treatment of culture was found to be elitist, exclusionary and foregrounding the interests of the educated minority. Cultural studies as formative force questioned the conservative values and perceptions embedded in "The Great Tradition" introduced by F. R. Leavis. According to the latter, culture is the high point in civilization, that goes against the ethos of popular culture reinforced by cultural studies. Cultural studies, you will see, goes in consonance with the New Left, which resisters a resistance against the economic determinism stressed by the orthodox/conventional Marxism.

In this unit you will also see how cultural studies as a formation was triggered by such developments in mass media including Television, Cinema, Consumer advertising leading to decline in differences in class relation. As a result of this new development, the expansion as well as the massification/commoditization of consciousness got intensified simultaneously.

7.2 Stuart Hall: An Introduction

Stuart Hall (1932-2014) is one of the seminal thinkers and founding figures of cultural studies. He left palpable impact on the interdisciplinary project called cultural studies. According to Prof Hall the question of culture is completely political one and the politics of cultural studies lies in reflecting rigorously the complex relationship between the “social” and the “symbolic”. He was the one who problematized both the theory and practice of Marxism and led to a rectification of Marxism that came to be known as the New Left. He was an editor of the journal named *New Left Review*. Hall was heavily indebted to Antonio Gramsci as the latter questioned/problemated the political dogmatism (i.e. economism) of the orthodox Marxism.

For Stuart culture is site of ongoing struggle and the task of cultural studies lies in exposing and critiquing the inherent hierarchies in cultures/cultural practices. The one of the tasks of cultural studies involves uncovering the relations of power that exist within a given social set up. Culture is an ideological sign that involves a wide range of signifying practices that go in determining the order of things. If Stuart Hall was critical of orthodox Marxism, so was he with regard to postmodernism which puts emphasis on the endless play or the free floating of significations.

7.3 An Overview of the Text

Stuart Hall separates himself from those thinkers who believe that the birth of Cultural Studies was an intellectual project. He believes that the field in fact began as a political project to study the post-war capitalist culture. The field of cultural studies came into existence while attempting an answer to the question “What happened to the working class under conditions of economic affluence?” in the 1950s and early 1960s. One of the main reasons of the broad changes in the society of Britain in the fifties and sixties was the Second World War. Suddenly, the centre of economic activity shifted from Britain to America, as America emerged as a Super-power on the world stage. With America becoming the paradigm case, significant changes in the patterns of social life were visible, and they were all modeled on the American society, for instance:

- The class relations lost the sharp division that they once possessed.
- There was a drift and incorporation of the people from the lower-middle classes and the working class into professional and non-professional commercial classes.
- There was a beginning of mass culture
- There was a beginning of the age of television and the other forms of mass media.
- There was a rapid expansion of a consciousness led by consumer advertising.

The impact of culture on economic and social life of people is well exemplified in the statement of the Labour Party leader, who had lost the elections for the second time to the Conservatives. He “blamed the telly, and the fridge, and the second hand motorcar, and the women’s magazines, and the disappearance of the working-class cloth cap, and the fact that people didn’t go to the whippets anymore. The breakdown of cultural life explained what had gone wrong!”

People began to talk so much about the decline and disappearance of traditional class-oriented political ideologies, that thinkers like Daniel Bell even went as far as to say that it was the “end of ideology”. But one of the most notable things was that the transformation was more cultural and social, and less political and economic. Therefore, one can assume that the changes taking place in the culture of the society led to the broader economic and political changes in the society, and in order to understand them, one has to get a strategic clue about the social and cultural changes.

Stuart Hall places the birth of Cultural Studies in parallel to the birth of the New Left. He asserts that the two movements remained closely connected for some time. In fact, many of the founding figures of the Cultural Studies were associated with the New Left, including Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart. The New Left was at that time trying to find out the reasons behind the cultural change in the Marxist theories but could not find any.

Richard Hoggart gave cultural studies an institutional form. It was he who founded the institution, gave it a base, established practice, brought people together and made the project an intellectual project. Hoggart writes about culture as a literary critic, attempting to analyze and read the real social and cultural life as he would read a novel or a poem. His method is developed as such due to his habit of close reading of a text. He tried to find the reasons for change not so much in the political and economic conditions, but in the social and cultural aspects of working-class life in that period, a certain pattern of culture, a certain set of values, a certain set of relationships between people. “He describes the kind of working-class home in which he was raised; he looks at how they arrange their living rooms, at the fact that even if the house is going to rack and ruin, there is always one place in it for visitors. Nobody else in the house ever goes into it. They may be sleeping four in a bed upstairs, but there is always a room to receive someone else. And he says, implicitly perhaps, that that is as much a culture as the culture of the country house or of the bourgeois palace.” His orientation is based on Coleridge’s critique of utilitarianism and political economy in which he says “Men ought to be weighed, not counted”. Hoggart develops on this and calls people “industrial hands” as if there is a hand working in a factory with the human body attached to it.

He then moves to a discussion about “fate” and the role played by it in the lives of people of different classes. For example, he writes that fate is a popular word among the gentry but it does not act like a stopper or an obstacle to the life of people, whereas fate deals the poor and the working classes with a rough hand. Fate is a language of a class to which things “happen”, not of the class which “makes” things happen.

Cultural studies as a tradition probably owes a great deal to the work of F. R. Leavis and his approach to literary studies which came to be known as Leavisism. Leavis sought to re-distribute access to high-culture by canonizing certain traditional kinds of literature, what he called "The Great Tradition" (modern literature was excluded) and then using the education system in order to endow acquaintance with them to all. F.R. Leavis was greatly influenced by Matthew Arnold and they share the notion that culture is the high point in civilization and concern of an educated minority. F.R. Leavis's great contribution to Cultural Studies was the notion of culture, and especially literature, being intertwined with social stratification and class struggle. This was indeed a Marxist idea that had already been in circulation before Leavis, but introducing it in the wake of the "social democratic power bloc" in post-war Britain paved the way for a new socially conscious strand of cultural research.

Raymond Williams is widely regarded as one of the founding fathers of cultural studies. He was a left-wing literary critic who developed an approach to cultural studies he called "cultural materialism." It is based on Marxist theory, and it attempts to explain the relationship between culture and society, and specifically, between literary tradition and political power. Culture as a whole way of life or as the distinctive patterns with which people live their lives and relate to one another is the conception of culture which becomes central in the work of Raymond Williams.

Stuart Hall then talks about mass culture and mass society. "Mass culture" typically refers to that culture which emerges from the centralized production processes of the mass media. When it is linked to the notion of mass society, then it becomes a specific variant of a more general theme; namely, the relation between social meanings and the allocation of life chances and social resources. Considered as a repository of social meaning, mass culture is one of a group of terms that also includes high (or elite) culture, avant-garde culture, folk culture, popular culture, and (subsequently) postmodern culture. The interpretation and boundaries of each of these categories are routinely the subject of debate and dispute. This becomes particularly evident in attempts at ostensive definition (i.e., the citation of examples of each term and the reasoning employed to justify their allocation to the category in question). In combination, these concepts constitute a system of differences, such that a change in the meaning of any one of its terms is explicable through, and by, its changing relation to the others. Those same terms frequently function as evaluative categories that – either tacitly or explicitly – incorporate judgments about the quality of that which they affect to describe.

Hall asserts that one of the strengths of sociology is its awareness of the plurality of culture; sociology understands culture as the languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environments meaningful. Sociologists study cultural meaning by exploring individual and group communication; meaningfulness is expressed in social narratives, ideologies, practices, tastes, values, and norms as well as in collective representations and social classifications. Sociology also studies the production, diffusion, reception, evaluation, and application of cultural meaning across institutions, organizations, and groups, including how cultures differentiate racial, ethnic, and class groups, and the role of culture in producing

inequalities and group boundaries. The relation between anthropology/sociology and culture is evident from the statement of Hall: “One thinks of the structural tradition of Durkheim and Mauss, the phenomenological and interpretive traditions that arise from Weber, and symbolic interaction theory (with its various positions) built upon the work of the Chicago School of Social Thought.”

Hall concludes the essay by explaining the relation of Cultural Studies and Marxism. Marxist traditions and inflections appear in the seminal works of Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, work on the culture industry inspired by the Frankfurt School in 1930s Germany, challenges by Stuart Hall and others to the structuralist theories of Louis Althusser, and writings on consciousness and social change by Georg Lukács. Perhaps the most pronounced indication of Marxist influences on cultural studies appears in the multiple and diverse interpretations of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony”. Cultures have remarkably contradictory and hybrid elements which are creatively assembled from materially present social contradictions in unequal societies. They range from reinforcement to resistance against constantly adjusting social relations of power. Five elements appear in most Marxist renditions on culture: materialism, the primacy of historical conjunctures, labour and social class, ideologies refracting social relations, and social change resulting from competing social and political interests.

Marxism insists on materialism as the precondition for human life and development, opposing various idealist conceptions whether religious or philosophical which put forward magical, supra-human interventions that shape humanity or assertions of consciousness, creative genius, or timeless universals that supersede any particular historical conjuncture. Second, Marxism finds material reality, including all forms of human society and culture, to be historical phenomenon. Humans are framed by their conditions, and in turn, have agency to make social changing using material, knowledge, and possibilities within concrete historical conditions. For Marxists, capitalist society can best be historically and materially understood as social relations of production of society based on labour power and capitalist private ownership of the means of production. Wages paid to labour are less than the value of goods and services produced. Capitalist withhold their profits from the value of goods and services produced. Such social relations organize individuals and groups into describable and manifest social classes that are diverse and unstable but have contradictory interests and experiences. To maintain this social order and its rule, capitalists offer material adjustments, political rewards, and cultural activities that complement the social arrangements to maintain and adjust the dominant social order. Thus, for Marxists, ideologies arise in uneasy tandem with social relations of power. Ideas and practices appear and are constructed, distributed, and lived across society. Dominant ideologies parallel and refract conflictual social relations of power. Ideologies relate to transforming existing social relations may express counter-acting views, values, and expectations. In sum, Marxist historical materialism finds that culture is a social product, social tool, and social process resulting from the construction and use by social groups with diverse social experiences and identities, including gender, race, social class, and more.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Who defined culture as ordinary, a way of life?
2. Who is the founding editor of the journal the New Left Review?
3. Who made the statement? :“Men ought to be weighed, not counted.”

7.4 Summary

In this lesson on the ‘formation of cultural studies’ as articulated by Stuart Hall, it has been highlighted that culture is a set of practices and representations bound with the formation and reformation of certain groups. Culture involves power relations, privileges some at the expense of others; hence a site of contestation.

You saw that cultural studies came into being as a reaction against the Leavisite way of engaging with literature/culture, which was elitist, exclusionary and foregrounding the concerns of the educated minority. Cultural studies as formative force questioned the conservative values and perceptions embedded in “The Great Tradition” introduced by F. R. Leavis. According to the latter, culture is the high point in civilization, that goes against the ethos of popular culture reinforced by cultural studies. Cultural studies, you will see, goes in consonance with the New Left, a development within the fold of Marxism, which resisters a resistance against the economic determinism stressed prominently by the orthodox/conventional Marxism.

In this unit you also got to know how cultural studies as a formation was triggered by such developments in mass media including Television, Cinema, Consumer advertising leading to decline in differences in class relation to a certain extent. As a result of this new development, the expansion as well as the massification/commoditization of consciousness got intensified.

7.5 Glossary of Key Concepts

- **Mass Culture**

Mass culture is the set of ideas and values that develop from a common exposure to the same media, news sources, music, and art. Mass culture is broadcast or otherwise distributed to individuals instead of arising from their day-to-day interactions with each other. Thus, mass culture generally lacks the unique content of local communities and regional cultures. Frequently, it promotes the role of individuals as consumers. With the rise of publishing and broadcasting in the 19th and 20th centuries, the scope of mass culture expanded dramatically. It replaced folklore, which was the cultural mainstream of traditional local societies. With the growth of the Internet since the 1990s, many distinctions between mass media and folklore have become blurred. Examples are Cultural products that are both mass-produced and for mass audiences, which include mass-media entertainments—films, television programs, popular books, newspapers, magazines, popular music, leisure goods, household items, clothing, and mechanically-reproduced art.

- **Popular Culture**

Popular culture (also called pop culture) is generally recognized by members of a society as a set of the practices, beliefs, and objects that are dominant or ubiquitous in a society at a given point in time. Popular culture also encompasses the activities and feelings produced as a result of interaction with these dominant objects. Heavily influenced in modern times by mass media, this collection of ideas permeates the everyday lives of people in a given society. Therefore, popular culture has a way of influencing an individual's attitudes towards certain topics. However, there are various ways to define pop culture. Because of this, popular culture is considered an empty conceptual category, or something that can be defined in a variety of conflicting ways by different people across different contexts. It is generally defined in contrast to other forms of culture such as mass culture, folk culture, working-class culture, or high culture, and also through different theoretical perspectives such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, postmodernism, and more. The most common pop-culture categories are: entertainment (such as movies, music, television, and video games), sports, news (as in people/places in the news), politics, fashion/clothes, technology, and slang. Popular culture is sometimes viewed by many people as being trivial and "dumbed down" in order to find consensual acceptance from (or to attract attention amongst) the mainstream. As a result, it comes under heavy criticism from various non-mainstream sources (most notably from religious groups and from countercultural groups) which deem it superficial, consumerist, sensationalist, or corrupt.

- **Close Reading**

Close reading, also called close analysis, is a thoughtful, disciplined reading of a text. Though close reading is commonly associated with New Criticism (a movement that dominated literary studies in the U.S. from the 1930s to the 1970s), the method is ancient. It was advocated by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* (c. 95 AD). Close reading remains a fundamental critical method practiced in diverse ways by a wide range of readers in different disciplines. Peter Barry in his *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* writes that "English studies is founded on the notion of close reading, and while there was a period in the late 1970s and early 1980s when this idea was frequently disparaged, it is undoubtedly true that nothing of any interest can happen in this subject without close reading." A rhetorical text appears to hide—to draw attention away from—its constitutive strategies and tactics. Consequently, close readers have to employ some mechanism for piercing the veil that covers the text so as to see how it works. The principal object of close reading is to unpack the text. Close readers linger over words, verbal images, elements of style, sentences, argument patterns, and entire paragraphs and larger discursive units within the text to explore their significance on multiple levels.

- **Hegemony**

Hegemony is the political, economic, or military predominance or control of one state over others. The Marxist theory of cultural hegemony, associated particularly with Antonio Gramsci, is the idea that the ruling class can manipulate the value system and mores of a society, so that their view becomes the world view. Gramsci is best known for his theory of cultural hegemony, which describes how the state and ruling capitalist class—the

bourgeoisie—use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies. The bourgeoisie, in Gramsci's view, develops a hegemonic culture using ideology rather than violence, economic force, or coercion. Hegemonic culture propagates its own values and norms so that they become the “common sense” values of all and thus maintain the status quo. Hegemonic power is therefore used to maintain consent to the capitalist order, rather than coercive power using force to maintain order. This cultural hegemony is produced and reproduced by the dominant class through the institutions that form the superstructure. In Terry Eagleton's words, “Gramsci normally uses the word hegemony to mean the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates”. In contrast to authoritarian rule, cultural hegemony “is hegemonic only if those affected by it also consent to and struggle over its common sense”.

7.6 References

1. Davis, Helen. *understanding stuart hall*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004.
2. Procter, James. *Stuart Hall*, Noida: Routledge, 2007.

7.7 Further Readings

1. Davis, Helen. *understanding stuart hall*, New Delhi:Sage Publications, 2004.
2. Procter, James. *Stuart Hall*, Noida: Routledge, 2007.
3. Longhurst, Brian and others. *Introducing Cultural Studies*,New Delhi: Pearson, 2011.

7.8 Model Questions

1. Discuss the key ideas formulated in the text by Stuart Hall.
2. Discuss the relationship of cultural studies to Marxism and postmodernism.

The Play of Meaning(s): Reader-Response Criticism, Dialogics and Structuralism and Post Structuralism, Including Deconstruction

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Reader-Response Criticism
- 8.3 Dialogics
- 8.4 Structuralism and Post structuralism
- 8.5 Deconstruction
- 8.6 Summary
- 8.7 Glossary
- 8.8 References
- 8.9 Suggested Readings
- 8.10 Model Questions

8.0 Objectives

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- Understand the general concepts related to theory and literary criticism, and briefly touch upon the distinction between them.
- Highlight the key postulates of various literary movements and concepts.
- Discuss the contribution of individual critics/theorists and schools/ideas.

8.1 Introduction

In the past century, we have witnessed a remarkable growth of philosophical and psychological theories that take the nature and processes of the human mind as their starting point. Developments like psychoanalysis have highlighted the role of unconscious processes and there has been an erosion of the importance of 'facts' or 'objects' and the fixity of 'things'. The conception of the individual as a unified 'subject' has been abandoned and the subject is now seen as a product of linguistic or discursive practices. The individual is no longer seen as

possessed of full control or initiative (agency). In humanist and some Marxist theories the subject is seen as capable of thought and hence capable of considerable choice and action. Most varieties of post structuralism are critical of such an identity of agent and subject.

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

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

8.2 Reader-Response Criticism

The domain of literature has a vast horizon representing a cluster of literary theories. Each of these theories has come from a different school of thoughts, forming a strict sense of the systematic study of literature. The purpose is to analyse the subtleties of literature that includes social prophecy, interdisciplinary themes, intellectual history, and moral philosophy. Hence, it considers anything that has relevance to interpret meanings to humans.

Reader response criticism, in modern academics, is another literary theory, focusing on the audiences or readers' experience of any literary work. The theory gained popularity because

of its contrastive ideology. The traditional theories primarily focused on the form or content of the literary work.

There is no denying that there are several literary theories, which paid some attention to a specific role of a reader in interpreting the meaning of a piece of literary work. However, reader-response criticism, as modern literary philosophy emerged between the 1960s and 80s, particularly in German and the US. The clearly dominated the work of Roland Barthes, Norman Holland, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and many others.

Typically, Reader-response criticism revolves around the phenomena 'Respond to Reading'. The theory identifies the reader as a significant and active agent who is responsible to impart the real meaning of the text by interpreting it. The modern school of thought argues on the existing perception of the literature. According to it, literature is like a performing art that enables reader creates his own text-related unique performance.

It stood against the other theories of New Criticism and formalism, which totally ignored the reader's role in re-creating the meaning. New criticism considered that only structure, form, and content, or whatever is within the text, create the meaning. There was no appeal to the author's intention or his authority, nor did it consider the reader's psychology. None of this single element was focused on the new critics orthodox.

Reader-response criticism can be connected to poststructuralism's emphasis on the role of the reader in actively constructing texts rather than passively consuming them. Unlike text-based approaches such as New Criticism, which are grounded upon some objective meaning already present in the work being examined, reader-response criticism argues that a text has no meaning before a reader experiences—reads—it. The reader-response critic's job is to examine the scope and variety of reader reactions and analyze the ways in which different readers, sometimes called "interpretive communities," make meaning out of both purely personal reactions and inherited or culturally conditioned ways of reading.

Reader-Response criticism is not a subjective, impressionistic free-for-all, nor a legitimizing of all half-baked, arbitrary, personal comments on literary works. Instead, it is a school of criticism which emerged in the 1970s, focused on finding meaning in the act of reading itself and examining the ways individual readers or communities of readers experience texts. These critics raise theoretical questions regarding how the reader joins with the author "to help the text mean." They determine what kind of reader or what community of readers the work implies and helps to create. They also may examine the significance of the series of interpretations the reader undergoes in the reading process.

Reader- Response theory exhibits an essential role of the reader when it comes to creating the meaning of the text. The theory works with an ideology of 'Reader existence'. According to it, it is only the reading experience in which literary work comes alive.

For instance, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, there is no monster until a reader reads it, imagines and reanimates the horrible creature to life. The whole process makes a reader a co-creator of the novel. This surfaces the purpose of this modern theory that examines, explains and defends the personal reaction of a reader.

As a reader, while critically reading something you need to explore,

- The theme and purpose of the text
- Explain why or why not you like the text
- Flaws in the plot
- Explain if you agree with the writer's perspective or if you disagree with it

The interesting fact about this approach is that it does not require you to support the right or wrong stance. There is no fixed absolute reading response. However, it is all about demonstrating an understanding of what you read by explaining and supporting your reactions. Using a standard approach by simply writing that '*I didn't like the text because it does not relate to my life*' or '*I liked it because it has a cool ending that made me excited*' does not always work.

Overall, Reader Response theory stresses on the reader's role in constructing and interpreting the meanings. Moreover, the theory does not separate the reader's response, belief, and understanding from the text.

Like New Critics, reader-response critics focus on what texts do; but instead of regarding texts as self-contained entities, reader-response criticism plunges into what the New Critics called the affective fallacy: what do texts do in the minds of the readers? In fact, a text can exist only as activated by the mind of the reader. Thus, where formalists saw texts as spacial, reader-response critics view them as temporal phenomena. And, as Stanley Fish states, "It is not that the presence of poetic qualities compels a certain kind of attention but that the paying of a certain kind of attention results in the emergence of poetic qualities. . . . Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them" (326-327)

8.3 Dialogics

During a speech like a sermon or a presidential address, the audience hears a single speaker and a single point of view. Fictional prose can work differently, with many characters all offering different perspectives. This distinction, called "polyphony," underpins literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic criticism approach to interpreting literature. Dialogic criticism is a method of understanding literature that draws meaning from the interplay of several disparate voices.

At the heart of Bakhtin's approach is the idea that no one perspective or voice holds a monopoly on truth. Developing a rich sense of meaning in a text requires understanding several different characters' views. In Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment," for example, the main character, Raskolnikov, and his sister have different perspectives on the same events. In dialogic analysis, neither is correct nor incorrect. Instead, both offer important and equally valid ways of understanding the world. The dialogic critic derives the meaning of the text from the interplay of the competing voices.

Dialogic criticism is intertwined with the concept of heteroglossia, the idea that any text or artistic work contains multiple viewpoints. Bakhtin's criticism disputes the monological interpretation of a novel as the voice of an author. Instead, he argues that novels contain many voices or perspectives. The author's job, he argues, is to assemble divergent points of view into a single narrative. The perspectives are not original creations, but the combination into a story is a unique artistic statement. Dialogic criticism focuses on analyzing the interplay of these many voices.

A literary text in Bakhtin's considered opinion is a text where double and multiple voices meet and clash in an open relationship between them. The total effect of the interactions of the voices "jostling for attention in the text" is essentially a semantic indeterminacy which is opposed to a closed view of meaning. The closed or monologic view of meaning, if accepted, will inevitably be a blow to human freedom. David Lodge has emphatically defended his interest in dialogic theory for its "widening of options":

Instead of trying desperately to defend the notion that individual utterances, or texts, have a fixed, original meaning which it is the business of criticism to recover, we can locate meaning in the dialogic process of interaction between speaking subjects, between texts and readers, between texts themselves.

Bakhtin celebrates novel from the dialogic point of view as a super genre compared to poetry and epic; this specific genre which has always been a potential force in the western culture is always remarkable for making departure from the traditional assumptions about form, distinguishing it as basically "anticanonical." Most theories related to novelistic discourse,

Bakhtin points out, try to divorce the style, content and "formal" form from its "ideological" components. He, however, considers the novel by contrast as a social phenomenon both at the levels of content and form. "The novel as a whole," Bakhtin asserts, "is a phenomenon multiform in style and uniform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls".

The language in a novel is constructed out of the system of its "languages," and, so, the discourse of one novel is fundamentally at variance with the other. "The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized." A novel grows dialogic when these languages within the novel give equal importance to each other, reply each other back and do not exclude the alien fragments within themselves. The relationship between 'individual voices' and 'artistic organization' is very vital. The diversity of the novel is determined by allowing the theme to make progress through as many 'different languages and speech types' as possible, rather than by permitting the novelistic theme itself to give rise to diverse languages.

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel, constitutes "double-voiced discourse," serving two speakers at the same time and expressing simultaneously two conflicting intentions. These intentions include the intention of the character speaking and the "refracted" intention expressed by the author. "In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions". These two voices, as they are dialogically interrelated, appear to hold conversations with each other, as they are supposedly in possession of mutual knowledge of each other. Double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin articulates, always tends to be "internally dialogized." The examples, Bakhtin cites, include "comic, ironic or 'parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character, and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre." A potential dialogue, which is embedded in the discourse referred to, is fundamentally "a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two worldviews, two languages." Thus double-voiced construction is possible not only through characters or narrators, since characters constitute only one means of novelization achieved through heteroglossia. David Lodge considers "doubly-oriented or doubly voiced speech" as "Bakhtin's most original and valuable contribution to stylistic analysis".

Dialogism is thus a general principle that organizes both polyphony and heteroglossia. "In the latter, social registers of language interact in a friction-filled way to produce meaning.

Polyphony is the name for one method by which heteroglossia can enter the novel, in the form of character's discourse; these discourses are arranged in a way which allows them maximum freedom."

Bakhtin's views have been, in some part and in diverse ways, incorporated by representatives of various types of critical theory and practice, whether traditional or poststructural. Among current students of literature, those who are identified specifically as "dialogic critics" follow Bakhtin's example by proposing that the primary component in the constitution of narrative works, or of literature generally—and of general culture as well—is a plurality of contending and mutually qualifying social voices, with no possibility of a decisive resolution into a monologic truth. Self-reflexively, a thoroughgoing dialogic critic, in accordance with Bakhtin's own views, considers his own critical writings to be simply one voice among many in the contention of critical theories and practices, which coexist in a sustained tension of opposition and mutual definition. As Don Bialostosky, a chief spokesman for dialogic criticism, has voiced its rationale and ideal: As a self-conscious practice, dialogic criticism turns its inescapable involvement with some other voices into a program of articulating itself with all the other voices of the discipline, the culture, or the world of cultures to which it makes itself responsible.... Neither a live-and-let live relativism nor a settle-it-once-and-for-all authoritarianism but a strenuous and open-ended dialogism would keep them talking to themselves and to one another, discovering their affinities without resting in them and clarifying their differences without resolving them.

8.4 Structuralism and Post structuralism

Both structuralism and post-structuralism place language at the centre of their respective world view, as they both derive from Saussure's linguistic breakthrough. In that sense, they are very similar. They both reject the empiricist view of language as a transparent medium between our mind and the world, and they both claim that language is rather to be seen as a system of signs existing independently from both the mind and physical reality. In fact, they go as far as to argue that language precedes the world in that it makes it intelligible through differentiation. Similarly, both structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers (who often are the same ones, shifting their view) will agree with Jacques Lacan that the subject is only possible through language. From there, it follows that language supersedes the human being as the source of meaning, action and history. In other words, our mind can no longer be regarded as an independent agent interpreting the world through language and acquiring knowledge

through experience, for it is a construction of discourse itself. Simply put, we do not create language, but are created by it. In that sense, these two related world views can be said to be anti-humanistic.

There exists nevertheless a major difference between the two. On the one hand, even though it discards the empiricist approach, and contends that reality is to be found in discourse, structuralism still aims at discovering an objective reality, and thus searches for truth. In this respect, its main purpose shares an obvious similarity with that of science. Very roughly, we could say that structuralism is the extension of the scientific method to the realm of social sciences. However, while the natural sciences are primarily concerned with isolated physical facts, structuralism deems these facts insufficient to account for signifying systems.

A simple explanation of structuralism is that it understands phenomena using the metaphor of language. That is, we can understand language as a system, or structure, which defines itself in terms of itself. There is no language 'behind' language with which we understand it, no metalanguage to explain what language means. Instead it is a self-referential system. Words explain words explain words (as in a dictionary), and meaning is present as a set of structures. Such an approach was an attack on other types of philosophy which claim that there is a 'core' of truth which is 'reality', something behind the world of 'appearance'. For example Marxists might argue that we can understand the world ('appearance') by examining the relations of production ('reality'), or some fundamentalist Christians might argue that we should understand the world as a battle of God against Satan, so this 'truth' is hidden, but in fact it explains the world.

Another structuralist was Roland Barthes, who claimed the term for a while, who was a literary critic and wrote about the 'Death of the Author'. He argued the author could not claim to know what his/her book was about any more than the reader. Again, the idea that there was a hidden reality (hidden to the reader but known to the author) was challenged, and instead a view of the 'text' presented which was available to all equally.

Michel Foucault, a philosopher and historian, argued that science has to be understood socially before it can be understood intellectually – for example he showed how 'madness' is primarily a social invention, rather than a medical discovery. He claimed that the analysis of systems of thought required analysis of the detail, to show how each part interacted with other parts. It wasn't enough to simply identify a 'core' (such as the evolution of scientific knowledge) and to ignore all other aspects of science.

Jacques Lacan, a psychoanalyst who claimed that the unconscious is structured like a language, is widely seen as a major structuralist thinker. He claimed to be 'returning to

Freud' and be working against the Americanisation of psychoanalysis with its emphasis on egopsychology. He emphasised the role of the unconscious by showing that the 'I' is not a centralised core 'ego' but a dispersed, fragmented, interrelated unknown (the unconscious).

So we can see that a primary feature of the structuralists is their attack on 'foundationalism', attacking any thought that claims to have found a Firm Foundation on which we can construct beliefs. Instead they emphasise the 'relatedness' of truth, how Truth is not something we 'discover', or can 'own', or can 'start from', but a structure which society invents.

Post-structuralism, on the other hand, cannot help viewing this pseudoscientific endeavor as futile and even ridiculous. The post-structuralists argue that truth and objective reality are not only inaccessible, but also altogether inexistent within language. Since physical reality can only be apprehended through language, and since our conscious self itself is a product of language, the quest for objective meanings and universal structures becomes therefore completely illusory. In the same way, the concept of nature, which was already very problematic within structuralism, becomes totally impossible with its counterpart. As Jacques Derrida demonstrates, this search for certainty, for a solid ground behind language, which he calls the metaphysics of presence, has been the ultimate quest of Western philosophy from Plato onwards, and can thus be perceived, under one form or another, throughout our philosophy. According to Derrida, structuralism falls prey to the same fallacy in its pursuit of universal and objective patterns. In that sense, as we will see, the French philosopher speaks of a perpetual absence, which can never be fulfilled. In the same way, he argues that meanings, which we are so certain of finding behind words, are actually never there, but continuously postponed, and accordingly always absent. Put very simply, we can say that, while structuralism separates the sign from physical reality in asserting that language can never grasp this reality, post-structuralism takes it a step further and disconnects the signifier from the signified within the sign itself. For post-structuralism, signifieds, or meanings can never be grasped behind the words in the same way as raw physical reality cannot be apprehended through language. Structuralism, which can be seen either as a method or a world view, was born from linguistics, as Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* constitutes its real foundation. Later on, the American linguistic Roman Jakobson developed some of its aspects, such as phonology. After the Second War, structuralism expanded toward anthropology with Claude Lévi-Strauss, and literary criticism with, among others, Roland Barthes (the early Barthes), Tzvetan Todorov and Jonathan Culler. Eventually, this powerful intellectual current reached philosophy and all the spheres of social sciences. By the end of

the sixties, structuralism reigned supreme as it had overthrown the so far prevalent world views of phenomenology, Marxism and existentialism. However, even as it achieved the peak of its popularity, it received a deadly blow from post-structuralism, and then quickly lost its appeal. Some critics have argued that modernist angst and alienation accounted for structuralism's extraordinary success; similarly, its unifying impulse can be seen as a logical reaction against the increasing fragmentation of knowledge. However, such an effort failed in the end, and post-structuralism has only given us more reasons to feel alienated, and for knowledge to be fragmented.

The opening statement of the post-structuralist movement appears in Derrida's essay, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," given at a symposium at John Hopkins University in 1966, and which rendered its author instantly famous in American universities. The following year, Derrida published three very influential books that seriously undermined structuralism, and that also introduced deconstruction, which was first regarded as a critical method or a philosophical strategy, but quickly came to designate a powerful intellectual movement both in France and in America. Deconstruction can therefore be seen as the engine behind post-structuralism, for it is what made it possible. Subsequently, the post-structuralist movement expanded and reached different spheres under thinkers such as Foucault, Barthes and Lacan. Yet, all these thinkers felt under the influence of Derrida in one way or another.

8.5 Deconstruction

Deconstruction involves the close reading of texts in order to demonstrate that any given text has irreconcilably contradictory meanings, rather than being a unified, logical whole. As J. Hillis Miller, the preeminent American deconstructionist, has explained in an essay entitled *Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure* (1976), "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air."

Deconstruction was both created and has been profoundly influenced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida, who coined the term deconstruction, argues that in Western culture, people tend to think and express their thoughts in terms of binary oppositions (white / black, masculine / feminine, cause /effect, conscious /unconscious, presence / absence, speech writing). Derrida suggests these oppositions are hierarchies in miniature, containing one term that Western culture views as positive or superior and another

considered negative or inferior, even if only slightly so. Through deconstruction, Derrida aims to erase the boundary between binary oppositions—and to do so in such a way that the hierarchy implied by the oppositions is thrown into question.

Although its ultimate aim may be to criticize Western logic, deconstruction arose as a response to structuralism and formalism. Structuralists believed that all elements of human culture, including literature, may be understood as parts of a system of signs. Derrida did not believe that structuralists could explain the laws governing human signification and thus provide the key to understanding the form and meaning of everything from an African village to Greek myth to a literary text. He also rejected the structuralist belief that texts have identifiable “centres” of meaning—a belief structuralists shared with formalists.

Formalist critics, such as the New Critics, assume that a work of literature is a freestanding, self-contained object whose meaning can be found in the complex network of relations between its parts (allusions, images, rhythms, sounds, etc.). Deconstructionists, by contrast, see works in terms of their undecidability. They reject the formalist view that a work of literature is demonstrably unified from beginning to end, in one certain way, or that it is organized around a single center that ultimately can be identified. As a result, deconstructionists see texts as more radically heterogeneous than do formalists. Formalists ultimately make sense of the ambiguities they find in a given text, arguing that every ambiguity serves a definite, meaningful, and demonstrable literary function. Undecidability, by contrast, is never reduced, let alone mastered in deconstruction. Though a deconstructive reading can reveal the incompatible possibilities generated by the text, it is impossible for the reader to settle on any permanent meanings.

Deconstruction is a poststructuralist theory, based largely but not exclusively on the writings of Derrida. It is in the first instance a philosophical theory and a theory directed towards the (re)reading of philosophical writings. Its impact on literature, mediated in North America largely through the influences of theorists at Yale University, is based 1) on the fact that deconstruction sees all writing as a complex historical, cultural process rooted in the relations of texts to each other and in the institutions and conventions of writing, and 2) on the sophistication and intensity of its sense that human knowledge is not as controllable or as convincing as Western thought would have it and that language operates in subtle and often contradictory ways, so that certainty will always elude us.

8.6 Summary

In this lesson, you had a comprehensive clarification of the general concepts related to theory and literary criticism. You also understood the key postulates of various literary movements and concepts such as Reader-Response Criticism, Dialogics, Structuralism, Post Structuralism, Deconstruction and significant contributions of the critics and theorists associated with these movements. Literary theory has opened up new spaces for readers as well as writers. Meaning, representation, reading, authorship have all been problematized in the wake of poststructuralism and sweeping generalisations of various kinds about literature, literariness and other related matters are no longer fashionable. Some scepticism has come along with these developments but the gains too have been many. Context now is again getting as much attention as text did during the heyday of New Criticism.

There is now greater awareness of the way discursive formations are constructed and how they operate in the world at large. 'Politics' of various kinds of writing and various critical stances is sought to be singled out. Reading itself is no longer a simple straightforward thing. Literature is not simply an innocent account of pink sunsets and yellow roses. It is also about politics and hidden agendas. One is on the lookout for a number of things one did not bother too much about a few decades ago. Theory should be used with temperance, without shrillness and without extreme, hardened positions. Attention to the 'textuality' of the text (the ways in which its linguistic features call attention to themselves in their own right) is a must. Certain, epochs in literary history are being looked at with some hostility (modernist experimentation, for example). That hostility will have to be toned down somewhat. At the same time greater openness should be there to take in issues related to gender, race and ethnicity.

8.7 Glossary

1. Heteroglossia: term used by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe the variety of voices or languages within a novel, but can be used of any text to give the sense that language use does not come from one origin but is multiple and diverse; a diversity of voices, styles of discourse, or points of view in a literary work and especially a novel

2. Carnivalization: Carnavalesque is a term used in the English translations of works written by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, which refers to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos. The idea of carnivalism is the discourse of structuralism. Carnivalism is the opposite of everything deemed "normal".

3. Logocentrism: a method of literary analysis in which words and language are regarded as a fundamental expression of external reality, excluding nonlinguistic factors such as historical context; excessive faith in the meanings of words or their specific usages.

4. Binary opposition: A binary opposition (also binary system) is a pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning. Binary opposition is the system of language and/or thought by which two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another. It is the contrast between two mutually exclusive terms, such as on and off, up and down, left and right. Binary opposition is an important concept of structuralism, which sees such distinctions as fundamental to all language and thought. In structuralism, a binary opposition is seen as a fundamental organizer of human philosophy, culture, and language

5. Indeterminacy/undecidability: Indeterminacy is often associated with deconstruction, the post-structuralist theory propounded by Jacques Derrida, and is best described as "a philosophically sceptical approach to the possibility of coherent meaning in language". According to indeterminacy theory, all texts can have the "multiplicity of possible interpretations of given textual elements, because the author's meaning or intent may be unclear, or distorted.

6. Différance: Différance is a French term coined by Jacques Derrida. It is a central concept in Derrida's deconstruction, a critical outlook concerned with the relationship between text and meaning. The term *différance* means "difference and deferral of meaning"; the process by which meaning is endlessly deferred from one sign to another within such a system.

8.8 References

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8.9 Further Reading

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8.10 Model Questions

1. How does the interaction of text and reader create meaning?
2. Does a literary text yield any essential meaning or does it engender many possibilities of meaning. Argue.
3. What do you mean by Post structuralism? How is it different from Structuralism?
4. What were Bakhtin's main concerns regarding language? How does he treat language?
5. Do you notice any similarity between Derrida and the Post-structuralist critics?

Umberto Eco: The Poetics of the Open Work

Structure

9.0 Objectives

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Author and the Work

9.3 Summary of the Text

9.4 Critical Analysis

9.5 Summary

9.6 Glossary

9.7 References

9.8 Further Readings

9.9 Model Questions

9.0 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Design a critical summary of the prescribed text in lucid and comprehensive terms.
- Describe the theoretical principles and nuances of the text.
- Identify a range of questions that can be discussed within the scope of the prescribed text.

9.1 Introduction

The Open Work (Opera Aperta; first published in Italian in 1962) remains significant for its powerful concept of "openness"--the artist's decision to leave arrangements of some constituents of a work to the public or to chance--and for its striking anticipation of two major themes of contemporary literary theory: the element of multiplicity and plurality in art, and the insistence on literary response as an interactive process between reader and text. The questions Umberto Eco raises, and the answers he suggests, are intertwined in the continuing debate on literature, art, and culture in general. *The Open Work* explores a set of issues in

aesthetics that remain central to critical theory, and does so in a characteristically vivid style. Eco's convincing manner of presenting ideas and his instinct for the lively example are threaded compellingly throughout. This book is at once a major treatise in modern aesthetics and an excellent introduction to Eco's thought. In "The Poetics of the Open work" chapter 1 from *The Open Work* the meaning of "open" work is elaborated and defined upon a thought process that engages the idea of the infinite possibilities of the interpretation of works.

Eco is regarded as one of the world's leading semioticians whose analysis of the linguistic and aesthetic codes or "signs," by which a culture communicates and understands itself, span nearly forty years. Indeed, the philosophical themes of Eco's academic research animate his erudite fiction, which dramatizes principles of semiotic theory through multi-faceted allusions to a broad range of significant cultural artifacts. Scholars have for some time widely acknowledged Eco's brilliant and substantial contributions to semiotic thought—a discipline that Eco almost single-handedly legitimated with his own theoretical writings, according to many. Similarly, most critics of Eco's hugely popular novels have applauded his knack for making the concepts of semiotics palatable to a general audience, who have in turn prompted a resurgence of interest in his earlier works.

9.2 Author and the Work

Umberto Eco (5 January 1932 – 19 February 2016) was an Italian author who is best known for mystery novels that reflect Eco's vast knowledge on subjects such as religion, literature, history, politics and philosophy. Umberto's most brilliant work to date remains his 1980 novel, *Il nome della rosa* (*The Name of the Rose*) which is a mystery involving intellectual aspects of semiotics, literary theory, medieval history and biblical analysis. In addition to writing novels, Umberto has also excessively contributed to the science of semiotics through his studies, research and other academic works. His literary talents have also made him a philosopher, essayist and literary critic from time to time. He later wrote other novels, including *Il pendolo di Foucault* (*Foucault's Pendulum*) and *L'isola del giorno prima* (*The Island of the Day Before*). His novel *Il cimitero di Praga* (*The Prague Cemetery*), released in 2010, topped the bestseller charts in Italy.

Eco also wrote academic texts, children's books, and essays, and edited and translated into Italian books from French, such as Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* (1983). He was the founder of the Department of Media Studies at the University of the Republic of San

Marino, president of the Graduate School for the Study of the Humanities at the University of Bologna, member of the Accademia dei Lincei, and an honorary fellow of Kellogg College, Oxford.

Eco began seriously developing his ideas on the "open" text and on semiotics, writing many essays on these subjects, and in 1962 he published *Opera aperta* (translated into English as *The Open Work*). In it, Eco argued that literary texts are fields of meaning, rather than strings of meaning; and that they are understood as open, internally dynamic and psychologically engaged fields. Literature which limits one's potential understanding to a single, unequivocal line, the *closed text*, remains the least rewarding, while texts that are the most active between mind, society and life (open texts) are the liveliest and best—although valuation terminology was not his primary focus.

Eco's notion of *The Open Work* is an attempt to understand modern artworks which can be rendered open by their author, and further completed by the performer, viewer, reader or audience. This notion legitimates the variety of interpretations one work may give us. But despite how we may never know which interpretation is the correct one, we cannot have unlimited interpretations of a work either. *The Open Work* deals with the making of art. Open work has two constituents: multiplicity of meanings and the participation of audience. Artists generate the work of art allowing the audience to fabricate numerous meanings. Work of art as an open work is contingent and the openness toward meaning determines its contingency. A work of art may be open from the audience point of view because interpretation is encompassing and occurs at various levels of human perception. Thus we perceive meanings in a work of art with various perspectives. Eco explains open work as an artwork in process or dynamic progress without any fixed conclusion/ending or meaning. He underlines the necessity in differentiating the association between the work of art and its creator.

9.3 Critical Summary of the Text

Eco begins by defining what he means by 'openness'. He refers to the conventional application of the term, in which an author (artist) 'arrange[s] a sequence of communicative efforts in such a way that each individual addressee can refashion the original composition as devised by the author. In Eco's terms 'openness' is about works which are open in a 'far more tangible sense' (4). Such works are 'quite literally unfinished' (5) and require the active participation of the audience to derive their meaning. Eco gives several examples of musical

works which fit with his view of ‘openness’, such as Stockhausen’s Klavierstucke, Boulez’s Third Sonata for Piano. (6) In these pieces the composers allow the performer to select from a series of note groupings or to choose the sequence in which sections of music are played.

Published in 1962 Eco’s ideas on ‘openness’ anticipate major themes in critical thinking which gained precedence from the mid-sixties onwards — the ideas of plurality/polysemy in art and the death of the author (or conversely the rise of the reader). The conventional view prevailed in his native Italy at the time was that of Croce, who viewed art as a mental phenomenon in which ideas are communicated from the mind of the artist to the spectator without change — Eco was radically opposed to this.

Eco was greatly influenced by his interaction with avant-garde artists and by his study of James Joyce. He considered that traditional art forms lead to representation of a conventional view of the world. He sees the ‘open work’ as an appropriate response to the modern world. Traditional art reflected the ‘conception of the cosmos as a hierarchy of fixed, pre-ordained orders’. (7) ‘Openness’ on the other hand offers an experience much more analogous with our experience of the modern world in which life is less ordered and there is great skepticism of metanarratives. Once again Eco appears to be anticipating later philosophical thought — in this case Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*.

Eco perceives an ‘open work’ as essentially ambiguous, offering a range of potential meanings. However, he also says that a successful ‘open work’ must produce ‘controlled disorder’ (8), in which the author offers ‘the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work to be completed’ (9) but which ‘remains the world intended by the author’ (10). Eco gives the example of Brecht’s plays, which he views as open works. He suggests that they appear to ‘elicit free and arbitrary response’ from the audience. (11), but are constructed so that any response is directed towards Brecht’s Marxist view of the world.

Eco also points out that we should not imagine that ‘the tendency towards openness operates only at the level of indefinite suggestion and stimulation of an emotional response’. This statement prefaces his comments on Brecht’s Epic Theatre. To quote Eco, Brecht’s plays ‘offer a series of facts to be observed’, but do not ‘devise solutions’. The solution is seen to come from the ‘collective enterprise of the audience’. (12)

A truly “open work” is one in which the structural arrangement of the work is open to the performer’s interpretation to determine how he wishes to assemble the parts. Closed form works, in contrast, have a clear, well-defined manner in which they are to be presented so that performers are obligated to reproduce them in the exact format that the artist has devised. Another example that has this same spirit of fluidity is Piano Etudes by Jason Freeman. Piano Etudes is a collection of short musical fragments with links to connect them. The pianist must decide how to order these fragments thus resulting in the possibility of an unlimited number of unique compositions.

The ways in which people were “allowed” to interpret works of art were either restricted or liberated by the cultural and perceptual limitations of their time. For example, classical works of art were designed so that they had only one correct interpretation. In the Middle Ages, works of art were allowed multiple, though rigidly defined and pre-established, layers of interpretation. During the Baroque period, viewers began to be encouraged to look at art from various perspectives as well as to search for new interpretations. Finally, during the Romantic period, “open” works, as Eco defines them, begin to appear where there are no predefined guides that dictate how a work is to be viewed. Instead, works become open to infinite possible interpretations which the viewer must search for on his own. Our own perceptual abilities are a reflection of the values of the society we live in. Because our society values freedom and individualism, we are accustomed to finding our own meaning and having our own individual way in which we relate to a work of art rather than believing that there is only one correct interpretation.

The move toward creating “open work” coincided with developments in contemporary scientific thought. For example, the principle of complementarity which states that it is not possible to determine the different behaviors of an elementary particle simultaneously has influenced how for “open work,” an incomplete knowledge of the system is an essential feature of how it is formed.

Some examples of “open works” made by artists today focus on human interactions and relationships. Nowadays, the use of technology to allow people to participate and interact with works has become much more accessible as well as offer many more possibilities to foster such participation. For example, technology allows for the much easier transmission of messages over long distances to a broader audience.

Eco feels that the author offers the interpreter a work that is to be completed. The author proposes a number of possibilities which rather than being allowed to be completed randomly or arbitrarily come with certain implications for how they are to be properly completed. Thus the author never fully loses control over his piece.

9.4 Critical Analysis

Aesthetic theories deal with ideas like “completeness” and “openness” with regard to a work of art. These notions relate to the response to the work of art in a given condition. Therefore we tend to think it as the concluding point of the work of the creator in his/her endeavour to communicate to the audience. However, “The addressee is bound to enter into an interplay of stimulus and response which depends on his unique capacity for sensitive reception of the piece” (Eco 3). The author composes the work of art and completes it with a desire to be realized by the audience. The author responds to his own work of art by providing his own credentials with a culture but allows multiplicity of perspectives when presented to the audience. Thus the work of art adds aesthetic validity with multiplicity of perspectives. Consequently a work of art is a “corn-piece and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole. While at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity” (Eco 4).

Every realization of the work of art is an interpretation and performance of it because when the work of art is received it takes novel perspective for itself. The work of art is in a constant state of flux allowing multiplicity of meanings with the change of time. Thus the work of art is unfinished and uncertain; the author completes his work and hands it over to audience. The progress of the method is related to the interpretative subjectivity of the work of art. Open work relates in a procedure of making an artwork rather than the completion of the work of art. This intention of the author establishes and determines the process and progress of the making of art. Eco overtly necessitates such an artistic inspiration of open work and believes it as an indispensable difference between modern and traditional art. Multiplicity of meaning and the participation of the audience in the composition of a work of art are reciprocal. While interpretations mark the participation of the audience, the artist transfers his/her artistic significance from a particular communication to an audience’s interpretation of meanings. This transfer also insists an altered way of making a work of art, different from the traditional

aesthetic practice that aim to create single meaning. Thus open work is methodical and it resolves the process of making a work of art and not the aesthetic significance.

Meaning is central to open work. Meaning is not message or content but an indispensable eminence that all works share and which endows them with aesthetic emotions. Eco differentiates between two kinds of openness: contemplative openness and structural openness. Contemplative openness is the psychic communication between the audience and the work of art without much importance on structural modifications. Structural openness engages the physical exploits of the audience and the structural modification of the work art through the responses and feedback of the audience. Eco refers James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as an example of contemplative openness and Mallarme's *Livre* as an instance of structural openness because the audience are challenged to create a sequence for the slack pages of Mallarme. Joyce portrays the ontological and the existential condition of his contemporary context in *Finnegans Wake*. His book "is moulded into a curve that bends back on itself, like the Einsteinian universe" (Eco 10). The work is limited and open at the same time. Every episode in the book opens up strings of possibilities to connect with all other words in the text making it a wealthy cosmos. However Joyce aims the book to involve the entirety spatially and temporally. Eco maintains that the "principal tool for all this all-pervading ambiguity is the pun, the *calembour*, by which two, three, or even tend different etymological roots are combined in such a way that a single word can set up a knot of different sub meanings, each of which in turn coincides and interrelates with other local allusions, which are themselves "open" to new configurations and probabilities of interpretation" (Eco 10). The audience of *Finnegans Wake* is not resolved to place themselves purposefully among an unlimited relationships, have a choice for themselves to register they perspective and to attempt to employ various facets to multiply the meanings.

Mallarme's *Livre* is an immense and influential work that comprises the aim of his actions and the *telos* of the world. Eco maintains that "*The Livre* was conceived as a mobile apparatus, not just in the mobile and "open" sense of a composition such as *Un coup de des*, where grammar, syntax and typesetting introduced a plurality of elements, polymorphous in their indeterminate relation to each other" (Eco 12). Mallarme's effort was utopian and was fabricated with more unsettling desires and resourcefulness that it leaves the work unfinished. The work might have turned into an uncertainly mystical and obscure embodiment of a debauched sensitivity that reached creativity. It is here the similarity between *Livre* attain

importance just as the audience would have sequenced the pages of the book in a various different ways, the audience of the *Wake* deciphers different outlines of meaning in Joyce's language. In *Livre* fabric of form is open but in the case of *Wake* it is the semantic content. However in both case the audience is significantly positioned in the same place because there is a certain freedom in mobility among multiplicity of varied interpretations.

The catholic in Dante allows his poetry to elucidate to his audience one of the unresolved mysteries of Christian doctrine, the nature of the Trinity. While acknowledging the views of existent theological views he utilizes poetic techniques that administers to "express not just the concept they are supposed to convey, but also the feeling of blissful contemplation that accompanies its comprehension—thus fusing referential and emotional value into an indissociable formal whole" (Eco 79). Eco maintains that with the entire astuteness Dante's poem is closed in their referential aspect. However Joyce's works are ambiguous and demands to be comprehended. Dante's Trinity mirrors the Florentine world view but Joyce symbolizes the ambiguous character and the polyvalence allowing multiple interpretations mirroring the history.

Both Dante and Joyce is an "ensemble of denotative and connotative meanings fuse with an ensemble of physical linguistic properties to reproduce an organic form" (Bondanella 28). Both the texts are open as they allow repeated readings with fresh aesthetic pleasure. Dante's text proclaims a univocal message and Joyce's text provides plurivocal message allowing openness of information. Eco does not distinguish between semantic and material openness. However the two forms of openness influence the audience's experience of a work of art in different ways. The artist views the reader as positioned statically transacting with various meanings of the work of art but the reader experiences variations in the semantic and material openness. The material artefact of the work of art is the boundary that unites the various meanings of the work of art and the intention of the artist. The configuration of the boundary in fabricating the meanings of the work of art allows the artist to examine the material openness and its association to the proposed meanings. Nevertheless to assume that the audience and the author participate in the same page, in the reception of meaning makes the process interactive. The physical participation of the audience shapes the manner in which the meanings are evoked. Consequently the work is in a state of progress and it assists itself openly and consciously into motion and acknowledges the tendency of the aesthetics that forms the backdrop to performance. Thus "these poetic systems recognize "openness" as the

fundamental possibility of the contemporary artist or consumer. The aesthetic theoretician in his turn, will see a confirmation of his own institutions in these practical manifestations: they constitute the ultimate realization of a receptive mode which can function at many different levels of intensity” (Eco 22). Contemplative open work is different from that of the traditional closed work. Both fashions physical alterations in the work art that are invisible for the audience. Nevertheless it demands the alteration of the artist depending whether the work of art is open or closed. Multiple meanings necessitates purposeful ambiguity through “the contravention of conventions of expression” work of art. Communication stipulates a set of symbols to articulate ideas to other and decipher from others. This process allows the audience to delve into an examination of unknown meanings leading to the psychological engagement with the work of art. Eco points out two kinds of messages in open work: univocal message and plurivocal message. These two kinds of messages are deciphered with their correlate aesthetic values. Both forms of messages are open and incite fresh and richer enjoyment. If the artist settles on having one meaning the artist focuses on singular meaning of communication but the mode of delivery can be through different outlets. The plurivocal communication is integrated through an openness that forms the foundation to all artistic forms. Moreover “plurivocality is so much a characteristic of the forms that give it substance that their aesthetic value can no longer be appreciated and explained apart from it” (Eco 42). It is unfeasible to understand and realize an “atonal” configuration without a choice, an openness to “the fixed grammar, the closure, of tonal music and that its validity depends on the degree of its success in doing so” (Eco 42). In an open work the artist veils the ambiguity in simple forms to make the audience realize the hidden meaning. However the meaning is obvious and deciphers an improved deeper meaning each time. Open work using plurivocal message discloses the ambiguities. The artist ponders on positioning the symbols in order to split-up from predictable usages. The audience of a plurivocal message is anticipated to survey different meanings through wonder. The artist is supposed to be watchful about using ambiguity as a method. However ambiguity generates wonder in the psyche of the audience evolving several possibilities of varied interpretations and it could become mere clamour if carried out to intensely. Within a univocal message and plurivocal message the layers of meaning inclines on conditional chance and the ability of the audience.

In conclusion the commonality between the multiplicity of meaning and audience participation in the creation of a work of art is the choice of the artist to leave the configuration of the elements open allowing not a uni-linear and definitive order but a

possibility of multiple orders. “Meaning is an infinite regress within a closed sphere, a sort of parallel universe related in various ways to the ‘real’ world but not directly connected to it; there is no immediate contact between the world of signs and the world of the things they refer to” (Eco xxii). Meanings are instigated by the artist and the work of art expresses the meaning. Meanings eventually exist in the interpretation of the audience as it is considered as open work. Consequently the work of art is a collaboratory work where the artist encourages the audience to participate in the creation of a work of art leaving it open. The artist fixes multiple levels of meanings in the work of art allowing the audience to have their subjective perspectives thus making it contingent and the act of interpretation is where the audience actively partake to deliberate various ways in which an artist configures the work of art.

9.5 The Limits of Openness

The writings of Italian philosopher Umberto Eco crisscross studies of the Middle Ages, a wide range of issues bearing upon interpretation in its most general sense, as well as cultural criticism and bestselling novels. Early in his career in the 1950s and 1960s, Eco wrote extensively on medieval aesthetics and avant-grade artistic practices. He also wrote cultural criticism in a parodic mode for journals of the Italian avant-garde and regularly contributed articles on contemporary events to mainstream publications.

The Open Work raised issues to which Eco has repeatedly returned. Eco used examples from avant-garde music, literature and painting to theorize the concept of openness. The openness of a work is tangible. It is an intentional element of an artist’s production of a work delivered to the performer in the manner of a “construction kit.” The interpreter or performer participates in completing an unfinished work. At issue for Eco are works and not random components open to indiscriminate actualizations. Performances of open works will neither be the same nor “gratuitously different.” The openness of the work is presented as a field of relations with specific structural limits and formal tendencies. An open work exploits ambiguity, which arises from formal innovations and contraventions of existing values and conventions; disorder arises in relation to the existing order which the work rejects, but the disorder of the new work is organized while at once avoiding a collapse into chaos and incomprehensibility, and a relapse into the predictability of classical forms. Eco remarked: “This tendency toward disorder, characteristic of the poetics of openness, must be understood as a tendency toward controlled disorder, toward a circumscribed potential, toward a freedom that is constantly curtailed by the germ of formativity present in any form that wants to

remain open to the free choice of the addressee.” (p. 65). Eco’s influential conception of openness is still used today by cyber cultural theorists such as Espen J. Aarseth as a foundational point for the development of a cyborg aesthetics of cybertexts, although Aarseth ultimately finds Eco’s openness to be too restricted, too much clouded by rash anti-formalist pronouncements, and in the end self-subverting, a quality that infects Eco’s later works as well as makes them less relevant for the study of cybertextuality. (Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997, pp. 51-3.)

In *The Role of the Reader* and later in the essays in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Eco revisited the question of openness as an extreme example of how texts produce their model readers. An open text creates a model reader whose interpretive project is purposefully directed by the text’s structural strategy, whereas closed texts have a poorly defined model reader whose interpretive choices are free from constraints. Superman comics and Ian Fleming’s James Bond novels are examples of closed texts. The empirical author is manifested in a text as a style or idiolect. Eco displaced the question of the author’s intentions onto the text. The text has an intention about which its model reader makes conjectures. The task of an empirical reader is both to make conjectures about the text’s model reader and to interpret the model author coinciding with the text’s intention. There are three intentions at issue in interpretation: those of the author, the text, and the reader. In *The Limits of Interpretation*, Eco added that texts produce two model readers: a naive one attuned to semantic content, and a second who critically and metalinguistically describes, explicates, and enjoys the clues the text employs to attract such a reader. By means of a semiotic modelization of the hermeneutic circle which essentially repopulates textual interpretation, Eco advances a sober alternative to intentionalist interpretation and the structuralist “death of the author,” in addition to warding off the radical freedom and ingenuity of a deconstructive reader of texts.

The Open Work, *The Role of the Reader*, and *The Limits of Interpretation* all address the problem of the reception of artistic works and literary and theoretical texts. They mark an important transition in Eco’s writing from pre-semiotic to structural and semiotic specifications of the dialectic of openness and the various pressures that guide and restrict interpreters. Eco progressively introduces concepts whose purpose is to protect openness against unlimited drift and arbitrary uses of texts. He consistently turns to the Peircean idea of unlimited semiosis to critically reveal the pragmatic limits it places upon free interpretive

play and how it transcends the will of any individual in the building up of a transcendental community of researchers who would be, in the long run, in agreement about the meaning of a text

9.6 Summary

In this lesson, you have read about the seminal ideas of Umberto Eco. After going through the main ideas of the text you understood how Eco placed the concept of the open work within aesthetic theory and how he explained that every text is more or less open, because every text can be read in an infinite number of ways depending on what the reader brings to the text. You understood how Eco sees open work as essentially political; work that is open expresses a pluralistic worldview. In addition to that you were also able to comprehend how in “The Poetics of the Open work” the meaning of “open” work is elaborated and defined in terms of a thought process that engages the idea of the infinite possibilities of the interpretation of works.

9.7 Glossary

1. Open text: In semiotic analysis (the studies of signs or symbols), an open text is a text that allows multiple or mediated interpretation by the readers. In contrast, a closed text leads the reader to one intended interpretation.

2. Ambiguity: Ambiguity occurs when the structure and/or content of a statement makes its meaning unclear, leaving it open to multiple possible interpretations.

3. Affective fallacy: Term used by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley to designate what they see as the error of making subjective responses (cognitive or emotional) the criteria for interpretive, critical or aesthetic judgements; the supposed error of judging or evaluating a text on the basis of its emotional effects on a reader.

4. Intentional fallacy: term used in 20th-century literary criticism to describe the problem inherent in trying to judge a work of art by assuming the intent or purpose of the artist who created it. Introduced by W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley in *The Verbal Icon* (1954), the approach was a reaction to the popular belief that to know what the author intended—what he had in mind at the time of writing—was to know the correct interpretation of the work.

9.8 References

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9.9 Further Readings

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9.10 Model Questions

1. Why does Umberto Eco describe text as "an open field"?
2. Summarize the arguments posited in "The Poetics of the Open Work" by Umberto Eco.