



**South Valley University**  
**Faculty of Arts**  
**Department of English**

# *Criticism*

## 4<sup>th</sup> Year

مقرر الفرقة الرابعة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية كلية التربية

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chide  
fault  
severe  
denounce  
develop  
people  
review  
remark  
verbal  
bash  
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blame  
constructive  
disapproval  
critique  
condemn

# CRITICISM

censure  
negative  
peer to peer  
harsh  
judgment  
boss  
feedback  
lambaste  
opinion  
public  
advice  
sideswipe  
attack  
scorch  
assessment  
private  
chastise  
put down  
decry

## ***Victorian Criticism***

### **→ The Victorian Age**

- The age during which Queen Victoria ruled Britain.
- Extended the span of 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- An age of colonial expansion.
- Scientific and industrial progress.
- The extreme gap between haves and have-nots.
- Industrial progress leading to pollution.
- Poor condition of people in the work houses and extreme working conditions in factories.
- Migration to urban areas and lack of proper housing in urban areas.
- Child labor was prevalent.
- Hypocritical morality of the Victorians.
- Darwin's theory of evolution.
- Publication of the Origin of Species which questioned the foundations of Christian faith.
- The loss of assurance offered by religion.
- Britain became a powerful country during this time.
- Material growth led to a decline in morals and culture among people.

The Victorians provide the last major step in the advancement of English critical theory before its twentieth century establishment as a scientific and methodological discourse. It is also true to assume that Victorian criticism represents the transition to or culminates in modern literary theory and criticism. In the nineteenth century, the co-existence of different artistic and literary trends during one period leads to the separation of criticism from literary process. The separation of criticism from literary practice is also a result of the diversity of literary forms. But primarily the independence of criticism from literature is acquired by creative and critical writing confronting and falling under the influence of diversity and complexity of philosophical thought, social theories and scientific advances, where critics attempt to assimilate science to literary criticism.

The route of criticism towards independence from literature means its own diversification and organization as a typology: although it is almost impossible to categorize Victorian criticism, it is Romantic theory still being influential, to which biographical, sociological, historical, positivist, realistic, naturalistic, impressionistic, aesthetic, moral, humanistic, and other types of criticism are added.

The diversification of the critical systems in the Victorian Age is the result of the massive presence of different critical voices belonging to both professional critics, like John Ruskin, and writer-critics, like Walter Pater, Matthew Arnold and Henry James. Among others, they are critics focusing on art and/or literature as well as critics providing critical commentary on criticism.

***Robert Browning***  
***Essay on Shelley***

In 1851, Browning published his *Essay on Shelley* as an introduction to a collection of Shelley's letters. Browning wrote very little prose criticism in his life, which is why this essay is especially important. It actually turns out that the letters about Shelley which Browning based this essay upon were fraudulent documents, but that is not important.

In the essay, Browning writes about how Shelley was an important poet—even near the level of Shakespeare—because he was both a subjective and objective poet. Browning respected and understood Shelley in such a way as to say he was each of these types of poets at the same time—something nearly impossible.

The important point of the essay is what Browning mentions about understanding the biography of a poet. He writes, "Doubtless, with respect to such a poet, we covet his biography. We desire to look back upon the process of gathering together in a lifetime, the materials of the work we behold entire". Browning might have said this only because it would be important to know the biography of a poet that lived

a short life, like Shelley. But Browning's ultimate point was one that he lived by himself:

*The man passes, the work remains. The work speaks for itself, as we say: and the biography of the worker is no more necessary to an understanding or enjoyment of it, than is a model or anatomy of some tropical tree, to the right tasting of the fruit we are familiar with on the market stall...*" (37)

Philip Drew says it best when he writes, "The biography of such a man is not without interest, but we can do without it". That is exactly what Browning was thinking. It is interesting, however, that Browning lost respect for Shelley after having learned of Shelley's private life, but that will be discussed later. Browning was an intensely private person, and that is probably why he had strong feelings toward this subject. But it is very important to understand Browning's thoughts on the unimportance of a writer's biography to an understanding of his writings. I argue that it is of ardent importance that one knows Browning's biography because it provides a much fuller understanding of his writing.

As mentioned earlier, Browning references Shelley in Pauline as "Suntreader," as if Shelley is a god in the

heavens. Browning's finest reference to Shelley appears written in a thankful stanza at the end of Pauline:

*Sun-treader, I believe in God and truth  
And love; and as one just escaped from death  
Would bind himself in bands of friends to feel  
He lives indeed, so, I would lean on them!  
Thou must be ever with me, most in gloom  
If such must come, but chiefly when I die,  
For I seem, dying, as one going in the dark  
To fight a giant: but live thou forever,  
And be to all what thou hast been to me! (1020-1028)*

Seeing all the evidence, Shelley certainly had an influence on Browning. He wishes that Shelley would "be ever with me" and he even wishes that Shelley's words would "live forever." But as Browning matured, his writing style changed and became his own.

There are a few ideas as to why he strayed away from his boyish obsession with Shelley. **First**, Browning did not believe (like Shelley did) that humans had the ability to attain perfection. Browning believed that "universal perfection was only to be achieved by divine intervention". It was Shelley's lofty ideals that Browning felt he could not live up to. The



**second** reason is that he did not respect Shelley as a man. It was around 1858 when Thomas Hookham, a friend of Shelley's, showed Browning some letters from Shelley's first wife, Harriet Shelley. When Browning learned of Shelley's infidelity and treatment of Harriet, he called Shelley "half crazy" and denounced his actions as being "wholly inexcusable". For these reasons, Browning strayed from his Shelleyan fixation.

Perhaps Browning disliked Pauline because his style at that time mimicked Shelley's so much, and he wanted to create his own identity as a poet. There are many parallels between Pauline and Shelley's writings. It appears that Browning's and Shelley's voices are intertwined in these selections. Notice the way the words "brow," "burn," and "secret" are repeated in Pauline and Shelley's *Adonais*. It appears as though Browning, in respect of Shelley, playfully twisted Shelley's words to fit into Pauline. Likewise, "call up the dead," from Pauline, is similar to, "forcing up some lone ghost," in *Alastor*. And finally, Pauline's "smiling like a friend" is comparable to Queen Mab's "savage joy lowered like a fiend." One can almost see Browning writing Pauline with copies of Shelley's books next to him.

As Browning began to mature as a writer, he looked upon his early writings with disgust. He even calls Pauline an “eyesore” because he dislikes it so much. Perhaps he condemned Pauline because it was strongly influenced by his boyhood idol, Shelley. Shelley was deceased by the time young Browning discovered his poetry, but the impact Shelley had on Browning is easily perceived. Though he read Shelley as a teenager and adopted Shelley’s liberal politics and philosophies, by the time he wrote Pauline at the age of twenty, Browning had moved on from his boyish obsessiveness of the poet. Yet the roots of Shelley were still embedded in Browning’s mind. Even up to his death in 1889, Browning thought highly of Shelley. Browning might have disliked Pauline because his style mimicked Shelley’s so much.

On the other hand, Browning might have loathed Pauline because it was built upon a naïve and boyish plan. Browning thought that this plan would make him famous. He would create a poem, an opera, a novel, etc. and he would make them appear as if different men wrote them. He gave up on the plan, however, after he wrote Pauline, either because he thought the plan was naïve, or he was displeased with Pauline. Browning called this plan “foolish” in his own copy

of Pauline. He refers to his plan as being “foolish” and the poem as an “abortion.”

But more interestingly, Browning states that the poet of Pauline is “more legitimately myself.” He admits that he wrote the poem autobiographically. At the time of writing Pauline, Browning was a young and profoundly arrogant writer. As a young man, those close to him described him as “undoubtedly spoiled” and “lovable, yet self-centered and selfish. His first two long poems are autobiographical in that they deal with self-centered characters”. In fact, Browning even referred to himself as “spoiled” in one of his early letters to Elizabeth Barrett. These qualities came through in his early poetry.

In fact, Browning disliked this self-centered poem so much that he hoped that the world would forget about it; and the world almost did! William Sharp writes, “But after a time the few admirers of “Pauline” forgot to speak about it: the poet himself never alluded to it: and in a year or two it was almost as though it had never been written”

Harold Bloom and Adrienne Munich write of Browning: “He is a great lover—but primarily of himself, or rather of his multitude of antithetical selves”. And that is exactly what

Browning's narrators are—contradictory, yet related selves. Leslie Brisman writes, "By entering each and all of his monologuists, he [Browning] has half revealed himself". It has already been mentioned that Browning considered himself a very conceited and spoiled young man, and some of Browning's most self-absorbed narrators lie within "My Last Duchess," "Porphyria's Lover," and "Andrea del Sarto." Bloom refers to Browning's narrators as "Browning-selves," meaning that the narrators represent a part of Browning himself or are, at least, representative of his personal beliefs.

These narrators are not exact duplicates of Browning, only poetic exaggerations. Browning decided to distance himself from his writings by creating narrators that were ostensibly unlike him.

Both "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover" are attacks on Victorian ideals for relationships between men and women. Browning disliked the public's taste for scandal in Victorian society. The Victorian era paved the way for the loss of familial secrecy. About the Victorian era, Karen Chase and Michael Harry Levenson write, "Adultery, divorce, bigamy, the cruelty of husbands, the flight of wives— these sensational anomalies were stitched into the fabric of authority". "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover" face

these social issues head-on. Browning offers these two poems as responses to this dichotomy of contrary issues; however, he never offers any answers to the societal problems.

The Duke in “My Last Duchess” is representative of the young and pompous Browning. As I quoted earlier, Pottle writes that, as a young man, Browning was “undoubtedly spoiled” and “self-centered and selfish,” exactly as the Duke seems to be. In Browning’s own love letters to Elizabeth Barrett, he claims that he was indeed “spoiled” as a young man. The Duke is also self-serving and full of insensibility, but he is not deranged; he is simply dominant and controlling. So the Duke is not an exact replica of Browning, just a poetic embellishment of him, meant to make fun of his own self-centered traits and free himself from his creative apprehension.

This dominant and controlling Duke depicts the “cruelty of husbands” that Chase and Levenson discuss. So narcissistic is the Duke that he cannot sympathize, nor empathize, with his last wife at all. In fact, they share very little in common. This is not a marriage based upon love. The Duke prefers artificial objects that he can control, such as artwork or his wealth. Ultimately, though, the Duke’s

jealousy leads him to believe that his wife is overly flirtatious with other men.

The Duke tries to prove his wife's unfaithfulness with circumstantial evidence, but ultimately there is no direct proof. The only proof of her deceitful acts lies in the Duke's words. He is extremely possessive and jealous, so it is possible that he witnessed a man's friendly act of generosity toward the Duchess—as well as her appreciation toward the giver—and interpreted it as proof of infidelity. The Duke is defined by this quick reaction without searching for tangible proof. In the middle of the poem, the Duke says that he believes her to be disloyal—or unworthy of his “gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name”—and, therefore, decides to have her killed (line 33). Though he seems selfish and murderous, he does not have the ability to commit the murder himself. He says: “I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together” (45-46). In these lines, the Duke gives an order for someone, either an assassin or servant, to murder his wife. He allowed the jealousy and rage to overtake him, thus fulfilling the “cruelty of husbands” expression that Chase and Levenson use.

Browning only considers it his duty to raise the questions about contemporary societal mores, such as the “cruelty of

husbands” and the “flight of wives.” Browning wants to shock his readers; he does not want them to enjoy the poem. He wants his readers to see that there is something wrong with trying to live noble lives while also enjoying stories of moral scandal. Browning offers no ideas of his own; he just wants his readers aware of the problems facing Victorian society. “My Last Duchess” is a great poem revealing a part of Browning himself.

## ***Mathew Arnold as a Critic of English Literature***

Matthew Arnold (1822 – 1888) was a poet-critic and one of the most significant writers of the late Victorian period in England. He occupies a prominent place in the history of Literary Criticism. His essay “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” was published in his first collection of critical writings, “Essays in Criticism” in 1865.

In his essay, Arnold states that criticism should be a ‘dissemination of ideas, an unprejudiced and impartial effort to study and spread the best that is known and thought of in the world’. He states that the role of criticism is to make itself inherently valuable, and to rouse men from complacency to a state of achieving perfection.

Arnold defines the role of a critic as the one to view an object for what it really is, to bring best ideas to the masses, and to create an atmosphere that fuels the literary genius of the future.

Arnold also likens criticism to creativity, citing how the writing of criticism gives rise to creative joy that comes from original writing. He argues that unlike Wordsworth’s opinion on criticism, it must be considered as a form of art for its vital contributions the literary world and society in general. It is a



form of exercising free creativity. He also states that criticism paves the way for creativity. Arnold believes that criticism is a way to understand life and the world, and can be linked to the satisfaction derived from creative writing.

### → **Definition of criticism by Arnold**

“The Function of Criticism in the Present Time is largely made of ideas that Arnold discusses in his Study of Poetry. He defines criticism as “A disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought of in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas.” The term ‘disinterest’ in the view of Arnold refers to being an impartial and just reader. A critic needs to be free from two prejudices: historical and personal. Historical prejudice is when the critic resorts to view through the lens of past and neglects the present in the work. Personal prejudice refers to a personal liking that can cloud judgment.

Arnold also believes that for the production of great literary work, the ‘power of man’ and ‘power of the moment’ (climate of great ideas) must come together. If one of them is absent, the work will not become great. To illustrate this, he takes the example of Goethe and Byron. Both had great productive power, yet Goethe’s work was more powerful because he had a rich cultural background. He also

mentions how Shakespeare was not a deep reader, which affected his work. But his fame and glory were a result of his age and a climate of great ideas.

### → **Three functions for the critic**

By the definition of criticism provided by Arnold, the task of a critic is threefold.

**The first task** is the critic's duty to learn, and for that he must "see things as they really are". **The second task** is to hand on this idea to others, to convert the world, to make "the best ideas prevail." **The third task** requires the critic to create a favourable atmosphere for the creative genius of the future, by promoting "a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power." Without the prevalence of best ideas, there will be a cultural anarchy.

Arnold also observes that to recognize the greatness of a literary work, one has to look beyond the social ideas and influences that cast shadows and opinions. Further, he indicates that two powers must converge to create a great piece of literature: the power of man and the power of moment. In the quest to be a critic, Arnold believed that one must not confine himself to the literature of his own country,

but should draw substantially on foreign literature and ideas because the propagation of ideas should be an objective endeavor. Scott-James says that Arnold places the critic “is the position of John the Baptist, preparing the ways for one whose shoe he is not worthy to unloose”. Thus, Arnold has a high conception of the vocation of a critic.

### → Role of Criticism

Arnold suggests that the function of criticism at the present time is to make itself inherently valuable in itself. Whether the value springs from bringing joy to the writer or from making sure that the best ideas reach society are irrespective. In this regard, Arnold mirrors Aristotle’s view of poetry while he explains that the highest function of human kind is exercising its creative power.

Criticism performs another important function as well. It rouses men out of their self-satisfaction and complacency. By shaking complacency off, criticism makes their mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and makes them contemplate the ideally perfect. Therefore, the critic must rise above practical considerations and have ideal perfection as his aim, in order to make others rise to it as well.

## → Defense on Significance of Criticism

Arnold argues that a lot of literature from European nations has been used for the purpose of criticism. But England has failed to produce and encourage significant amount of critical writing due to the attitudes of writers towards criticism. He takes the example of Wordsworth to illustrate this further. Wordsworth believed that critical writing was a waste of time for the author as well as the reader. He also states that great harm can be done through critical writing, but little harm occurs through means of creative writing. But Arnold defends these views by arguing that if a man has talent in one line of writing, he must not be forced to create original writing under the pretext that critical writing is of no value. To quote,

*“It is almost too much to expect a poor human nature, that a man capable of producing some effect in one line of literature, should for the greater good of society, voluntarily doom himself to impotence and obscurity in another.”*

Arnold goes on to point out the paradox of Wordsworth’s beliefs on criticism as Wordsworth had indulged himself in being a critic by writing against literary criticism.

## → **Literary Criticism and Creativity**

Arnold believed creative capacity to be more important than critical faculty. However, his definition of criticism as “the endeavor, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is” makes it a necessary prerequisite for valuable creation. He asserts that creation of quality is not possible if people are not provided with a current of fresh ideas. This is achieved through honest criticism. If the best ideas do not prevail, it gives rise to a cultural anarchy. Only when the power of man and power of moment come together can a good piece of literature be created.

Arnold also states that writing criticism may produce in its practitioner a sense of creative joy. He compares the emotional state of writing criticism with the emotional state of creative writing. In this, he dispels the typical censure that criticism serves no purpose.

Arnold observes that great writing emerges from great ideas, and they are manifested when these ideas reach the masses. The critic performs the important task of identifying these ideas with disinterest and impart these ideas to people. He implies that the period of great creativity and

dormant creativity can be traced to lack of objective criticism and public attention as much as to creators of great work. In this argument, Arnold establishes literary criticism as an art form as high and significant as any form of creativity.

Further, Arnold argues that critical writing is an important activity of exercising free creativity. “It is undeniable, also, that men may have the sense of exercising this free creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature or art.” If some people were better equipped to write criticism, it would be frustrating to insist they channel their talent only for creating original writing.

Finally, criticism is necessary because Arnold thinks that creative power works with certain materials, and for the author these ideas, “the best ideas on every matter which literature touches, current at the time.” However authors do not discover these ideas, rather they synthesize them into their work of art. Therefore, if authors do not readily know these ideas, they have nothing to write about. Arnold talks about the power of man and power of the moment, in this context. The author needs to live in a society where true ideas are discussed and debated, where true thoughts are cherished and passed on, like in ancient Greece or

Renaissance England. Thus he advocates that good criticism propagates good literature.

### → Conclusion

Matthew Arnold is hailed as the first 'modern critic' and is also called a 'critic's critic' for his contribution to the meaningfulness of criticism in the realm of literature. In his work 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1865), Arnold makes an effort to demonstrate that criticism in itself has several functions and should be observed as an art form that is as high and important as any other creative art form. He offered an objective method in the field of criticism, through comparison and analysis. His methods were met with disapproval from his peers. However, Arnold's method for literary criticism was widely accepted and went on to influence the first sixty years of the 20th century. Arnold has a high conception of the vocation of a critic and the function of criticism. His ideas are a result of the prevalence of cultural anarchy, leading him to take up the mission to bring about cultural regeneration in the literary world through means of objective criticism. His critic is a critic of life, society, religion culture, national character and all aesthetic

activities. His Touchstone method offered scientific **objectivity** to literary criticism.

### → **The Objective Approach**

In the Objective Approach, the text or the artistic object is the only reality worth studying. Additionally, the text or poem has an internal structure of references that has nothing to do with the author, audience or universe. Arnold began as a romantic poet but changed in the middle of his career to become a critic of romanticism. His shift also changed the interest from feelings to that of the ideas. Arnold's view came to be known through his work "The Function of Criticism at the present Time".

In the Function of Criticism, Arnold states that criticism should be a dissemination of ideas, a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. He implies that while evaluating a work, the objectivity of a critic is more important than psychological, historical and social background of the work.

Through his Touchstone method published in 'The Study of Poetry' (1880), Arnold introduced scientific objectivity to critical evaluation. He provided comparison and analysis as the two primary tools of criticism. In this, he employed short



quotations from recognized poetic masterpieces as the benchmark to gauge the value of other works. According to this method, Chaucer, Dryden, Pope, Shelly fall short due to their lack of high seriousness. Shakespeare too falls short due to his emphasis on expression rather than concept. Arnold put works by Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Milton and Wordsworth in the forefront, and ranked Wordsworth as first for his “criticism of life”.

He laid great stress on ‘Disinterestedness’, which he considered to be the most important quality of criticism. He also laid emphasis on knowledge as a tool for objective criticism. Arnold’s criticism method has faced disapproval by some critics as lacking in logical and methodical aptitude. However, many critics agreed with Arnold and the first sixty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in literary criticism were greatly influenced by Arnold’s work.

### **→Poetry as a Criticism of Life**

For Arnold poetry is not meant to delight, it is meant to provide food to soul. He defines poetry “as a criticism of life under the condition fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.” For Arnold ‘criticism of life’ means the noble and profound application of ideas

to life and the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty as truth and seriousness to substance and matter, and felicity and perfection of diction and manner. Arnold believes that poetry does not present life as it is. The poet rather adds something of his own from his noble nature to it and this something contributes to his criticism of life. Poetry makes men moral, better and nobler, but it does so not through direct teaching, or by appealing by reason like science, but by appealing to the soul of man. The poet gives in his poetry what he really and seriously believes in; he speaks from the depths of his soul. The real greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life – to the question: how to live.

Thus poetry interprets to us the ways of facing the odds of life and the method of surviving such a crisis. For Arnold poetry has a great role to play. In fact he makes the moral purpose of poetry as the integral function. He says, “a poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt-against life; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas in a poetry of indifference towards life”. By treating moral ideas, he does not call upon composing didactic poems that “bring us but a very little way in a poetry.” Since moral ideas are

really main part of our life, therefore, a poetry that has to console and sustain man has to base on moral ideas.

Poetry therefore to utter such moral convictions must be of highest order. It ought to be excellent both in matter as well as in manner. It must have universal truth and high seriousness for matter and the natural felicity of a superior order that blends harmoniously with the matter.

### → **Arnold on Shakespeare**

Praising Shakespeare, Arnold says 'In England there needs a miracle of genius like Shakespeare's to produce a balance of mind'. This is praise tempered by a critical sense. In a letter he writes. 'I keep saying Shakespeare, you are as obscure as life is'. In his sonnet On Shakespeare he says; 'Others abide our question. Thou are free./ We ask and ask - Thou smilest and art still,/ Out-topping knowledge'.

### → **Arnold's limitation as a critic**

Though Arnold is given the title of the father of modern literary criticism, he has a number of limitations too. He is not a critic but a satirical critic and he has provided decisions too quickly. Arnold's love of classicism made him blind to the beauty of lyricism. He ignored the importance of lyrical

poems, which are subjective and which express the sentiments and the personality of the poet. His lack of historical sense is another failing and his touchstone method is not out and out perfect.

As we have seen, later critics praise Arnold, but it is only a qualified praise. Oliver Elton calls him a 'bad great critic'. T. S. Eliot said that Arnold is a 'Propagandist and not a creator of ideas'. According to Walter Raleigh, Arnold's method is like that of a man who took a brick to the market to give the buyers an impression of the building.

### **→ Arnold's legacy**

In spite of his faults, Arnold's position as an eminent critic is secure. He was one of those critics who, as Eliot said, arrive from time to time to set the literary house in order. Eliot named Dryden, Johnson and Arnold as some of the greatest critics of the English language.

Arnold's objective approach to criticism and his view that historical and biographical study are unnecessary was very influential on the new criticism. His emphasis on the importance of tradition also influenced T. S. Eliot. Eliot is also indebted to Arnold for his classicism, and for his objective approach which paved the way for Eliot to say that

poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality, because it is not an expression of emotions but an escape from emotions.

Although Arnold disapproved of the Romantics' approach to poetry, he also shows his appreciation the Romantics in his *Essays in Criticism*. He praises Wordsworth thus: 'Nature herself took the pen out of his hand and wrote with a bare, sheer penetrating power'. Arnold also valued poetry for its strong ideas, which he found to be the chief merit of Wordsworth's poetry. About Shelley he says that Shelley is 'A beautiful but ineffectual angel beating in a void his luminous wings in vain'.

In the present day with the literary tradition overburdened with imagery, myth, symbol and abstract jargon, it is refreshing to come back to Arnold and his like to encounter central questions about literature and life as they are perceived by a mature and civilized mind.

## ***T.S Eliot as a Critic***

Thomas Stearns Eliot is considered to be one of the most influential critic of the modern era. He is widely influential for his famous essay **Tradition and the Individual Talent**. The essay influenced the emerging theory in the literary theory known as **New Criticism** and hence Eliot is also sometimes referred to be as the anticipate of New Criticism theory. He has contributed critical terms such as the Impersonality theory, objective correlative, unification of sensibility and autotelic text.

Firstly as a critic Eliot is a classicist. His essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* shrouds him to be a classicist where he believed that a piece of art should be sublime, complex and objective. He gave a full understanding of the idea of tradition where tradition is simply a current of literary writings but Eliot highlights that the poet cannot attain tradition unless and until he obtains a historical sense. Historical sense is simply a consciousness of the past in terms of writing consciousness of the dead poets from Homer till the present and grasping on their literary works. A poet according to Eliot has to obtain this sense of historical sense first so to obtain tradition. A poet can only refine his sense of tradition/historical sense only when he subtracts his

personal feelings and emotions. Hence, he highlights the theory of Impersonality which also makes him a classicist.

According to Eliot the work of art has to be impersonal and the poet can achieved the level of impersonality only when he has refined his tradition/historical sense. The materials or historical sense/tradition that he gathered inside his mind is going to be mixed as in a chemical reaction along with the personal experiences of the poet. The mind has to act as a catalyst as in chemistry where it will increase its reaction but will not participate or undergo any process of change. He highlights that the past (materials he obtained through historical sense/tradition) will direct or guide the present poet( any modern poet) for his writing or creativity at present and the present(the modern mind's poet) will alter or modify the past(materials from the past tradition/historical sense) and a new of work of art will be created which is the individual talent. In simple words, the Individual talent is the product of the chemical reaction between tradition/historical sense fusing with personal experiences of the poet.

Eliot as a critic believed that the work of art can project a personal emotions of the poet but he believed that it needs a mediator to be expressed. In his essay *Hamlet and His*

*Problems* , Eliot coined the term **objective correlative**. This critical concept is actually a mediator through which a poet can correlate his personality and emotions with a set of objects or events. Eliot criticized that Shakespeare's Hamlet has a lot of emotions in his head but are unable to be expressed because it lacked objective correlative. In critical understanding the concept emphasizes on evoking a sense of emotions in any work of poetry where a particular emotion can be expressed by correlating it with an image or object or events to portray it objectively.

Eliot criticism has always emphasized on objectivity rather than subjectivity. This essence also makes him a classicist. His impersonality theory focuses on objective art and he criticizes the Romantic poetry for its subjectivity especially Wordsworth's theory of poetry of "recollection in tranquility". He believes that poetry is an escape of emotions and personality rather than expressing one's emotions and feelings. This is the idea of objectivity he emphasized and he further adds that it has to be "impersonal" since it has its own life and does not focus on the existence of the writer/poet/artist. He is actually propagating the idea of art for art's sake where they believed that art has its own life and can exist without the presence of an artist.



However, there is also a question which arises the need for tradition and objectivity. It was the demand of the time and the society for it became complex and difficult for the poets and people to live during that age. The individual trust was broken due to the First world war and if Eliot expressed his emotions like Wordsworth then nobody will dared to believe Eliot and his writings. Hence, there was a demand for the sense of tradition and Eliot in the impersonality revolutionized the modern poetry by attacking Renaissance Humanism. He attacked the Renaissance Humanism with his impersonality theory that though human beings maybe significant in the world yet they are also equally destructible in the world because of the impact of the First World War and Impersonality theory addresses such compaction of forces of First World War.

It was Eliot who actually appreciated and glorified the 17th century poets known as Metaphysical poets. In his essay *The Metaphysical Poets*, Eliot appreciates their poetry for their ability to unify both wits and emotions in a balanced form. When Neo-classicism emerged, poetry became witty and imbalanced and Romanticism became emotional and less witty. Hence, it was the metaphysical poets who balanced the wits and emotions in their poetry and he came

up with the idea of unification of sensibility where the use of wits and emotions are well balanced and formed in a work of art.

### → **T.S Eliot Concept of Tradition and Individual Talent**

**Tradition and Individual Talent** , written by T.S. Eliot is one of the most influential essays of all the times. It has placed an important concept of understanding the core meaning of Literature as a whole. He tries to justify the importance of art in academy as a discipline and if Literature has to be enacted as a discipline, it has to be critical , refine , allusive and complex in its nature. The essay serves as an important masterpiece to understand the theory of Impersonality and tradition”.

The concept of “tradition” according to Eliot is the sense of continuity from the past. It is a continuity where a writer or a poet should write in tradition and it is readily unacceptable to the Whites as it is like a “censure”. The Western world seems to be occupied more on the creative forces but Eliot stresses on the elements of critical thoughts while obtaining a “tradition’. According to Eliot, a poet has to write in “tradition” and there exist the elements of past in the work of poet’s art when it is examined or explored from a critical lens

rather than a creative force. The very “individual parts” will show the impressions of the continuity of the past or the elements of past which the poet has taken from which has been already existed before. He states that “the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors ,assert their immortality vigorously”.

According to Eliot , if a poet or a writer imbues the element of the past, there is an imitation of the past but he justifies that the imitation is “not the slavish imitation” of the past or the existed work of art before. He argues that the strict blinding of imitation of the past is not tradition and hence “Novelty is better than repetition”. He tries to suggest that a poet do not slavishly imitate the past but there is something new which is born out of that imitation. Hence, there will be a new novelty in the piece of work of art which he implies the “individual talent”. He says that a passive imitation of the past is to be discouraged and ignored.

In addition to this, Eliot suggest that a poet can obtain a “tradition” by understanding the past and he calls it as a “historical sense” which is not merely an imitation of the past but of its presence in the present. It not involves the “pastness of the past but of its presence” and the literary

circles of the whole European literature produced from “Homer” to the present and the poet creates his own new work in the present with not just a mere imitation of the past but by understanding the past to obtain the “tradition”. A poet has to differentiate the good and bad things from the past and has to obtain the good things to create his own new work of art and hence the amalgamation of the understanding of the past and the poet’s liability to obtain the good things from the past constitute a “historical sense’. Hence, there will be both elements of past as well as of the present in a new work of art through a “historical sense” to establish a continuity of literary tradition by a poet.

Moreover, he highlights that “tradition” is not easily obtained and “inherited” but requires a “hard labor” and effort. There has to be the development of the “historical sense” by a poet to write in “tradition” and there is a recognition of the past and the present poet who creates a new work of art so that there is a continuity of literary tradition because every poet writes in a tradition. The poet starts to write in “tradition” when he has obtained the “historical sense” and it is possible for the poet to obtain when he has understood the past and is guided by the past in the present where he adds a new piece of work. Here, he

suggests that there is a continuity as well as the creation of a new work of art in the present.

Eliot further goes on to say that “tradition” is a “dynamic one”. He suggests that the past directs the present and the present alters the past to create a new work of art which is the “individual talent”. Hence, the knowledge of the past and the creation of a new art becomes the “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. He adds that the poet takes a “tradition” or the elements from the past in his work of art but there is also a change or alteration in the present that creates something new and hence it is “dynamic one”. It is also a “dynamic” in a sense that when one would judge critically, one can find the elements of the past which has been existed before and is guided to the present but the present modifies it when the new work of art is produced. Hence, the entire structure becomes a reciprocal and the relationship of the past or the “historical sense” reciprocates to the present where it modifies the past to bring forth a new work of art or “individual talent” and the “tradition” is established and continued.

Lastly, Eliot also points out the judgment of the new piece of work in the present. He states that the judgment of

the new piece of work is done by comparison and contrast between the past and the present that has altered the past. It is not merely done through a comparison and contrast but it is to see the manners in which the present has modified or altered the past and the present has done to the past. It is to observe the range of changes in the new work of art in the present and to the past as well as to undermine the values of the past and present to be equally balanced without undermining the past as well as the present. Here, Eliot is against Arnold's The Touchstone Method where Arnold argues that a work of art has to be compared against the sublimity and greatness with the classical poets but Eliot opines that the dead poets and the present poets are all equal for it is the past that has guided the present and the present has altered the past without undermining the values of the both. He further stretches that an honest criticism will be judged upon the work of art or the individual talent rather than the present poet himself meaning that the work of art is objective and the present poet has subtracted his subjective experience, emotions and personality. Hence, Eliot says that this is the real sense of "tradition".

## ***Literary Criticism and Theory in the Twentieth Century***

At the end of the nineteenth century, criticism in Europe and America had been predominantly biographical, historical, psychological, impressionistic, and empirical. In the humanist tradition of Matthew Arnold, much of this criticism saw in literature a refuge from, or remedy for, the ills of modern civilization.

The modern literary criticism is remarkable for its variety of theory and practice. There are various moods, techniques and cross currents of criticism in practice at present consequent upon the new discoveries in the field of science, anthropology, sociology and psychoanalysis. There have been great changes and revolution in the critical outlook, technique and methods. And no wonder, criticism is becoming more and more a kind of laboratory for the study of the intellectual activity. The approach of the critics and the problems which they deal which are radically different from this predecessors.

The new critical techniques have been great influenced by a number of revolutionary systems of thought about man and society. The different trends have their own line of

thinking and they interpret the work of art by their favorite and accepted literary techniques. In the first place there is the psychoanalytic vogue in modern criticism. Psychoanalysis insists upon human emotions and devotes itself to the buried drama of individual life. Modern criticism has been influenced by a number of revolutionary systems of thought. The major influences in the field have been those of Darwin, Marx and Freud. They contributed to the belief that literature is essentially a social instrument. Freud modifies the whole conception of the modification of human activities. He gave currency to the theory that the artistic gift is the compensatory function of neurosis.

The psychoanalytic criticism of literature began with the publication of Freud's interpretation of dream in 1900. Nonetheless the greatest impact upon literary criticism was unleashed by the three great contributions are in the evolution of various psychological views of art and his rejection of hedonism of the specifically aesthetic emotions. Almost as significant is Freudian or psychoanalytical criticism so it is the social criticism which takes its inspiration from Marxism. It regards literature as a social institution.



The sociological approach to literature is particularly cultivated by those who are protagonist of social philosophy. Marxists criticism study the relation between literature and society. They practice evaluation based on judicial criticism. These Marxists critics are not only students of literature but also propagandist critic like Herbert Reed. They have tried to evolve a new type of criticism which is known as auto-genetic criticism. It seeks a synthesis between a psychological criticism and the sociological criticism. By the late thirty's psychoanalytic, sociological or Marxist criticism lost much of their significance and these values. These new critics were in their hay days in the forty's. These new critics derived much from Coleridge, Ezra pound, I.A Richards and T.S Eliot. Eliot became their model. The chief ideal before the new critics was to free literature from what they called the pressure and contemplation of science.

The new critics asserted that content and form are inseparable. The content of a poem could be located in the specific dynamics of the form. The new critics very often laid stress on ambiguity, irony, paradox and tensions. The critics treated all literary works as if they were lyrical poems. Another trend in modern criticism is what might be called the correction of opinion. There is another kind of criticism which

is becoming popular these days. It is known as exaggerated criticism. The application scholarship for the elucidation of symbolic significant. Despite so many trends in modern criticism is to survive, it must remain the work of a solitary man. In brief we can say that modern criticism is psychoanalytic and these trends are rampant in modern criticism.

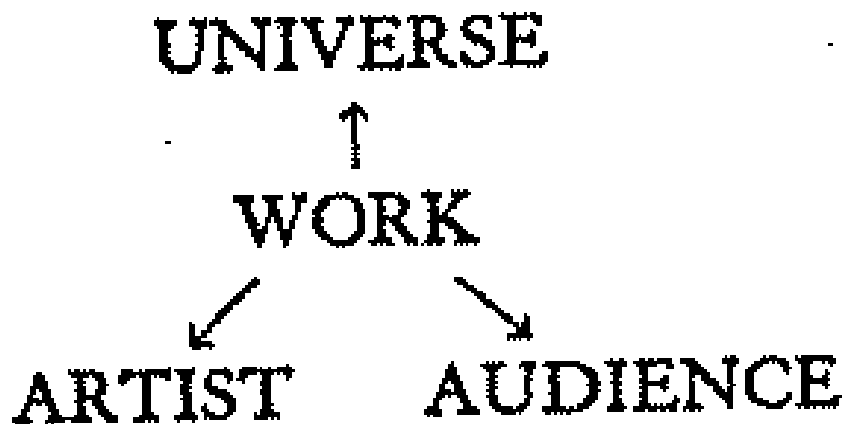
**M. H. Abrams**  
***Orientation Of Critical Theories***

Till today, the chief tendency of modern criticism is to consider the aesthetic quality in terms of relation of art to the artist. Meyer (Mike) Howard Abrams (born July 23, 1912) is an American literary critic, known for works on Romanticism, in particular his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Abrams in his essay "Orientation of critical Theories ", a chapter of his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*, demonstrates the growth of criticism in relation of art , artist, audience. From Plato until the late 18th century the artist was thought to play a back-seat role in the creation of art. He was regarded as no more than "a mirror," reflecting nature either as it exists or as it is perfected or enhanced through the mirror. This artist-as-mirror conception remained dominant until the advent of the Romantic era (Abrams sets the date around 1800), when the artist began to make his transformation from "mirror" to "lamp"— a lamp that actively participates in the object it illuminates.

Considering a whole work of art, there are four elements which are well distinguished and made important in almost all the theories. First, there is the work, the artistic product

itself. Since this is a human product, the next common element is the artist. The work is directly or indirectly related to the universe inclusive of man, material things, events and ideas. The audiences come as the final element.

On this frame work of artist, work, universe and audience, M.H. Abrams has spread out various theories for comparison. To make matters easier he has arranged the four elements in a convenient triangular pattern with the work of art, the thing to be explained in the center.



According to this frame work, M. H. Abrams gives four critical theories i.e. Mimetic, Pragmatic, Expressive, and Objective theories.

**1) Mimetic Theory** - which focus on the relationship between text and universe (by "universe" he means all things of the world apart from audience, text and author)

**2) Pragmatic theory-** which are interested in the relationship between text and audience.

**3) Expressive theory-** which are concerned with the text-author relationship.

**4) Objective theory** - the most recent classification, which focus on analysis of the text in isolation.

As Abrams stated above that nothing exists other than universe, text, author and audience, any form of theory must fit into one of these four categories. Let's see these four critical into details.

#### **1) Mimetic theory:**

The first category of mimetic theories forms the oldest and is, according to Abrams, the "most primitive" of the four categories. Aristotle shows that it is the "manner of imitation" and not the relation to truth which is important in art, and that aesthetic evaluation should be based on the assessment of both the "manner of imitation" and the emotional effect produced in the audience.

According to this theory, the artist is an imitator of aspects of the observable universe. This theory focuses on the relationship between text and universe (by "universe" he means all things of the world apart from audience, text and author).

## **2) Pragmatic theory:**

The second type of theories are pragmatic theories, which are concerned with the relation between text and audience. According to Abrams, these theories have constituted the dominant mode of analysis from Horace to the early 19th century, and much of its terminology is borrowed from ancient rhetoric.

Aristotle argued in his *Ars Poetica* that the three functions of poetry are to teach, to please, and to move. It was Sir Philip Sydney who in his *Apologie for Poetry* expanded Aristotle's theories into a specifically didactic theory of poetry. Sydney argues that poets differ from historians in that, unlike historians who deal only with what has been, poets also deal with what may be, and that such moral utopianism is what makes poetry, specifically epic poetry, and superior to history.

### 3) **Expressive theory:**

By 1800, we begin to see “the displacement of mimetic and pragmatic by the expressive view of art,” a phenomenon due in part to the writings of Longinus, Bacon, Wordsworth, and, later, the radical Romantics of the 1830s. With this new “expressive view” of art, the primary duty of the artist was no longer to serve as a mirror reflecting outer things, but instead to externalize the internal, and make one's “inner life” the primary subject of art. It is around this time in the early 19th century that the “mirror,” which had hitherto been the conventional symbol for the artist, becomes the “lamp.

To give an overview of the evolution of Western aesthetics up to this point, Abrams provides the following rough timeline. In the age of Plato and Aristotle, poets were mimetic poets, and their personal roles and intrusions were kept to a minimum. In the Hellenistic and Roman eras, poets were pragmatic, and they sought to satisfy the public, abide by the rules of decorum, and apply techniques borrowed from rhetoric. From 1800 to 1900, poets, specifically those of England and Germany, were self-affirming figures whose task was to express to the world their inner genius.

It is concerned with the text-author relationship. With this new “expressive view” of art, the primary duty of the artist was no longer to serve as a mirror reflecting outer things, but instead to externalize the internal, and make one's “inner life” the primary subject of art. It is around this time in the early 19th century that the “mirror,” which had hitherto been the conventional symbol for the artist, becomes the “lamp.

#### 4) **Objective theory:**

The most recent classification, which focus on analysis of the text in isolation. Though extremely rare in pre-20th-century history, this fourth alternative has been the dominant mode for criticism for at least half of the 20th century. Proponents of this theory trace its origins to the central section of Aristotle's Poetics, where tragedy is regarded as an object in itself, and where the work's internal elements (plot, character, thought, diction, melody and spectacle, in order of importance) are described as working together in perfect unison to produce in the audience a “catharsis” of pity and fear.

The important point, the objective theorists point out, is that these qualities are treated by Aristotle as inherent in the



work itself, and that the work is praised to the extent that these internal elements work together cohesively. Still, some might counter that Aristotle's Poetics, with its careful attention paid to the effect produced upon the audience, in fact more closely fits the criteria of the pragmatic theories than of the objective theories. Aristotle's influence disappeared for centuries until the Renaissance, when we see the re-emergence of his ideas in new forms. Yet it is not until the 1780s in Germany that we see a significant objective theory brought forth. During this period from 1780-1820, and in large part as a consequence of Kant's writings, an "art-for-art's-sake" movement begins to emerge. Under this new theory, the poem came to be considered a "heterocosm" which functions independently and according to its own set of rules.

### **→ Orientation of critical Theories**

Any adequate theory takes some account of all the four elements but tends to derive from one of these his principal categories for defining, classifying and analyzing a work of art. Application of this analytical scheme will sort attempts to explain the nature and worth of a work of art into four broad classes. Three will explain the work of art principally by

relating it to another thing : the universe, the audience, or the artist. The fourth will explain the work by considering it in isolation, as an autonomous whole, whose significance and value are determined without any reference beyond itself.

These four co-ordinates are not constants but variables. They differ in their importance according to the theory in which they occur. Each of the other terms also varies both in meaning and functioning according to the critical theory in which it occurs.

The explanation of art as essentially an imitation of the aspects of the universe was probably the most primitive aesthetic theory. Yet, since its appearance in the dialogues of plato, mimesis was no more a simple concept. 'Imitation' is a relational term, signifying two items and some correspondence between them. But the philosopher in the Platonic dialogues characteristically operates with three categories. The first category is that of the eternal and unchanging Ideas; the second, reflecting this is world of senses, natural or artificial; and the third category, in turn reflecting the second, comprises such things as shadows, images in water and mirrors, and the fine arts.

Aristotle also in defines poetry the Poetics as imitation. His interpretation of imitation is also his own. It is by no means an illusory copy of life or twice removed from reality as Plato believed. On the contrary, they reveal truths of a permanent or universal kind. To prove this Aristotle institutes a comparison between poetry and history. 'It is not the function of the poet', he says, "to relate what has happened, but what may happen, -- what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose.... The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen, Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history the particular. By the universe I mean how a person of certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity. History records particular persons, places or things: poetry infuses a universal appeal into them by stressing what they have in common with all persons, all places, or all things in the same set of circumstances. The pictures of poetry therefore are not mere reproductions of facts but truths embedded in those facts that apply to all places and times. This is the meaning Aristotle gives to imitation.

“Imitation” continued to be a prominent item in the critical vocabulary for a long time after Aristotle – in fact, all the way through the eighteenth century. Particularly after the recovery of the Poetics and the great burst of aesthetic theory in sixteenth-century Italy, whenever a critic was to frame a comprehensive definition of art, he usually included the word “imitation”, or one of those parallel terms which all faced in the same direction: reflection, “representation”, “counterfeiting”, “feigning”, “copy” or “image”.

Through most of the eighteenth century, the tenet that art is an imitation seemed almost too obvious to need any proof. As Richard Hurd said in his “Discourse on Poetic imitation”, published in 1751, “All Poetry, to speak with Aristotle and the Greek critics is properly imitation”.

The concept that art is an imitation, then, placed an important part in neo-classic aesthetics; but closer inspection shows that it did not, in most theories play the dominant part. It was commonly said that art was an imitation – but an imitation which is only instrumental towards producing effects upon an audience. The focus of interest had shifted and this later criticism is primarily oriented, not from work to universe, but from work to audience. The nature and

consequences of this change of direction is clearly indicated in Sir Philip Sidney's *The Apologie for Poetry*.

To Sidney Poetry, by definition has a purpose – to achieve certain effects in an audience. It imitates “to teach and delight”. Those who practice it are called makers and prophets, “for these indeed do merely make to imitate and imitate both to delight and teach and delight to move men to take that Goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach to make them know that Goodness where unto they are moved, which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed, yet want there not idle tongues to bark at them”. As a result, throughout this essay the needs of the audience become the fertile grounds for critical distinctions and standards. The poet is distinguished from, and elevated above the moral philosopher and the historian by his capacity to move his audience more forcefully to virtue since he couples “the general notion” of the philosopher with “the particular example” of the historian.

For convenience we may name criticism that, like Sidney's is ordered towards the audience, a “pragmatic theory” since it looks at the work of art chiefly as an

instrument for getting something done. The central tendency of the pragmatic critic is to conceive a poem as something made in order to effect requisite responses in its readers; to consider the author from the point of view of the powers he must have in order to achieve this end.

The pragmatic orientation was characterized by far the greatest part of criticism from the time of Horace through the eighteenth century. In the course of time and particularly after the psychological contributions of Hobbes and Locke in the seventeenth century, increasing attention was given to the mental constitution of the poet, the quality and degree of his “genius”. Gradually, the stress was shifted more and more to the poet’s natural genius, creative imagination, and emotional spontaneity. As a result the audience gradually receded into the background, giving place to the poet himself, and his own mental powers and emotional needs and this led to the introduction of a new orientation into the theory of art.

“Poetry”. Wordsworth announced in his preface to the Lyrical Ballads of 1800, “is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. On this, the ground idea, he found his theory of the proper subjects, language, effects, and value of

poetry. Almost all the major critics of the English romantic generation phrased definitions or key statements showing a parallel alignment from work to poet. M.H. Abrams calls this way of thinking, “in which the artist himself becomes the major element generating both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged”, as the expressive theory of art.

In general terms, the central tendency of the expressive theory may be summarized in this way: a work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind. The paramount cause of poetry, is not, as in neoclassic criticism a final cause, the effect intended upon the audience; but instead an efficient cause – the impulse within the poet of feelings and desires seeking expression of the elements constituting a poem, the element of diction, especially figures of speech, becomes primary, and the burning question is,

whether these are the natural utterance of emotion and imagination. The first test any poem must pass is no longer, “Is it true to nature?” or “Is it appropriate to the requirements either of the best judges or the generality of mankind?” but a criterion looking in a different direction, namely, ‘Is it sincere? Is it genuine?’ Does it match the intention, the feeling, and the actual state of mind of the poet which composing? The work ceases then to be regarded as primarily a reflection of nature, actual or improved; the mirror held up to nature becomes transparent and yields the reader insights into the mind and heart of the poet himself.

There is also a fourth procedure the objective orientation, which on principle regards the work of art in isolation from all these external points of reference. The objective orientation was just beginning to emerge in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The aim to consider a poem as Poe expressed it, as a “Poem per se .... written solely for the poem’s sake” in isolation from external causes came to constitute one element of the diverse doctrines usually huddled together by historians under the heading “Art for Art’s Sake”. T.S. Eliot’s dictum of 1928, that when we are considering poetry we must consider it primarily as poetry and not another thing is widely approved, however Eliot’s



own criticism sometimes departs from this ideal; and it is often joined with Macheish's verse aphorism, "A poem should not mean but be". In sum, Abrams has analyzed the growth of criticism thematically, chronologically, historically and critically. This wins a special place for him in the genre of criticism.

## ***Introduction to Literary Criticism***

For centuries literary criticism was considered as an art of writing poetry; it was an advice to the poet rather than the reader. Literary criticism has been applied since the seventeenth century to the description, justification, analysis, or judgments of works arts. Criticism in modern times is classified in different ways. M.H. Abrams in **The Mirror and the Lamp** talks about four different critical theories: When the critic views art in terms of the universe or what is imitated, he is using the **mimetic theory**. When the emphasis is shifted to the reader, and the critic views art in terms of its effect on the audience, he is using a **pragmatic theory** that was dominant up to the end of the eighteenth century. But in the nineteenth century the emphasis shifted to the poet, and poetry became „a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling“ of the poet. In this case a work of art is essentially the internal made external. Therefore, when a critic views art in terms of the artist, he is using the **expressive theory**. In the 20th century, the emphasis shifted to the work of art, especially under the influence of the **New Criticism**. When the critic views art basically in its own terms, seeing the work as a self-contained entity, he is using the **objective theory**. Some critics have talked about

theoretical and practical or applied criticism. **Theoretical criticism** attempts to arrive at the general principles of art. **Practical criticism** applies these principles to the works of art. Literary critics have also talked about other types of criticism: **Historical criticism** examines a work of art against its historical background and the author's life and time. **Impressionistic criticism** emphasizes the way that a work of art affects the critic. **Textual criticism** applies scholarly means to a work of art to reconstruct its original version. **Analytical criticism** tries to get at the nature of a work of art as an object through the detailed analysis of its parts and their organization. **Judicial criticism** judges a work of art by a definable set of standards. **Moral criticism** evaluates a work of art in relation to human life. **Mythic criticism** explores the nature and significance of the archetypes and archetypal patterns in a work of art.

### → **History of Literary Criticism**

Literary criticism begins with the Greeks, but little of their work has survived. Aristotle's **Poetics** is mostly devoted to drama; and Plato's theories of literature are scarcely literary criticism. From the Romans the major works are Horace's **Ars Poetica** and the works on rhetoric composed by Cicero and Quintilian. The first important critical essay in the

Christian era is Louginus's **On His Sublime**, and the first medieval critic of note was Dante who, in his **De Vulgari Eloquentic**, addressed himself to the problems of language appropriate to poetry. The Renaissance writers and critics for the most part followed the Classical rules on the principle that the ancients were bound to have been right; but there were some attempts at originality. For example, Vida's **Poetica** (1527), a treatise on the art of poetry; du Bellay's **Deffense et Zllustration** (1549); and Lope de Vega's **New Art of Making Comedies** (1609). In England there is little criticism of note until Puttenham's **The Art of English Poeise** (1589) and Sidney's **Apologie for poetrie** (1595), which is important because it is a detailed examination of the art of poetry and a discussion of the state of English poetry at the time.

For nearly a hundred years the major critical works to appear tended to reinforce the classical tradition and rules. Some of the main works were Ben Jonson's **Timber; or Discoveries** (1640), Pierre Corneille's **Discours** (1660) and Boileau's **L'Art Poetique** (1673). With Dryden, however, in his **Essay of Dramatic Poesy** (1668) – not to mention his prefaces, dedications and open-mindedness whose critical essays are works of art in themselves. He, if anybody,

showed the way to the people function of criticism. In the 18th c. G.B.Vico, the Italian critic and philosopher, was the pioneer of the historical approach to literature. Historicism, as it is called, completely changed, in the long run, critical methods. It enabled people to realize that the rules that held good for the Classical writers do not necessarily hold good in a later age, and that there were not absolute principles and rules by which literature could be judged (which was Dr. Johnson's point of view). There was thus a reaction against Neoclassicism, an increasing interest in literatures other than those of Greece and Rome, and a greater variety of opinions about literature, about the language to be used, and about the creative and imaginative faculties and processes of the writer. The new views found expression in Wordsworth's Preface to the Second Edition of the **Lyrical Ballads** (1800), Coleridge's **Biographia Literaria** (1817), Shelley's **Defense of Poetry** (1820) – a reply to Peacock's ironical debunking in **The Four Ages of Poetry** (1820) and **The Philosophy of Composition** (1846), and Matthew Arnold's **Essay in Criticism** (1865, 1888). The writings of Walter Pater on culture and art, especially **The Renaissance** (1873) and **Appreciations** (1889) had profound influence on critical thinking. By the second half of the 19th c. many different

critical theories had begun to proliferate, as is clear from a study of the philosophy of aestheticism, the doctrine of art for art's sake and the work of the Symbolist poets. There were fewer rules of any kind as more and more writers experimented. At the same time the work of the best critics continued in the tradition and method of Vico. Sainte-Beuve, with his immense range of learning and his keen sense of critical and judicious detachment, was the supreme exponent of historicism. Recent criticism has tended to be more and more closely analytical in the evaluation and interpretation of literature, as is evident in the achievements of major critics like M.H. Abrams, Eric Auerbach, I.A. Richards etc.

### → **What is Literary Criticism**

Sometimes the word **criticism** puts people off, because in everyday use it has negative connotations. We usually think of a "critic" as the kind of grumpy person who seems to exist solely to find problems and stress faults. The word means more than that, however. It comes from the Greek verb **kritikos**, which means to judge or to decide. In its original sense, a critic is simply a person who expresses an informed judgment or opinion about the meaning, value, truth, beauty, or artistry of something.

Let's go more specific. **Literary criticism** is the discipline of **interpreting, analyzing** and **evaluating** works of literature. **Literature** is most commonly defined as works of writing that have lasted over the years because they deal with ideas of timeless and universal interest with exceptional artistry and power. This can include poems, stories, novels, plays, essays, memoirs, and so on. Each of the three main activities of literary criticism – interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating – gives rise to different questions. **The Interpretive Question:** What does this work of literature mean? When we **interpret** a work, we set forth one or more of its possible meanings. Reading is like a potluck picnic to which the writer brings the words and the readers bring the meanings. Literary works speak to us all in different ways, and one of the pleasures of talking about books is the chance to check out all the different ideas other readers bring to the picnic. **The Analytic Question:** How does this piece of literature work? When we **analyze** a text, we get under the hood to see how the engine operates. Analysis is technical: pulling things apart, examining relationships, figuring out effects. We are not asking **what** a poem means anymore but **how** the author makes it click. **The Evaluative Question:** Is this work of literature any good? When

**evaluate** a work, we form a personal judgment about its work: Is this a great novel or a rotten one? Why? Does this poem have any value? Why? What does this work of literature add – or subtract – from the world?

### → **Does Literary Criticism have any practical use?**

The discipline of literary criticism is valuable for a number of reasons, including the following: First, literary criticism improves your general reading skills, giving you more tools to help solve problems of understanding as you read. Second, literary criticism can help you in college by expanding your awareness of different approaches, thus giving you more ways to respond to what you read. Third, literary criticism supports the development of critical thinking skills. It encourages you to identify your own reading habits and to explore beyond their boundaries. It can also give you a sense of confidence and responsibility about developing your own critical standards and judgments and not having to surrender your opinion to other's interpretations. It sharpens your general interpretive, analytic, and evaluative skills. And it improves your ability to make a good argument by encouraging the habit of backing up your opinions with reasons and textual evidence. For all these reasons, literary



criticism can help you develop your skills as an independent thinker and reader.

### → **What's a Literary Theory?**

In literary criticism, a theory is the specific method, approach, or viewpoint a critic or reader has staked out from which he or she interprets, analyzes, and evaluates works of literature – and often the world.

There are numerous literary theories. Some you may find useful, some not so useful. That's for you to judge. But you should learn how each theory or approach works before you make your final judgment.

Here are the essential questions when looking at literary theories: What are some of the many different ways a reader can approach a book? How does each work? What are the benefits and limitations of each literary lens? Which critical theories make sense and seem useful to you? Which don't? Why?

### → **Types of literary Criticism**

**a. Theoretical criticism** proposes an explicit **theory** of literature, in sense of general principles, together with a set of terms, distinctions, and categories, to be applied to

identifying and analyzing works of literature, as well as the **criteria** (The standards, or norms) by which these works and their writers are to be evaluated. The earliest, and enduringly important, treatise of theoretical criticism was Aristotle's **Poetics** (fourth century B.C.).

**b. Practical criticism** or **applied criticism**, concerns itself with the discussion of particular works and writers; in an applied critique, the theoretical principles controlling the mode of the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation are often left implicit, or brought in only as the occasion demands. Among the more influential works of applied criticism in England and America are the literary essays of Dryden in the **Restoration**; Dr. Johnson's **Lives of the English Poets** (1779-81); Coleridge's chapters on the poetry of Wordsworth in **Biographia Literaria** (1817) and his lectures on Shakespeare; William Hazlitt's lectures on Shakespeare and the English poets and so on.

**c. Impressionistic criticism** attempts to represent in words the felt qualities of a particular passage or work, and to express the responses (the "impression") that the work directly evokes from the critic. As William Hazlitt put it in his essay "On Genius and Common Sense" (1824): "you decide from feeling, and not from reason; that is, from the

impression of a number of things on the mind ... though you may not be able to analyze or account for it in the several particulars.” And Walter Pater later said that in criticism “the first step toward seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly,” and posed as the basic question, “What is thing song or picture ... to /me? (Preface to **Studies in the History of the Renaissance**, 1873). As its extreme this mode of criticism becomes, in Anatole Franc’s phrase, “the adventures of a sensitive soul among masterpieces.”)

**d. Judicial criticism**, on the other hand, attempts not merely to communicate, but to analyze and explain the effects of a work by reference to its subject, organization, techniques, and style, and to base the critic’s individual judgments on specified criteria of literary excellence.

### → **Types of Traditional Critical Theories and Applied Criticism**

**a. Mimetic criticism** views the literary work as an imitation, or reflection, or representation of the world and human life, and the primary criterion applied to a work is the “truth” and “adequacy” of its representation to the matter that it represents, or should represent. This mode of criticism,

which first appeared in Plato and (in a qualified way) in Aristotle, remains characteristic of modern theories of literary realism.

b. **Pragmatic criticism** views the work as something which is constructed in order to achieve certain effects on the audience (effects such as aesthetic pleasure, instruction, or kinds of emotion), and it tends to judge the value of the work according to its successes in achieving that aim. This approach, which largely dominated literary discussion from the versified **Art of Poetry** by the Roman Horace (first century B.C.) through the eighteenth century, has been revived in recent **rhetorical criticism**, which emphasizes the artistic strategies by which an author engages and influences the responses of readers to the matters represented in a literary work. The pragmatic approach has also been adopted by some **structuralists** who analyze a literary text as a systematic play of codes that effect the interpretative responses of a reader.

c. **Expressive criticism** treats a literary work primarily in relation to its author. It defines as an expression, or overflow, or utterance of feelings, or as the product of the poet's imagination operating on his or her perceptions,

thoughts, and feelings; it tends to judge the work by its sincerity, or its adequacy to the poet's individual vision or state of mind; and it often seeks in the work evidences of the particular temperament and experiences of the author who, consciously or unconsciously has revealed himself or herself in it. such views were developed mainly by romantic critics in the early nineteenth century and remain current in our own time, especially in the writings of **Psychological and Psychoanalytic critics** and in **critics of consciousness** such as Poulet and the Geneva School.

d. **Objective criticism** deals with a work of literature as something which stands free from what is often called an "extrinsic" relationship to the poet, or to the audience, or to the environing world. Instead it describes the literary product as a self-sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be contemplated as its own end, and to be analyzed and judged solely by "intrinsic" criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelations of its component elements. The conception of the self-sufficiency of an aesthetic object was proposed in Kant's **Critique of Aesthetic Judgment** (1790) was taken up by proponents of **art for art's sake** in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and has been

elaborated in detailed modes of applied criticism by a number of important critics since the 1920s, including the **New Critics**, the **Chicago School**, and proponents of European **formalism**.

## → Six Approaches to Literature

### 1. Historical / Biographical Approach

Historical / Biographical critics see works as the reflection of an author's life and times (or of the characters „life and times). H/B approach deems it necessary to know about the author and the political, economic, and sociological context of his times in order to truly understand the work (s).

**Advantages:** This approach works well for some works - - like those of Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and Milton - - which are obviously political in nature. It also is necessary to take a historical approach in order to place allusions in their proper classical, political, or biblical background.

**Disadvantages:** New Critics refer to the historical/biographical critic's belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by the author's intention as "the intentional fallacy." Thus, art is reduced to the level of biography rather than universal.

## 2. Moral /Philosophical Approach

Moral / Philosophical critics believe that the larger purpose of literature is to teach morality and to probe philosophical issues. Practitioners include Matthew Arnold (works must have “high seriousness”), Plato (literature must exhibit moralism and utilitarianism), and Horace (literature should be “delightful and instructive”).

**Advantages:** This approach is useful for such works as Alexander Pope’s “An Essay on Man,” which presents an obvious moral philosophy. It is also useful when considering the themes of works (for example, man’s inhumanity to man in Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn). Finally, it does not view literature merely as “art” isolated from all moral implications; it recognizes that literature can affect readers, whether subtly or directly, and that the message of a work - - and not just the decorous vehicle for that message - - is important.

**Disadvantages:** Detractors argue that such an approach can be to “judgmental.” Some believe literature should be judged primarily (if not solely) on its artistic merits, not its moral or philosophical content.

### 3. Formalism / New criticism

A formalistic approach to literature, once called **New Criticism** involves a **close reading of the text**. Formalistic critics believe that all information essential to the interpretation of a work must be found within the work itself; there is no need to bring in outside information about the history, politics, or society of the time, or about the author's life. Formalistic critics spend much time analyzing irony, paradox, imagery, and metaphor. They are also interested in the work's setting, characters, symbols, and point of view.

#### **Terms used in New Criticism:**

- **Tension** – the integral unity of the poem which results from the resolution of opposites, often in irony or paradox
- **Intentional Fallacy** – the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by the author's intention
- **Affective fallacy** – the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by its effect on the reader
- **External form** – rhyme scheme, meter, stanza form, etc.
- **Objective correlative** – originated by T.S. Eliot, this term refers to a collection of objects, situations, or events that instantly evoke a particular emotion.



**Advantages:** this approach can be performed without much research, and it emphasizes the value of literature apart from its context (in effect makes literature timeless). **Virtually all critical approaches must begin here.**

**Disadvantages:** The text is seen in isolation. Formalism ignores the context of the work. It cannot account for allusions. It tends to reduce literature to little more than a collection of rhetorical devices.

#### **4. Psychological Approach**

Psychological critics view works through the lens of psychology. They look either at the psychological motivations of the characters or of the authors themselves, although the former is generally considered a more respectable approach: most frequently, Freudian and/or Jungian (archetypes) psychology to works.

##### ○ **Freudian Approach**

- **Id** (reservoir of libbil or pleasure principle in the unconscious )
- **Superego** (the moral censoring agency and repository of conscience/pride that protects society)
- **Ego** (the rational governing agent of the unconscious that protects the individual)

Freudian critics steer toward the sexual implications of symbols and imagery, since Freud theorized that all human behavior (drives) derives from libido/sexual energy.

- **Concave Images**, such as fonts, flowers, cups, and caves = female symbols.
- **Convex Images**, such as skyscrapers, submarines, obelisks, etc. = male symbols.
- **Actions**, such as dancing, riding, and flying = sexual pleasure.
- **Water** = birth, the female principle, the maternal, the womb, and the death wish.
- **Oedipus complex** = a boy's unconscious rivalry with his father for the love of his mother.
- **The Electra complex** = a girl's unconscious rivalry with her mother for the love of her father.
- Critics may also refer to Freud's psychology of child development, which includes the **oral stage (eating)**, the **anal stage (elimination)**.

**Advantages:** A useful tool for understanding some works, in which characters manifest clear psychological issues. Like the biographical approach, knowing something about a

writer's psychological make-up can give us insight into his work.

**Disadvantages:** Psychological criticism can turn a work into little more than a psychological case study, neglecting to view it as a piece of art. Critics sometimes attempt to diagnose long dead authors based on their works, which is perhaps not the best evidence of their psychology. Critics tend to see sex in everything, exaggerating this aspect of literature. Finally, some works do not lend themselves readily to this approach.

### **(b) Jungian Approach**

Jung is also an influential force in myth (archetypal) criticism. Psychological critics are generally concerned with his concept of the process of **individuation** (the process of discovering what makes one different from everyone else). Jung labeled three parts of the self:

- **Shadow** - - the darker, unconscious self; rarely surfaces, yet must be faced for totality of self
- **Persona** - - the public personality/mask (particularly masculine)
- **Anima/Animus** - - a man's / woman's "soul image" (the negative that makes a composite whole)

- A **neurosis** occurs when someone fails to assimilate one of these unconscious components into his conscious and **projects** it on someone else. The persona must be flexible and be able to balance the components of the psych

## 5. Mythological/Archetypal

A mythological/archetypal approach to literature assumes that there is a collection of symbols, images, characters, and motifs (i.e., **archetypes**) that evokes a similar response in all people. According to the psychologist Carl Jung, mankind possesses a “**collective unconscious**” (a cosmic reservoir of human experience) that contains these archetypes and that is common to all of humanity. Myth critics identify these archetypal patterns and discuss how they function in the works. They believe that these archetypes are the source of much of literature’s power.

**Advantages:** Provides a universalistic approach to literature and identifies a reason why certain literature may survive the test of time. It works well with works that are highly symbolic.

**Disadvantages:** literature may become little more than a vehicle for archetypes, and this approach may ignore the “art” of literature.

## 6. Feminist Approach

Feminist criticism is concerned with the impact of gender on writing and reading. It usually begins with a critique of patriarchal culture. It is concerned with the place of female writers in the canon. Finally, it includes a search for a feminine theory or approach to texts. Feminist criticism is political and often revisionist. Feminists often argue that male fears are portrayed through female characters. They may argue that gender determines every-thing, or just the opposite: that all gender differences are imposed by society, and gender determines nothing. **Elaine Showalter's Theory** In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter argued that literary subcultures all go through major phases of development. For literature by or about women, she labels these stages the Feminine, Feminist, and Female:

- **Feminine** Stage - - involves "imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition" and "internalization of its standards."
- **Feminist** Stage - - involves "protest against these standards and values and advocacy of minority rights ...."

- **Female Stage** - - this is the “phase of self-discovery, a turning inwards freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.”

**Advantages:** Women have been underrepresented in the traditional cannon, and a feminist approach to literature attempts to redress this problem.

**Disadvantages:** Feminists turn literary criticism into a political battlefield and overlook the merits of works they consider “patriarchal.” When arguing for a distinct feminine writing style, they tend to neglect women’s literature to a ghetto status; this in turn prevents female literature from being naturally included in the literary cannon. The feminist approach is often too theoretical.

## **9. Conclusion**

Literary criticism does not require that we all agree about what a work of literature means, how it works, or whether it’s effective. We don’t even have to agree with any expert’s judgment. We have only two obligations when we assert our opinions. First, we are obligated to explain as clearly as possible the reasons behind our ideas and back them up with evidence from the actual text we’re discussing. Second, we are obligated to listen respectfully to critics’ ideas in the

hope that we can learn from learning how others respond to works of literature.

## → **Schools of Literary Criticism**

To put meat on these bones, here are brief descriptions of some of the most prominent schools of literary criticism. (Bear in mind that this is hardly a comprehensive list!) When you research the available scholarly writings on a given work of literature, you may come across essays and articles that use one or more of these approaches. We've grouped them into four categories—author-focused, text-focused, reader-focused, and context-focused—each with its own central approach and central question about literary works and effective ways to understand them.

### **Author-Focused: How can we understand literary works by understanding their authors?**

**Biographical** criticism focuses on the author's life. It tries to gain a better understanding of the literary work by understanding the person who wrote it. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- What aspects of the author's life are relevant to understanding the work?

- How are the author's personal beliefs encoded into the work?
- Does the work reflect the writer's personal experiences and concerns? How or how not?

**Psychological** criticism applies psychological theories, especially Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian archetypal depth psychology, to works of literature to explore the psychological issues embedded in them. It may analyze a story's characters or plot, a poet's use of language and imagery, the author's motivations for writing, or any other aspect of a literary work from a psychological perspective. It can be classified as an author-focused approach because its emphasis is on reading the work as an expression of the author's unconscious processes, such that one can analyze and interpret the work in the same way a psychoanalyst would do with a patient's dream. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- What psychological forces and factors are involved in the words, behaviors, thoughts, and motivations of the characters in a story?
- Do dreams or psychological disorders play a part in the work?



- How did the author's life experiences affect his or her intellectual and emotional formation? How is this psychological impact evident in the text and/or the author's act of writing it?
- What unintended meanings might the author have embedded or encoded in the work?

**Text-Focused: How can we understand literary works in terms of themselves?**

**Formalism**, along with one of its more conspicuous modern iterations, **New Criticism**, focuses on a literary text itself, aside from questions about its author or the historical and cultural contexts of its creation. Formalism takes a story, poem, or play "on its own terms," so to speak, viewing it as a self-contained unit of meaning. The formalist critic therefore tries to understand that meaning by paying attention to the specific form of the text. New Criticism was a particular kind of Formalism that arose in the mid-twentieth century and enjoyed great influence for a time. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- How does the structure of the work reveal its meaning?

- How do the form and content of the work illuminate each other? What recurring patterns are there in the form, and what is their effect?
- How does use of imagery, language, and various literary devices establish the work's meaning?
- How do the characters (if any) evolve over the course of the narrative, and how does this interact with the other literary elements?

**Reader-Focused: How can we understand literary works by understanding the subjective experience of reading them?**

**Reader-response** criticism emphasizes the reader as much as the text. It seeks to understand how a given reader comes together with a given literary work to produce a unique reading. This school of criticism rests on the assumption that literary works don't contain or embody a stable, fixed meaning but can have many meanings—in fact, as many meanings as there are readers, since each reader will engage with the text differently. In the words of literature scholar Lois Tyson, “reader-response theorists share two beliefs: (1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and (2) that readers do not

passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature.” Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- Who is the reader? Also, who is the implied reader (the one “posited” by the text)?
- What kinds of memories, knowledge, and thoughts does the text evoke from the reader?
- How exactly does the interaction between the reader and the text create meaning on both the text side and the reader side? How does this meaning change from person to person, or if the same person rereads it?

**Context-Focused: How can we understand literary works by understanding the contextual circumstances—historical, societal, cultural, political, economic—out of which they emerged?**

**Historical** criticism focuses on the historical and social circumstances that surrounded the writing of a text. It may examine biographical facts about the author’s life (which can therefore connect this approach with biographical criticism) as well as the influence of social, political, national, and international events. It may also consider the influence of

other literary works. New Historicism, a particular type of historical criticism, focuses not so much on the role of historical facts and events as on the ways these things are remembered and interpreted, and the way this interpreted historical memory contributes to the interpretation of literature. Typical questions involved in historical criticism include the following:

- How (and how accurately) does the work reflect the historical period in which it was written?
- What specific historical events influenced the author?
- How important is the work's historical context to understanding it?
- How does the work represent an interpretation of its time and culture? (New Historicism)

**Feminist** criticism focuses on prevailing societal beliefs about women in an attempt to expose the oppression of women on various levels by patriarchal systems both contemporary and historical. It also explores the marginalization of women in the realm of literature itself. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- How does the work portray the lives of women?

- How are female characters portrayed? How are the relationships between men and women portrayed? Does this reinforce sexual and gender stereotypes or challenge them?
- How does the specific language of a literary work reflect gender or sexual stereotypes?

**Post-colonial** criticism focuses on the impact of European colonial powers on literature. It seeks to understand how European hegemonic political, economic, religious, and other types of power have shaped the portrayals of the relationship and status differentials between Europeans and colonized peoples in literature written both by the colonizers and the colonized. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- How does the text's worldview, as evinced in plot, language, characterization, and so on, grow out of assumptions based on colonial oppression?
- Which groups of people are portrayed as strangers, outsiders, foreign, exotic, "others"? How are they treated in the narrative?
- How does the work portray the psychology and interiority of both colonizers and colonized?

- How does the text affirm (either actively or by silence) or challenge colonialist ideology?

**Critical race theory** focuses on systemic racism and interrogates the dynamics of race and race relationships. In origin, it is a specifically American school of critical theory that sees White racism as an everyday fact of life in America, visible throughout all aspects of culture and society. As such, it encompasses all aspects of life, including literature. Its purpose is to expose and overturn the factors that enable systemic racism to exist. As a literary critical approach, its typical questions include the following:

- What is the significance of race, either explicit or implicit, in the literary work being examined?
- Does the work include or exclude the voices and experiences of racism's victims?
- How does the work either affirm/reinforce (whether actively or by silence) or challenge/subvert systemic racism?

## ***An Introduction to Post-Colonialism, Post-colonial Theory and Post-colonial Literature***

### **Where does it come from?**

Post-colonial literature comes from Britain's former colonies in the Caribbean, Africa and India. Many post-colonial writers write in English and focus on common themes such as the struggle for independence, emigration, national identity, allegiance and childhood.

### **What is Post-colonial theory?**

Postcolonial theory is a literary theory or critical approach that deals with literature produced in countries that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries. It may also deal with literature written in or by citizens of colonizing countries that takes colonies or their peoples as its subject matter. The theory is based around concepts of otherness and resistance.

Postcolonial theory became part of the critical toolbox in the 1970s, and many practitioners credit Edward Said's book *Orientalism* as being the founding work.

Typically, the proponents of the theory examine the ways in which writers from colonized countries attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from the colonizers. They also examine ways in which the literature of the colonial powers is used to justify colonialism through the perpetuation of images of the colonized as inferior. However, attempts at coming up with a single definition of postcolonial theory have proved controversial, and some writers have strongly critiqued the whole concept.

### **Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory:**

Post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonized countries, or literature written in colonizing countries which deals with colonization or colonized peoples. It focuses particularly on the way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority, of the colonized people on literature by colonized peoples which attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. It can also deal with the way in which literature in colonizing countries appropriates the language, images, scenes, traditions and so forth of colonized countries.



## The literature(s) of the colonized:

- Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of **otherness**. There are however problems with or complexities to the concept of otherness, for instance: otherness includes doubleness, both identity and difference, so that every other, every different than and excluded by is dialectically created and includes the values and meaning of the colonizing culture even as it rejects its power to define; the western concept of the oriental is based, as Abdul Jan Mohamed argues, on the Manichean allegory (seeing the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites): if the west is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the orient is chaotic, irrational, feminine, evil. Simply to reverse this polarizing is to be complicit in its totalizing and identity-destroying power (all is reduced to a set of dichotomies, black or white, etc.); colonized peoples are highly diverse in their nature and in their traditions, and as beings in cultures they are both constructed and changing, so that while they may be 'other' from the colonizers, they are also different one from another and from their own pasts, and should not be totalized or essentialized -- through such concepts as a black consciousness, Indian soul, aboriginal culture

and so forth. This tantalization is often a form of nostalgia which has its inspiration more in the thought of the colonizers than of the colonized, and it serves give the colonizer a sense of the unity of his culture while mystifying that of others; as John Frow remarks, it is a making of a mythical One out of many... the colonized peoples will also be other than their pasts, which can be reclaimed but never reconstituted, and so must be revisited and realized in partial, fragmented ways. You can't go home again.

- Postcolonial theory is also built around the concept of resistance, of resistance as subversion, or opposition, or mimicry -- but with the haunting problem that resistance always inscribes the resisted into the texture of the resisting: it is a two-edged sword. As well, the concept of resistance carries with it or can carry with it ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality, etc., which ideas may not have been held, or held in the same way, in the colonized culture's view of humankind.
- On a simple political/cultural level, there are problems with the fact that to produce a literature which helps to reconstitute the identity of the colonized one may have to

function in at the very least the means of production of the colonizers -- the writing, publishing, advertising and production of books, for instance. These may well require a centralized economic and cultural system which is ultimately either a western import or a hybrid form, uniting local conceptions with western conceptions.

- The concept of producing a national or cultural literature is in most cases a concept foreign to the traditions of the colonized peoples, who (a) had no literature as it is conceived in the western traditions or in fact no literature or writing at all, and/or b) did not see art as having the same function as constructing and defining cultural identity, and/or c) were, like the peoples of the West Indies, transported into a wholly different geographical/political/economic/cultural world. (India, a partial exception, had a long-established tradition of letters; on the other hand it was a highly balkanized sub-continent with little if any common identity and with many divergent sub-cultures). It is always a changed, a reclaimed but hybrid identity, which is created or called forth by the colonizers' attempts to constitute and represent identity. (hybridity = mixing of cultures; ex. double consciousness – one goes to an American

University and gets educated then returns to native land only to find that he/she cannot identify with the culture anymore)

- The very concepts of nationality and identity may be difficult to conceive or convey in the cultural traditions of colonized peoples.
- There are complexities and perplexities around the difficulty of conceiving how a colonized country can reclaim or reconstitute its identity in a language that is now but was not its own language, and genres which are now but were not the genres of the colonized. One result is that the literature may be written in the style of speech of the inhabitants of a particular colonized people or area, which language use does not read like Standard English and in which literature the standard literary allusions and common metaphors and symbols may be inappropriate and/or may be replaced by allusions and tropes which are alien to British culture and usage. It can become very difficult then for others to recognize or respect the work as literature (which concept may not itself have relevance -- see next point).

- There other are times when the violation of the aesthetic norms of western literature is inevitable, as colonized writers search to encounter their culture's ancient yet transformed heritage, and as they attempt to deal with problems of social order and meaning so pressing that the normal aesthetic transformations of western high literature are not relevant, make no sense. The idea that good or high literature may be irrelevant and misplaced at a point in a culture's history, and therefore for a particular cultural usage not be good literature at all, is difficult for us who are raised in the culture which strong aesthetic ideals to accept.
- The development (development itself may be an entirely western concept) of hybrid and reclaimed cultures in colonized countries is uneven, disparate, and might defy those notions of order and common sense which may be central not only to western thinking but to literary forms and traditions produced through western thought.
- The term 'hybrid' used above refers to the concept of **hybridity**, an important concept in post-colonial theory, referring to the integration (or, mingling) of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized

cultures ("integration" may be too orderly a word to represent the variety of stratagems, desperate or cunning or good-willed, by which people adapt themselves to the necessities and the opportunities of more or less oppressive or invasive cultural impositions, live into alien cultural patterns through their own structures of understanding, thus producing something familiar but new). The assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures, can be seen as positive, enriching, and dynamic, as well as oppressive. "Hybridity" is also a useful concept for helping to break down the false sense that colonized cultures -- or colonizing cultures for that matter -- are monolithic, or have essential, unchanging features.

- The representation of these uneven and often hybrid, polyglot, multivalent cultural sites (reclaimed or discovered colonized cultures searching for identity and meaning in a complex and partially alien past) may not look very much like the representations of bourgeois culture in western art, ideologically shaped as western art is to represent its own truths (that is, guiding fictions) about itself.

- To quote Homi Bhabha on the complex issue of representation and meaning from his article in Greenblatt and Gun's *Redrawing the Boundaries*, Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the middle passage of slaver and indenture, the voyage out of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement -- now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of global media technologies -- make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture , a rather complex issue. It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences -- literature, art, music, ritual, life, death -- and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation --

migration, diaspora (cultures who have been spread forth = Egyptians move to Jersey-they are not Americans but they cannot go back to Egypt. they are no Egyptian-Americans. This links to hybridity which is usually a positive answer to differences) displacement, relocation -- makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. the natural(ized), unifying discourse of nation , peoples , or authentic folk tradition, those embedded myths of cultures particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition.

### **The literature(s) of the colonists:**

- In addition to the post-colonial literature of the colonized, there exists as well the postcolonial literature of the colonizers.
- As people of British heritage moved into new landscapes, established new founding national myths, and struggled to define their own national literature against the force and tradition of the British tradition, they themselves, although of British or European heritage, ultimately



encountered the originating traditions as Other, a tradition and a writing to define oneself against (or, which amounts to the same thing, to equal or surpass). Every colony had an emerging literature which was an imitation of but differed from the central British tradition, which articulated in local terms the myths and experience of a new culture, and which expressed that new culture as, to an extent, divergent from and even opposed to the culture of the "home", or colonizing, nation.

- The colonizers largely inhabited countries which absorbed the peoples of a number of other heritages and cultures (through immigration, migration, the forced mingling of differing local cultures, etc.), and in doing so often adapted to use the myths, symbols and definitions of various traditions. In this way as well the literature of the hitherto colonizers becomes 'post-colonial'. (It is curiously the case that British literature itself has been colonized by colonial/postcolonial writers writing in Britain out of colonial experiences and a colonial past.)
- In this regard a salient difference between colonialist literature (literature written by colonizers, in the colonized country, on the model of the "home" country and often for

the home country as an audience) and post-colonial literature, is that colonialist literature is an attempt to replicate, continue, equal, the original tradition, to write in accord with British standards; postcolonial literature is often (but not inevitably) self-consciously a literature of otherness and resistance, and is written out of the specific local experience.

### **Major Post-colonial Theorists:**

- Homi K. Bhabha "The Commitment to Theory"
- Edward W. Said Orientalism
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

### **Words To Know:**

#### *Hybridity:*

1. [...] the integration (or, mingling) of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures ("integration" may be too orderly a word to represent the variety of stratagems, desperate or cunning or good-willed, by which people adapt themselves to the necessities and the opportunities of more or less oppressive or invasive cultural impositions, live into alien cultural patterns through their own

structures of understanding, thus producing something familiar but new.

2. The mixing of cultures; ex. double consciousness – one goes to an American University and gets educated then returns to native land only to find that he/she cannot identify with the culture anymore

*Diaspora:*

1. The dispersion of Jews outside of Israel from the sixth century B.C., when they were exiled to Babylonia, until the present time.

2. often **diaspora** The body of Jews or Jewish communities outside Palestine or modern Israel.

3. **diaspora**

a. A dispersion of a people from their original homeland.

b. The community formed by such a people: *"the glutinous dish known throughout the [West African] diaspora as ... fufu" (Jonell Nash).*

4. **diaspora** A dispersion of an originally homogeneous entity, such as a language or culture.

***Orientalism***  
***by***  
***Edward W. Said***  
***(Colonial and Postcolonial Studies)***

Orientalism a seminal book published in 1978 by Edward Said has been highly influential and controversial in Post-colonial studies and other fields. In the book Said effectively redefined the term “Orientalism” to mean a constellation of false assumption underlying western attitude towards the Middle East. The two quotations given as preface of the book set the mood of his treatise that exposes the European Universalism that takes for granted white supremacy and authority:

“They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.” - by Karl Marx

“The East is a career.” - by Benjamin Disraeli

**→ Terms used in the text**

- **The Orient-** signifies a system of representations framed by political forces that made the Orient a mirror image of what is inferior and alien (other) to the West.

- **Orientalism-** is a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) writing, vision and study, dominated by an entire system of thought and scholarship.
- **The Oriental-** is the person represented by such thinking. The man is depicted as feminine, weak, yet strangely dangerous. The Oriental is a single image, a sweeping generalization and a stereotype that crosses countless cultural and national boundaries.
- **Latent Orientalism-** is the unconscious, untouchable certainty about what the orient is. Its basic content is static and unanimous. It is always the other, the conquerable and the inferior.
- **Manifest Orientalism-** is what is spoken and acted upon. It is the expression in words and actions of Latent Orientalism.

## → Introduction

Many scholars place the beginning of postcolonial studies in history, literature, philosophy, anthropology and arts with the publication of Said's magnum opus "Orientalism". Said focuses his attention on the interplay between the "Occident" and the "Orient". The "Occident" is his term for the West (England, France and US) and Orient

is his term for the romantic misunderstood Middle East and Far East.

In 1970 Said went to Beirut. There he got caught up in the Palestinian struggle for freedom. He became part of the community of academicians and writers who were involved in various colonial and post-colonial struggles. During this time he translated the speeches of Yasar Arafat into English for the Western Press. He became an articulate voice for the liberation of Palestine in Europe and U.S. Having published "Orientalism" in 1978, the next three years saw a trilogy being formed with the publication of "The Question of Palestine" (1979) and Covering Islam (1981).

### → Major Influences on Said

Before explaining Said's "Orientalism" it is imperative on our part to understand the major influences on him in the global context. The very concept of "Beginning" is derived from Vico who distinguishes between „Origins“ and „Beginnings“ saying the „Origins“ are divine and „Beginnings“ are human. The world is created by God, but the social world is the handiwork of man. Said learns from Vico that any attempt at beginning requires not only grounding in reality but also imagination which can

sympathetically formulate it. Said also made use of Vichian idea of distinction between filiation and affiliation, the first being instinctive and the second social.

Apart from Vico Said was also influenced by Foucault's concept of power and the correlation between knowledge and power. He asserts that without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot understand the systematic way by which European culture was able to produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the Post-Enlightenment period.

Said was also influenced by Gramsci's concept of hegemony, "which is the exercise of power through the consent of the ruled" by incorporating and transforming their ideologies. The domination of the rulers over the ruled (i.e. the colonial power over the colonized) was done at two levels- first at the level of administration through military education in schools and institutions like Church and other social organizations. It is clear from Said's writings that he has made use of ideas of Vico, Foucault and Gramsci to formulate his theory of Orientalism.

## →What is “Orientalism”?

Orientalism is the study of the Orient by the Occidents. These two terms “Orient” and “Occident” are of Latin origin. Occident comes from the Latin “Occidents” which means the West and Orient comes from the latin “Oriens” which means the East. So, one who studies the Orient is an Orientalist. The very term “the Orient” holds different meanings for different people. As Said points out, Americans associate it with the Far East mainly Japan and China, while for Western Europeans and for the British and the French, it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and oldest colonies.

Said puts forward several definitions of “Orientalism” in the introduction of Orientalism. Some of these are widely quoted and influential.

- “A way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience”
- “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) “the Occident”
- “A Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient”



- “A distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts”

In the 19th century oriental studies was an area of academic study, Said asserts that West had to create, invent East in order for this study to take place. He further asserts that the West has created a dichotomy between the reality of the East and the romantic notion of the Orient. The Middle East and Asia are looked with prejudice and racism. They are projected as backward, static and unaware of their culture and history. To fill the void, the West created a culture, a history and a promising future for them. On this framework rests not only the study of the Orient but also the political imperialism of Europe in the East. To Said “Orientalism” is more an indicator of the power the West holds over the Orient than about the Orient itself. By taking control of the scholarship the West also took political and economic control.