JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV
PUNJAB STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

(Established by Act No. 19 of 2019 of the Legislature of State of Punjab)

The Motto of the University

(SEWA)

SKILL ENHANCEMENT EMPLOYABILITY WISDOM ACCESSIBILITY

M.A. English
Semester –III
Course Code: MAEM24301T
Course: Literary Criticism

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Course Outcomes:

This course will enable learners to:

- Understand literary criticism
- Appreciate the works of literary critics
- Examine and evaluate literary works
- Interpret literature and develop critical skills

M.A. English

Semester – III

MAEM24301T: Literary Criticism

MAX. MARKS: 100
EXTERNAL: 70
INTERNAL: 30
PASS: 40%

Objective: **Credits: 5**

The aim of the course is to introduce students to significant works in Irish literary tradition, spanning different genres and periods. The course aims to provide an understanding of the cultural and artistic richness of Irish literature and foster critical appreciation for the diverse themes and styles found in the selected works.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PAPER SETTER/EXAMINER:

1. The syllabus prescribed should be strictly adhered to.
2. The question paper will consist of five sections: A, B, C, D, and E. Sections A, B, C, and D will have two questions from the respective sections of the syllabus and will carry 15 marks each. The candidates will attempt one question from each section.
3. Section E will have four short answer questions covering the entire syllabus. Each question will carry 5 marks. Candidates will attempt any two questions from this section.
4. The examiner shall give a clear instruction to the candidates to attempt questions only at one place and only once. Second or subsequent attempts, unless the earlier ones have been crossed out, shall not be evaluated.
5. The duration of each paper will be three hours.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES:

Candidates are required to attempt any one question each from the sections A, B, C, and D of the question paper and any two short questions from Section E. They have to attempt questions only at one place and only once. Second or subsequent attempts, unless the earlier ones have been crossed out, shall not be evaluated.

Section – A

William Wordsworth: *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*

Section – B

Matthew Arnold: *The Study of Poetry*

Section – C

T.S. Eliot: *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

Section – D

Elaine Showalter: *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*

Suggested Readings:

1. Bertens, Hans. *Literary Theory: The Basics*. London & New York: Routledge, 2003.
2. Frye, Northop. *T.S. Eliot: An Introduction*. University of Chicago, 1981.
3. Gardner, Helen. *The Art of T.S. Eliot*. Faber and Faber, 1980.
4. Hamilton, Ian. *A Gift Imprisoned: The Poetic Life of Matthew Arnold*. Basic Books, 1999.
5. Hartman, Geoffrey H. *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*. New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press. 1964.
6. Levenson, Michael. *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*. Cambridge UP, 1991.
7. Lodge, David, ed. *Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Pearson Education, 2003.
8. Parrish, Stephen Maxfield. *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads*. Cambridge MA: Herward University Press, 1973.
9. Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Pearson, 2006.
10. Tate, Allen. *T.S. Eliot: The Man and His Work*. Penguin Books ltd, 1971.
11. Waugh, Patricia. *Literary Theory & Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford: OUP, 2006.
12. Wolfson, Susan J. *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry*. Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986.

M.A English

Semester-III

MAEM24301T

Literary Criticism

Section A

William Wordsworth: *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*

Structure

Unit 1

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Neoclassicism and Romantic Movement
    1.1.1 Traits of Neoclassical Poetry
    1.1.2 Romantic Movement and Theory of Art
    1.1.3 Characteristics/Attributes of Romanticism

1.2 Summary *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*

1.3 Function of Poetry

1.4 Wordsworth's Theory of Language

1.5 Theory of Imagination

1.6 Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry

    1.6.1 Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry

1.7 Conclusion

1.8 Questions

1.9 Suggested Readings

1.0 Objectives

This unit will make us understand the following:

- Background and attributes of Romantic Movement
- Main ideas in the *Preface*
- Quality and function of poetry
- Wordsworth's theory of language and imagination

1.1 Neoclassicism and Romantic Movement

Neoclassicism emerged after the excesses of metaphysical school of poetry. The rigid rules of French Academy imported to England increased the French influence. The development of scientific spirit, focus on rationalism, reason, clarity and simplicity of thought and expression, and evasion of all that was extravagant favored the rise of neoclassicism in the second-half of the 17^{th} century in England. The neoclassical movement in English literature continued to the 18th century. It has been labelled as pseudo classical age, Augustan age or even classical. Neo classicism emphasized the need to respect rules and principles of literature especially the revival of classics, the Greeks, who believed in the supremacy of reason, logic accuracy and structure over emotions, personal feelings and subjectivity. The age was dominated by materialism and empirical science. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Joseph Butler were the philosophers who shaped the thoughts of people of this age. The philosophical empiricism of the age, propagated through the writings of Bacon, Hobbes and Locke were supported and validated by empirical science. Men, morals, manners and politics were the dominating aspects and concerns of writers in this age. The ages also created an imitation of classics of ancient Greek and Roman literature. There was a firm belief in human nature that was considered static and standard by Homer and Horace. There was no mention of feelings and thoughts of ordinary men and women. It was believed that man was insignificant and he had limited powers. Man was criticized for his excessive pride, as is reflected in the works of the period. Thinkers of the age believed that objectivity, reason and logic were the standards to be maintained with regards to religious beliefs, literature and morality. The didactic function of poetry gained greater importance than the aesthetic part. It was believed that poetic justice was necessary in order to reward the virtue and punish the voice. There was a restriction on use of emotions and imagination in the writings. Writers were forced to adhere to the regulations of language. The vocabulary and grammar was expanded and regularized.

1.1.1 Traits of Neoclassicism:

- The principle decree of Neo-classics was to follow nature. Nature, for Neo-classics, meant external reality which the poet must adhere to. An extended meaning to the word nature was also general human nature which referred to the qualities shared by men of all ages.
- Universal types must be dealt with by the poet instead of the individual ones. It was believed that power was regulated through nature which possessed qualities of order, regularity and harmony.
- Neoclassicism followed rules. The critics valued correctness, reason and good sense.
- There was an emphasis on universal truths and general ideas.
- As the content was not given primacy, artificial poetic diction was employed. Perfection rather than the content was given primacy.
- Poetic justice became imperative. The didactic function of poetry was central and the aesthetic one, restrained.
- Style and diction of poetry was preferred. Compound words, epithets, personification and circumlocution was practised.

- Archaic words and technical language of sciences was avoided.
- There was an insistence on style. Style had to suit the genre of literature.
- Difference in the language of poetry and the language of prose was maintained.

1.1.2 Romantic Movement and Theory of Art

The French Revolution and the American declaration of independence led to political freedom. Three- fold slogan of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" was embraced by the Romantics like Wordsworth and PB Shelley. There was a revolt against the authority and love for freedom. The spirit of individualism and humanitarianism was at the core of romantic revival in the 19th century. The movement is imbibed by the political writings of Rousseau, as it denounced aristocracy and religious dogmatism.

William Wordsworth was greatly influenced by Voltaire's explication of link between God and nature and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's veneration of nature. The poetry of Wordsworth abounds in pantheism, which is the belief that God is only present. Rousseau's slogans like **go back to nature** and **man is born free** became the model of the romantic that spread to Europe and America. Rousseau's emphasis on dignity of man as human being endowed with humanists an inseparable connection between nature and man that affected human sensibility had a profound influence on the Romantic Movement. Romantic humanism which emphasized equal and natural rights of every individual was heralded by Rousseau's Emile and social contract.

Wordsworth was also influenced by the Schlegel brothers, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel who propagated the aesthetic view of art. August Schlegel drew a clear distinction between Classicism and Romanticism. He believed that classicism is an artistic search for perfect and ordered world. Romanticism, he believed, is a secret longing of soul for the chaos that underlies all creation and strives for new births. He explained that the poet is endowed with a vision that he presents in poetry. Hence, he is not bound by rules and restrictions.

1.1.3 Characteristics of Romanticism

Imagination and emotion was encouraged by Romanticism. It denounced reason and logic. Poetic fervour, enthusiasm and spontaneity were considered the dominant modes of expression for poetry. The poetry written by the Romantics followed of freestyle, seldom adhering to any rules and regulations. Liberty and freedom of individuals were believed to be pivotal for artistic representation. Individualism and self-expression were the core aspects that were essential for imagination. Keen observation, reaction and perceptions of the poet who was sensitive to the changes in the world were important for the Romantics.

The fundamental feature of romantic poetry was subjectivity. The poets of this epoch imported subjective interpretations to the objective realities of life. The Romantic Movement, says William J.Long, was the expression of individual genius rather than of the established rules. Nature was seen as a living entity and force and man's link to nature was positive, Symbiotic relationship had to be maintained. Nature was benevolent and divine. She had immense powers. However, exploitation of nature through industrialization, emergence of factories resulting in

pollution seemed to have disconnected man's attachment to nature. The Romantics celebrated the beauty of nature in various dimensions. Wordsworth equated nature with God; Coleridge described the mysterious power of nature; Shelley praised the force and power of nature. His revolutionary spirit was nurtured by the influence and vigour of nature and Keats admired the census beauty of nature. Poets like Coleridge and Scott provided a sense of wonder and mystery to the poetry. It was this interest in a supernatural element that extended the mediaeval atmosphere of wonder and mystery to Romantic poetry.

The innocence and vision of childhood was vividly expressed in the poetry of Wordsworth and Shelley. Imagination was seen as a creative faculty that enhanced the ability to spiritually connect with nature and further explained man's association with nature. The poetry of 18th century dealt with life of fashionable society, clubs and coffee houses, drawing rooms and the social and political life of London. Neoclassical poetry was essentially urban-centric. The primary concerns of romantics were the activities and life of ordinary people in the countryside. Romantic poetry was marked by intense human sympathy. The poet, endowed with certain vision, played a pivotal role in society which was of a prophet anticipating social and political change. Lyricism predominated in Romantic poetry through melody and sweetness of tone but the artificial mode of depiction used by classical poets was not employed by the romantics. The natural diction and spontaneous expression of thoughts in romantic poetry was a strong reaction against the heroic couplet which was regarded as the only style by the Neo-classics.

Attributes of Romantic Poetry:

- Romantic poets ascribed to what Victor Hugo describes as "liberalism in literature". They give importance to poetic inspiration and enthusiasm and are less concerned about the systems, techniques, rules and conventions.
- Commenting on the passion, emotion and application of imagination, Hudson writes, "Their poetry shows a love of the wild, fantastic, abnormal and supernatural." Romantic poetry is devoid of reason, intellectual commitment in content, nature and treatment of subjects of poetry.
- The comments on human nature by Romantic poets are contrasting to the ones in neoclassical poetry. Their interests are not limited to the shallow description of urban life or the manners and trivial incidents that the new classics preferred.
- Individual rather than the society was the preference of Romantic poets. Their poetry is subjective in terms of content and subject. A democratic spirit coupled with the greater concern for ordinary, rustic life, poor and downtrodden forms their primary poetic concern.
- The literature an art of Middle Ages, neglected by Dryden and Pope, became a matter of study and interest to the Romantic poets.
- Romantic poets experiment with new stanzaic forms and metre instead of the heroic couplet which was considered to be the only appropriate metre for verse by Neo-classics.

1.2 Summary *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*

Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* presents basic principles of Romantic School of poetry. It is a critical appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry and Manifesto of Romanticism. Wordsworth's essay envisages role of poetry and poet. He tells that poems in *Lyrical Ballads* differed from others. In these, he uses 'a selection of real language of men' as medium for poetic expression. His friends encouraged him to write in defense of the theoretical principles that form the basis of his poetry. Though Wordsworth initially thought that readers might have little interest or might think this as trying to influence the way in which poems should be read or appreciated, he decided to write introductory words for this different poetry.

It was essential for him to write introductory words so that the readers will get used to this new style of poetry and did not find his poetry strange. According to Wordsworth, the main purpose of his poetry was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate these in a selection of language used by men. He deliberately used the common place experience as the subject of his poetry and treated them in the simple rustic language of common people. These experiences were not presented in a photographic manner. They were to be made more charming and interesting through their imaginative recreation. His purpose in doing so was to show the natural ways that govern life.

Wordsworth explains the reasons for depiction of rustic common life of the people. He believes that human mind functions in a natural way without any pretensions in natural conditions. People lead simple life and express the feelings and emotions in the simple language without making it ornamental. Their use of language is based on simple natural occupations that they undertake. Another reason for the choice of this language was that common people remain in touch with objects of nature which form a source of the best part of language. It makes their language natural and free from artificial expression impacted by complexities of urban industrialized life. Wordsworth considers this language more philosophical and permanent. It differs from the exaggerated expressions used by poets who made an ornamental use of language. However, the language of common people is used only after it has been purified of the gross elements in it. The use of a different kind of language and the purpose that Wordsworth associates with his poetry make it different from other poetry. He considers poetry as spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. This process results in valuable poetic creations when these feelings are modified by the poet who has greater 'organic sensibility'. The poet keeps on thinking something about the important and the worthwhile things. This process of thinking results in the writing of noble poetry. Another distinct feature of his poetry is that his poems give significance to situation and action. In other words, feelings are more prominent than action or situation in the poems of Wordsworth.

Wordsworth avoids personifications and abstract ideas. He claims to keep poetry close to the natural rhythms of life. He rejects the stereotypical diction. He believes that there is barely a difference between language of poetry and that of prose. He illustrates this with references to poetry of Milton and Gray. The use of meter is not essential for poetry. Intensity of passion is

more important than artificial expressions. Poetry offers higher pleasure than any joy offered by an activity. It is divine and sublime as poetry deals with higher truth. He also emphasizes that meter adds pleasure to poetry. When poet expresses emotions, meter helps him to mould pathetic and painful emotions. The poetic processes, according to Wordsworth, involve observation, recollection, contemplation and emotional excitement. For him, the real thing in poetry is feelings and not language. The sensibility of poet, his comprehensive soul, imaginative mind and power to create as well as communicate poems give a greater importance to the poet than the poetry.

Wordsworth refers to Aristotle's view that poetic truth is much higher than the truth of history or philosophy. While history deals with particular facts and philosophy deals with abstract truths, poetry dwells on both particular and universal truth.

1.3 The Function of Poetry

"Every great poet is a teacher; I wish either to be considered as a teacher or as a nothing," writes Wordsworth. Poetry, he believes, frames models "to improve the scheme of man's existence and recast the world" (*The Excursion*). According to Wordsworth, "poetry is the most philosophical of all writings", "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge", "the impassioned expression that is the countenance of all signs" and "the image of man and nature". Wordsworth's *Preface* underscores the function of poetry "to produce excitement in co-existence with an over balance of pleasure". Wordsworth differs from Neo-classics who focus on instruction and delight as the aim of poetry. The function of poetry, according to Wordsworth, is to give pleasure which is not purely aesthetic but moral. The use of metre and rhyme tempers emotions but the real aim of poetry is to provide higher pleasure in the form of realization of truth. An enlightenment provided by poetry not only strengthens emotions but also makes readers sane and pure.

An organic sensibility and deep contemplation possessed by a person enables him to write good poetry. "Our feelings and emotions are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of our past feelings," remarks Wordsworth. Human feelings connected to essential and permanent objects of nature reveal general and universal laws of human life as well as nature. This enhances understanding and results in purification of emotions. Wordsworth asserts that his poems extend dominion of sensibility and ascertain delight and honour which would benefit human nature. He, as a poet, consoles the bereaved and makes life happier so as to encourage the youngsters to be virtuous and active.

1.4 Wordsworth's Theory of Language

Wordsworth's theory of language differs from the diction followed by the Neo-classics. His theory of poetic language is a reaction against Neo- classical poetic diction. Wordsworth's theory aims to deal with language of humble life of rustics. He advocates simplicity of language to suit the themes of his poems. His dictum, "the poet is essentially a man speaking to men", justifies simple language used by ordinary man. He disapproves superficialities of language "a motley masquerade of tricks, hieroglyphics, and enigmas," invented by Alexander Pope and his followers. Wordsworth claims to use language of countryside men, the subjects of his poetry. Wordsworth uses this language in selected form which is purified and believes that only judicious selection of

language can give pleasure. Simple, unpretentious and passionate language of rustics is expressed without any reservation or inhibitions and therefore operates from the heart to connect with hearts.

The simple language of ordinary man imbibes essential truths about human life and nature so it can be clearly communicated. It is more philosophical and provides better understanding of the basic truths. As rustics communicate with beauty and grandeur of nature every hour, their language is derived from such communication. Hence, their language is noble, poetic and capable of giving the highest poetic pleasure.

Artificial poetic diction of the eighteenth century, according to Wordsworth, must be avoided. The language of poetry cannot be separated from language of men in real life. The earliest poets made use of metaphors and images resulting from powerful emotions but the later poets started using figurative language which was not the result of genuine passion. According to Wordsworth, a poet speaking in his own person or through characters must avoid artificial diction. However, the language of the poet must very according to the nature, rank and status, thought and emotions of the character who speaks it. Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction is of immense value when considered alongside the Neo-classical use of language. There are also a few limitations and contradictions in the theory given by Wordsworth.

1.5 Theory of Imagination

C.M. Bowra in *The Romantic Imagination* observes that Romantics attach great importance to imagination. Wordsworth's *Preface* is mainly concerned with 'observation' and 'imagination' (occurs twice). Imagination occurs first when Wordsworth tells that his purpose is to select incidents and situations from common life and make these appear uncommon and unusual with colours of imagination. Imagination, hence, transforms and transfigures the incidents. As the poet possesses special gifts, he adds something to nature and reality to impart glory and freshness to an experience.

Wordsworth argues against associationist psychologists who believe that human mind receives impressions from the external world which get associated together to form images. The mind merely reflects on the external world but Wordsworth believes that mind is not a passive reflector but an active creator as well. Imagination is the active and creative part of mind. The poet establishes relationship with the eternal through imagination. Imagination works on the raw material of impression to illustrate the working of eternal truth. It is this power which makes the poet perceive the essential unity of man, God and nature while the intellect of the scientist merely multiplies diversities. According to Wordsworth, poet is a man who has thought deeply and can perceive things which are absent. The poet contemplates in tranquility the emotions which he experienced in the past and visualizes objects that give rise to those emotions initially. Thus imagination becomes a visualizing power which enables the poet to recreate the past. It is imagination which enables the poet to render emotional experiences which he had not personally experienced as if they were personally felt emotions. It is power of imagination of the poet which makes him universalize the personal and the particular. It is through this power that poet arrives at the universal truth.

Emphasizing on Wordsworth's idea of the role of imagination in creative process, Bowra observes that it is the highest gift of poet. Wordsworth calls imagination "reason in her most exalted mood". It transforms sense perception and makes the poet conscious of human and the divine. Wordsworth also differentiates the power of imagination and fancy. Though both evoke,

combine, associate, fancy makes things exact while imagination leaves everything vague and indefinite.

1.6 Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry

According to Wordsworth, emotions and feelings are important to poetry. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and "it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility". The word "spontaneous" in definition does not mean immediate or sudden; it implies natural or voluntary. The poet, possessing the capacity to reconstruct his earlier emotions and feelings, is not concerned with the imitation of the external. His art externalizes internal and feelings that are the primary sources of poetic creation. Poetry is the communication of emotions and not ideas and whatever knowledge the poet imparts is through emotions. Pleasure is aroused only when the thoughts and feelings are truthfully associated with each other. Wordsworth's statement strongly advances the concept of spontaneity, having as its base the coordination of thought and feeling.

Observation is the first step to artistic creation. The poet possesses greater sensibility, observes objects of external world and this gives rise to certain feelings and emotions. Instead of communicating these feelings and emotions directly to the readers, the poet allows them to settle in his mind. In the process of meditation that follows, original feelings and emotions get transformed due to their interaction with thoughts. After this alteration earlier emotions and feelings get spiritualized.

Impressions that a poet receives from the observation of objects are purified of their initial ingredient and spiritualized until what remains is the ideal or the essential truth. In tranquil moments, the poet would recall original impressions, feelings and emotions that would accompany them are also revived. The faculty of recreating emotions belongs to the poet. As he composes a poem, he lives through his original experiences that now exist in an idealized form. The artistic creation represents a complex process of observation, impression, feeling, thoughts and their interactions. Wordsworth's theory focuses on memory and he blames Scott for taking a notebook and making an inventory of all the pleasant objects found in nature and finally weaving them into a fabric.

1.6.1 Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry

Coleridge exposes inherent weaknesses of Wordsworth's theory of language. He points out that the language selected and purified, as Wordsworth mentions, would differ in no way from the language of any other man in common sense. Such a selection would remove the difference between rustic language and language used by men and other walks of life.

Wordsworth permits meter but Coleridge finds this to be an arrangement of words. If metre is to be used, the order of words in poetry is bound to differ from prose which does vary in poetry of Wordsworth. Meter indicates the whole atmosphere and the language of poetry is bound to differ from that of prose. Coleridge claims that there is and must be an essential difference between language of prose and metrical composition. The use of meter is as artificial as the use of poetic diction. It is absurd to prohibit the use of the other. Both are equally good sources of poetic pleasure.

Coleridge also objects to the use of word 'real'. He writes, "every man's language varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties and the depth or quickness of his feelings. Every man's language has, firstly, its individualities; secondly, the common

properties of class to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of universal sense." Real, says Coleridge, must be substituted. He also points out the erroneous notion that the best part of our language is derived from Nature. The best words are abstract nouns and concepts that are derived from reflective acts of the mind and reflection grows as man advances from the so called primitive state. When man has advanced in thought, he acquires new ideas and concepts which cannot be expressed through the use of rustic language that is primitive and undeveloped. If the poet has to use rustic language, he must reflect like rustics. Coleridge observes, "The language of rustics is curiously inexpressive. It would be putting the clock back. Instead of progression it would be retrogression." Wordsworth does not adhere to his own theory in practice. Inverted and poetic constructions are frequent in his poetry and often his vocabulary is not drawn from rustic life. He does not use the language of real man at all times. Wordsworth's theory of language therefore has intense weaknesses but it at the same time is significant.

1.7 Conclusion

According to Wordsworth, poetic creation has four stages. These are observation, recollection, contemplation and imaginative excitement. The poet recollects emotions in tranquility and contemplates upon them. On contemplation, poet gets transported to initial emotional excitement. As temporary emotions get discarded, universal emotions are communicated. Pathetic and painful emotions are assuaged by use of meter. Meter imparts skill to overcome artistic difficulties which in turn gives pleasure. It also makes ordinary common place language unusual and delightful. In order to enjoy new and genuine type of poetry, readers must be familiar with the creative process, language and purpose of writing to scrutinize these poems with open mind.

1.8 Questions

Q 1. What was the purpose for writing *Preface to Lyrical Ballads?*

Q 2. Explain Wordsworth's idea of poetry?

Q 3. Comment on Wordsworth's theory of language.

Q 4. How does Wordsworth defend his own use of meter?

Q 5. Why does Wordsworth choose rustic life as subject of his poetry?

1.9 Suggested Readings

Gill, Stephen, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth.* Cambridge UP, 2003.

Williams, John. *William Wordsworth: A Literary Life.* St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Semester-III

MAEM24301T

Literary Criticism

Section A

William Wordsworth*:* *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*

Structure

Unit II

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction to William Wordsworth

2.2 Introduction to *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*

2.2.1 The Ordinary

2.2.2 The Role of Poetry and the Poet

2.2.3 Response of Readers

2.3 The Definition of Poetry

2.3.1 Objective of Poem

2.4 The Characteristics of Poet

2.5 The Value of Poetry

2.6 Poetic Diction

2.7 Conclusion

2.8 Questions

2.9 Suggested Readings

2.0 Objectives

This unit will make us understand the following:

- William Wordsworth's concept of poetry
- Characteristics of the poet

- Value of Poetry
- Poetic Diction

2.1 Introduction to William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was born in the Lake District of England. He lost his mother at the age of seven and his father when Wordsworth was thirteen. He studied in a grammar school at Hawkshead, a village in the Lake District. Wordsworth received education in classics, literature and mathematics at Hawkshead. He enjoyed living and playing in the outdoors. The beauty of English lakes and the natural scenery nurtured Wordsworth. He wrote much later to testify this fact, "I grew up fostered alike by beauty and by fear". He articulated every aspect of his boyhood in the poem,"Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey".

Wordsworth moved to Saint John's College, Cambridge in 1787. He chose two idle away because of the competitive pressures. The only important thing that he did during the college years was to devote summer vacation in 1790 for walking tour through revolutionary France. He got caught up in the passionate enthusiasms that followed the fall of the Bastille. He became an ardent Republican sympathizer. After graduating from Cambridge, he returned to France in 1791. In 1792, Wordsworth had to return to England due to the outbreak of war between England and France. His return to England marked the darkest of years in his life. He was not prepared for any profession. He was rootless, penniless and hostile to his own country's opposition to the French. He lived in the company of radicals like William Godwin and had profound sympathy for vagrants, victims of England's war, beggars and abandoned mothers. This dark time came to an end in 1795 with reunion (meeting sister, Dorothy). While living with Dorothy, words with Wordsworth became friends with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The partnership of both these poets altered the course of English poetry.

The partnership between Wordsworth and Coleridge 1797 to 1798 had two consequences for Wordsworth. Firstly, he turned away from the long poems on which he had laboured since his Cambridge days. The healing influences of nature and his sister along with the stimulation by the creative energy of Coleridge, Wordsworth began to compose short lyrical and dramatic poems for which he is best remembered by many of the readers. A few of the poems were affectionate tribute to Dorothy, some were tribute to daffodils birds and other elements of nature and the holy plan. He also wrote about the simple rural people to illustrate the basic truths of human nature. Many of the short poems were written jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge to break the decorum of neoclassical verse. These poems appeared in 1798 as *Lyrical Ballads*, which opened with Coleridge is long poem he Rime of the Ancient Mariner and closed with Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey. Most of the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* were dramatic in form and were designed to reveal the character of the speaker. The manifesto and the accompanying poems set forth a new style, a new vocabulary, new subject for poetry and all of these foreshadowed the developments in the 20th century. The second consequence of Wordsworth's partnership with Coleridge was the

framing of a poetic design. Coleridge projected an enormous poem called the brook to treat science philosophy and religion but laid the burden of composing the poem upon Wordsworth. Wordsworth also began writing autobiographical poems for the next 40 years which were published in 1850 under the title *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind*.

The middle period of Wordsworth's creative energy was devoted to the odes. He also wrote a large number of sonnets most of them strung together in sequences. Duddon Sonnets (1820) were highly admired by the readers. These sonnets traced the progress of stream through Lake District landscapes and blended nature poetry with philosophical reflection. Most of the memorable poems of Wordsworth's middle and late years were cast in an elegiac mode. Wordsworth's poetic span, more than 60 years, produced the best of poetry during the decade 1797 to 1807. The first period of his poetic phase is known for works like *Descriptive Sketches* and *Evening Walk*. The best known works, in the second period 1792 to 1797, are *The Borderers, Guilt and Sorrow* and *Margaret* or *The Ruined Cottage*. *The Excursion* is a masterpiece written during the second period. The third period, 1797 to 1807, is a glorious decade which showcases Wordsworth's poetic powers at their zenith. *The Lyrical Ballads* 1798 is a work that contains many admirable poems like *Lines Written in Early Spring, Michael, Fountain, Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of Wye during a Tour*. *Peter Bell* in 1819, Lucy group of poems - *Lucy Gray, Nutting* and *Ruth*. *The Prelude* or *The Account of Growth of Poet's Mind*, published posthumously in 1850, is an autobiographical poem running into 14 books. *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, or *Ode to Duty, Highland Girl, Solitary Reaper, Affliction of Margaret, Happy Warrior, Resolution and Independence, Peele Castle, To the Cuckoo, My Heart Leaps Up, I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* are among his notable poems. *Sonnet on Sonnet, Milton*, Upon Westminster Bridge, The World is too Much with Us and the series on River Duddon also mark the third period of his poetic career. The fourth period office poetry writing is marked by writings like Ecclesiastical Sketches and Lines Written on Charles Lamb. Wordsworth's notable works include *Lyrical Ballads, Michael, Ode:Intimations of Immortality, Peter Bell, The Excursion, The Prelude, The Recluse, The Ruined Cottage, The Solitary Reaper, The World is too Much with Us* and *Daffodils.*

2.2 Introduction to *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge collaboratively wrote the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).It was a collection of poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge. After having written the lyrical ballads Wordsworth and Coleridge were inspired to write *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* for clarifying their poetic style an illuminating the criticism on their writings. Preface to lyrical ballads is the consequences of conversations between Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. According to Coleridge the artificiality and impermanence of poetry came with an aristocratic taste. He wanted the readers to know that the poetry written by Wordsworth and him was more real and everlasting. The idea of writing *Preface* was Coleridge's but it was written by Wordsworth. Despite the collaborative effort of both the poets, it was Wordsworth who added the *Preface* in the 1800 edition and 1802. *The Preface* is a critical statement by Wordsworth who

wanted to bring poetry nearer to life. It can be studied in four parts what is poetry, characteristics of poetry, value of poetry and poetic diction are highlighted in it.

After the publication of *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, the disagreement between Coleridge and Wordsworth started surfacing in the writing *Biographia Literaria* as well as other letters and essays. These writings indicate disparities in the thoughts of both the poets. Wordsworth, in 1880s, "sets out his poetic position in the preface". He emphasizes on the ordinary and the role of poetry and the poet. *The Preface* illustrates some major gaps between the writings of two poets. Wordsworth, in the preface, describes his desire to break away from the ornamented style of 18th century poetry to create a comprehensible art form for the ordinary man. This thought of Wordsworth is quite similar to Coleridge's claim about the artificiality of aristocratic taste. Wordsworth states that breaking away from the ornamented style, "personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; And are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose" (*The Preface* 9). Wordsworth emphasises the adoption of a language of men which rejects personification as a mechanical device "or as a family language which writers in metres seem to lay claim to buy prescription" (9). Coleridge, conversely, states that he believes poetry should have passion which is presented in the metre. He claims that Wordsworth believes in this but this was not actually represented in *The Preface* (Shulz).

2.2.1 The Ordinary

Coleridge writes that Wordsworth assignment was "to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday and to excite a feeling analogus to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." Wordsworth awakened the romantic beauty of nature to his readers but on the publication of the second edition Coleridge thought Wordsworth's poetry was heterogeneous. Coleridge claims that Wordsworth, in the preface, extends style of poetry to all kinds and rejects the poetry that does not include the language of real life. Wordsworth defines the permanence of poetic voice that should reflect the importance off the topic but Coleridge disagrees with this. Coleridge believes that common language does not apply to all classes and therefore it should not be practised. It is quite evident that Coleridge and Wordsworth differ in their writing style Wordsworth with his lack of poetic diction versus Coleridge's formal style of writing. Coleridge asserts that Wordsworth cannot adequately and accurately write to men of all classes instead he writes to the lowest denominator of the taste. This kind of disagreement with words ability leads many to believe that Coleridge clarifications of the preface are nearly or refusal.

2.2.2 The Role of Poetry and the Poet

According to Wordsworth, the ordinary man is closer to nature and therefore closer to human nature. In order to direct poetry toward the ordinary man, Wordsworth addresses the significance of language in his poetry as well as the effects of these writings on the reader. The Boy is a man speaking to the reader therefore his language should not be short of anything that makes them understand about it. Coleridge thinks that the role of poet is to maintain the previous ideals of poetry regarding language rather than completely changing it to the level of lowly man. The role of poetry according to both Wordsworth and Coleridge is to stir the passion of the reader. However, the methods used by them are slightly different. Coleridge agrees that poet has to take the imagination and the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings but it also requires a good sense which is the body of the poetic genius (Coleridge, XIV).

2.2.3 Response of readers

As the readers of the time were accepting elegant and aristocratic writing styles, the new trend of poetic creation by Wordsworth and Coleridge and *Lyrical Ballads* was criticised by them. The last 10 paragraphs of *The Preface* state faith "in the educative taste of the public" and exhort the reader to judge *Lyrical Ballads* by his own feelings and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgement of others. According to Coleridge, the public taste is to be despised. In one of the journals, Coleridge wrote that he would penned an essay on public taste in the future.

2.3 The Definition of Poetry

Wordsworth's *Preface* is a critical document on creative process. It is called the manifesto of Romantic Movement in poetry. *Preface* advocates a form of art connected with individualism and subjectivity. Wordsworth defines poetry to readers who were used to Neo-classical poetry of Alexander Pope. Wordsworth explains his readers reasons for writing poems that were different from earlier poems written by his predecessors. This explanation makes the radically changed poetry comprehensible to the readers. Wordsworth asserts that he chooses incidents and situations from common life and describes these in language of the men. By presenting poems in an unusual and ordinary way, he traces the poems to primary laws of human nature.

According to Wordsworth, a humble and rustic surroundings of men is more natural. This kind of surrounding becomes an appropriate subject of study for a poet who writes "on man, on nature and on human life". He discards gaudy phraseology, artificial diction and sophisticated themes of Neo-classical poetry. By including simple and natural life of countryside in his poems, Wordsworth creates freshness. Feelings and passions of humble village farmers, shepherds, woodcutters, leech-gatherers among others provide universal appeal to poetry, believes Wordsworth.

Wordsworth gives following reasons for choosing aspects of rustic life as subject of his poetry:

- Essential and innermost feelings are best expressed in humble rustic surroundings.

- There is simplicity in elementary feelings of human heart in rustic conditions. Sophisticated societies exhibit reverse feelings.
- Social vanity never masks the rustic behaviour. Manners of rustic life originate from comprehensible elementary feelings.
- Human passion in rustic conditions is associated with beauteous forms of external Nature. These become nobler than passions/emotions of city dwellers who cannot much associate with Nature.

2.3.1 Objective of Poem

The poet, an unusual man, with exceptional organic sensibility is also a man of thought. He possesses habit of meditation that modifies and regulates his feelings. As the poet possesses capacity to reconstruct his earlier emotions and feelings, he is not simply concerned with imitation of the external. His art externalises the feelings which become primary source of creation. "Poetry," according to Wordsworth, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that originate from "emotions recollected in tranquillity". These powerful feelings, missing in poetry of previous times, differentiate poetry of his times. The word 'spontaneous' in Wordsworth's definition connotes 'natural' or 'unforced' and not 'immediate' or 'sudden'. A poet's feelings, he believes, are modified by his thoughts. He connects one thought to the other to discover something worthwhile and important. Sentiments are more important than actions and situations in the poems of Wordsworth.

2.4 The Characteristics of Poet

Wordsworth democratised the conception of poet. Poet is a person essentially different from men in degree and sensitivity. His sensibility is livelier. He has a comprehensible soul. His powers of observation are greater than others. His imagination gives depth to his thoughts. He possesses imagination of a higher order. Though others also have these qualities, poets possess these attributes in a higher degree. Wordsworth holds in high esteem the organic oneness of poets. A poet can emotionally identify with men. The poet partakes the pleasant and unpleasant experiences of men and writes for their pleasure.

In comparison to a scientist who remains aloof enjoying knowledge of truth, the poet is a benefactor and a genial companion. The poet seeks to bind all mankind with ties of love, affection and unity. He appeals to both the heart and intellect of man. Nature speaks to the poet of essential oneness in the universe. The perception of truth excites him emotionally and he expresses his emotions through the poems. Despite revolutionary and scientific changes, poet will eternally infuse new life, substance, flesh and blood to science.

2.5 The Value of Poetry

Poetry is superior to science. According to Wordsworth, knowledge provided by science is intellectual and superficial. Scientists dissect and examine superficially but poets examine inner reality. While the scientist searches truth which is personal, poetic truth is experienced by everyone and is a consequence of unity of man and nature. By virtue of greater sensibility, the poet probes deeper to discover higher truth. Poetry, for Wordsworth, is "the breath and final spirit of all knowledge; the impassioned experience which is the countenance of all science". Poetic truth can be shared by all because it realises basic laws that are same for all ages and countries.

The function of poetry is to provide pleasure. The pleasure derived from poetry is an acknowledgement of beauty of universe and dignity of man. Pleasure is basic principle of life. When man sympathizes with pain and suffering of others, it gives a sense of satisfaction. This inner satisfaction is a source of spiritual pleasure. An organic unity between man and nature makes a person mirror truth and realize it. This realization that occurs through poetry gives pleasure to man.

Poetry is manifestation of intricacies in man and bounties of nature. It reproduces reality and projects universal truths. The adherence to nature and reality associates sense of pleasure with poetic truth.

2.6 Poetic Diction

Poetry differs from prose. Wordsworth does not believe in pleasure gained by using rhyme and meter. "Selection of language really used by men" is the recommendation of Wordsworth. Using true taste and feeling, the language of poetry should be free from coarseness and vulgarity of ordinary life. Meter, according to Wordsworth, is not essential for poetry. Meter is a 'pleasure superadded'. Wordsworth opposes 'inane phraseology' of lifeless verse and favors an impassioned love for simple words. Simple words, according to Wordsworth, have latent poetic effect. "And never lifted up a single stone" from "Michal" is a classic example of Wordsworth's poetic diction, a corrective to the diction prevalent in his times. He denounces the use of personifications, trite mythology, clichés and the likes of Neo-classical school. Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction does not exclude borrowing of apt phrases from other poets. He evades poetic diction to bring his language nearer to the language of men. Wordsworth affirms that the best of poetry has an order of words similar to good prose combinations. He avoids all those poetic devices that collectively constitute poetic diction.

2.7 Conclusion

Wordsworth expounds his theory of poetry in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads.* It is the gateway to his poems rather than a defense of his theory of poetry. He emphasizes on simplicity and spontaneity. He provides his readers an opportunity to read and accept the changed pattern of poetry. The *Preface* prepares favourable conditions for reception of his new kind of artistic compositions. While demonstrating the futility of artificial diction, Wordsworth advocates simple language of the ordinary men. Wordsworth asserts that there can be poetry without meter.

2.8 Questions

1. Why did William Wordsworth write *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* ?
2. What is the subject of Wordsworth's poetry?
3. Write a short note on Poetic Diction of Wordsworth.
4. What is the difference between scientific truth and poetic truth?
5. Discuss the objective of Wordsworth's poetry.

2.9 Suggested Readings

Abrams, M.H. *Wordsworth:A Collection of Critical Essays.* Prentice Hall INC,1972.
Brett, R.L., and A.R. Jones, Eds. *Wordsworth and Coleridge:Lyrical Ballads.* Metheun, 1971.
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Semester-III

MAEM24301T

Literary Criticism

Section B

Matthew Arnold: *The Study of Poetry*

Structure

Unit I

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Background and Context

1.2 About Matthew Arnold

1.3 Works of Matthew Arnold

1.4 Summary 'The Study of Poetry'

1.5 Major Arguments

1.6 Conclusion

1.7 Questions

1.8 Suggested Readings

1.0 Objectives

This unit will enable us to know about the following:

- Literary criticism of the nineteenth century
- Matthew Arnold's contribution to criticism
- Accomplishments of Matthew Arnold
- Main ideas discussed by Arnold in The Study of Poetry
- Arnold's concept of a classic in literature

1.1 Background and Context

The socio-political, cultural and material developments of Victorian England influenced Matthew Arnold's poetry and criticism. He, in his writings, responded to and borrowed material from the sweeping changes witnessed by Victorian England. As England was emerging a pioneer in scientific, technological, engineering and industrial development, a steady inflow of wealth from the British colonies across the world was strengthening the nation. This age was characterized by Victorian Optimism, which made it 'a spring of hope'. Matthew Arnold lived through the massive changes, the railway boom of 1840s, scientific leadership of Great Exhibition 1851 and emergence of London as financial and commercial capital of the world.

In contrast to scientific and industrial development, social problems like exploitation of labour, urban unrest, publication of Communist Party Manifesto in 1848 and political activism were also witnessed in Victorian England. The publication of *Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin in 1859 challenged the Christian faith and questioned the nobility of human race. Consequently, the 'withdrawing roar' of 'sea of faith' (Dover Beach) coupled Victorian Optimism with pessimistic skepticism. Arnold's poetry and criticism steeped deep into these opposing sensibilities. In a letter to his mother, Arnold wrote: "My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of the last quarter of a century." His poetry mirrored intellectual history of the nineteenth century. His often quoted "Stanzas from the Grande Charteuse" summed the state of Victorian society as follows:

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead

The other powerless to be born,

With nowhere yet to rest my head

Like these, on earth I wait forlorn"

The Victorians were torn between the ancient and the modern. Though the old was dying fast, fear, suspicion and reactionary attitude to the advancements confused people. These developments were elaborated by Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). Matthew Arnold was pre-occupied with questions related to role of poetry, poet, art and critics in technology/science-driven Victorian society. The relevance of subjective and intuitive truth of poetry was questioned. Whether or not poetry could withstand pragmatic standards of the new society, intrigued Arnold. He sought to respond to these questions in the essays titled 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1865) and 'The Study of Poetry' (1880).

1.2 About Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold (1822 - 1888) was an English Victorian poet and social critic. He advocated a new epic poetry that would address the moral requirements of readers. Matthew

Arnold, the father of modern literary criticism, argued for a renewed religious faith and adoption of classical aesthetics and morals which are representative of Victorian intellectual concerns. He was known for his classical attacks on the contemporary tastes and manners of the "Barbarians" (the aristocracy), the "Philistines" (the commercial middle class), and the "Populace." He was recognised as apostle of "culture" in works as *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). Walt Whitman called Arnold, ' a literary dude'. Though many critics disparaged Arnold's moralistic tone, his work laid the foundation for prominent literary critics like T.S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks and Harold Bloom.

Matthew Arnold was born into an influential English family. His father, Thomas Arnold, was renowned headmaster at Rugby School. Matthew Arnold entered Rugby in 1837 and graduated from Balliol College, Oxford in 1844. He won Newdigate Prize for his poem 'Cromwell' at Oxford. St. John Henry Newman, associated with the Oxford movement, and Oxford remained for Arnold symbols of spiritual beauty and culture. Arnold became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne in 1847 and got married in 1851. He started his career as a school inspector. He travelled throughout England on the newly built railway system. Two of his reports on schools abroad (Germany, Holland, Switzerland) were reprinted as books and his urbane civilized prose attracted attention. In 1857, Arnold got elected as Professor of poetry at Oxford. He was the first elected Professor to deliver lectures in English instead of Latin.

1.3 Works of Matthew Arnold

Arnold's poetic achievements include *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* (1849), *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems* (1852), *Merope* (1858) and *New Poems* (1867). His verses insist on classic virtues of unity, impersonality, universality and serve as models for 'an age of spiritual discomfort' (an age wanting in moral grandeur). Not many of Arnold's poems will stand his own criteria. As Professor of poetry, Arnold revolutionized the spirit of literature. Many of his lectures were published in *On Translating Homer* (1861) and *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). Arnold's religious writings include *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), *God and the Bible* (1875) and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877).

It is said, "when the poet in Arnold died, the critic was born; and it is true that from this time onward he turned almost entirely to prose." Many leading ideas and phrases were early put into currency in *Essays in Criticism* (First Series, 1865; Second Series, 1888) and *Culture and Anarchy*. His first essay in the 1865 volume, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," introduces themes he developed in later work. Arnold ascribes to criticism a scope and importance which was never dreamt of. The function of criticism, in his sense, is "a disinterested endeavour to learn and disseminate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." He attempts to foster spirit of an awakened and informed intelligence playing upon not "literature" merely but theology, history, art, science, sociology, and politics, and in every sphere seeking "to see the object as in itself it really is."

Matthew Arnold is a poet critic who provides invaluable perceptions about the understanding and analysis of poetry. His ideas about the criticism of poetry mark him as a non-conformist critic. The major arguments of Arnold are related to nature and significance of poetry. "The Function of Criticism in the Present Time" and "The Study of Poetry" are his popular

essays. The ideas presented by Arnold in these essays disapprove romantic individualism and subjectivity.

1.4 Summary 'The Study of Poetry'

The first essay in the 1888 volume, "The Study of Poetry," was originally published as an introduction to T.H. Ward's *The English Poets* (1880). *The English Poets, a manifesto of Arnold's critical creed, epitomised his canons* of literary criticism as well as the role and future of poetry. Arnold believed that in an age of crumbling creeds, poetry should replace religion. More and more, we will "turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us." Therefore, one must know how to distinguish the best poetry from the inferior, the genuine from the counterfeit. In order to accomplish this, one must immerse in the work of the acknowledged masters, using as "touchstones" passages exemplifying their "high seriousness," and their superiority of diction and movement.

In "The Study of Poetry" Matthew Arnold points out the superiority of poetry to science, religion and philosophy. The cultural critic Arnold considers best poetry to be free from "charlatanism". In this work, Arnold elaborates on poetry's "high destiny". He claims that "mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us" as science and philosophy will eventually prove to be flimsy and destabilizing. Arnold's essay articulates a "high standard" and "strict judgment" to avoid the fallacy of valuing certain poems (and poets) very highly, and charts out a method for discerning only the best "classic" poets (as distinct from the description of writers of the ancient world). Arnold's classic poets include Milton, Shakespeare, Dante, and Homer; and the passages he presents from each reveal that their poetry is timeless. For Arnold, feeling and sincerity are paramount, as is the seriousness of subject. He writes, "The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner." An example of an indispensable poet who falls short of Arnold's "classic" designation is Geoffrey Chaucer, who, Arnold states, ultimately lacks the "high seriousness" of classic poets.

Arnold argues to illuminate and preserve the poets he believes to be the touchstones of literature. He also questions the moral value of poetry that does not advocate truth, beauty, valour, and clarity. Arnold's conviction that poetry should both elevate and console drives the essay's logic and its conclusions. He believes that poetry should not only maintain high standard but also should be judged by stringent parameters because it plays pivotal role in lives of men. The distinctions of excellent and inferior, sound and unsound and true and untrue gain significance in case of poetry as it has a 'higher destiny'.

Arnold points out that systems of thought like religion, philosophy and sciences stand challenged and destabilized whereas poetry has immense future. Religion lays emphasis on material aspects of life and is based on imagined things. Science and philosophy are based on rationalization of cause and effect. It is poetry that has greater value as it helps to interpret life through application of ideas. These ideas about the superiority of poetry, according to Arnold, are relevant for the whole of the world and at all times. The ideas concerning poetry include the belief

that it is capable of higher uses. On the other hand, philosophy and Science cannot help understand life as they are 'shadows and dreams' and 'false shows of knowledge'. The future of poetry can be bright immensely because it enables human beings to interpret life. If it shows weaknesses of any kind, elements in it cannot help provide a proper criticism of life. To have the best of poetry means not to mix the high and low, serious and popular. There has to be a distinction between two types of poetry that has to be realized, understood and maintained. The best and high poetry is that in which humanity will find solace and support. Arnold expresses these ideas in the following words, "In the poetry, as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay".

Arnold believes that high standard poetry which sustains values to support humanity should be evaluated in terms of qualities. As the best poetry provides criticism of life, the idea about what is the best in poetry must govern our understanding of this evaluation. Judging poetry in these terms forms a real estimate. Arnold observes that the real estimate may sometimes be overpowered or ignored due to the historic and the personal estimates. The historic estimate intervenes when the work of a writer is studied in relation to development of language, literature and thought of a nation. When writer's work is considered to be a stage in this development, it receives more praise than it deserves. Such work is overrated by the critics. It results in a fallacy caused by the historic estimate. In such a case, the work and the writer are praised not for qualities but for historic significance of the work. Similarly, one's likes and dislikes can influence understanding about poets and poetry. Personal biases can lead to faulty estimate of poetry. Illustrating demand of the French people for glorification of earlier works as classics, Arnold claims that this is the case of historic estimate influencing real estimate.

Arnold endorses the concept of classics. He points out the distinction between the high and low, classic and the other works to make the study of classic significant. Historic estimate discourages understanding about a work. Using classic as a standard to judge works enables critics in true opinion formation. The historic estimate interferes more while studying ancient poets. The personal estimate influences views about contemporary or modern poets. Judgements based on historic estimate are not that serious as these are only exaggerated praise of the work. For example, Caedmon, Anglo-Saxon poet, is falsely ranked equal with Milton due to the historic estimate. In the same way, 'Chanson de Roland:Songs of Roland', the oldest French epic poem having immense literary value is wrongly rated as equal to Homer's epic poetry. Arnold disapproves such an attitude and approach in these words: "If our words are to have any meaning, if our judgements are to have any solidity, we must not heap that supreme praise upon poetry of an order immeasurably inferior". The views that treat these two works as of the same order are consequence of application of the historic estimate. They are valued not because of their internal qualities but due to their significance in historical terms. Arnold, therefore, suggests a method to appreciate the work on the basis of its quality and the real estimate.

Arnold suggests that Touchstone Method can provide genuine and real estimate of poetry. It requires to keep in mind "lines and expressions of great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry". This method involves comparison between the poetry of great poets

and the other poetry that we want to evaluate. Some stanzas or even lines of the poems written by great masters are kept in mind and their qualities clearly comprehended. While studying other poems, one tries to see whether they have the qualities of the classics and to what extent or degree. The poems on which the touchstone method is to be applied maybe quite dissimilar to the classics but still this method can be used. When the lines of poetry by a poet are placed against the lines from a classic, the critic having tact to understand the quality of poetry will easily judge the standard of poetry he wants. The lines of very high standard or excellent poetry provide us sense of the best in poetry. This sense of the best is used to find whether it exists in other poetry or not. Instead of using the qualities of poetry in abstract terms, touchstone method takes concrete examples of classics without trying to explain how and why these qualities develop. Arnold explains that the qualities of great poetry are to be found "in the matter and substance of poetry, and they are in the manner and style". In other words, the subject matter or the content style or the form determines the quality of poetry. Using Aristotle's idea, Arnold emphasizes that best poetry possesses "higher truth and higher seriousness". This means that poetry concerns with higher truth of life and culture. The higher standard of subject matter requires higher style of language use. Content and form determine quality of great poetry. "The superior character of truth and seriousness in the matter and substance of best poetry, is inseparable from superiority of diction and movement making its style and manner. The two superiorities are closely related, and are in steadfast proportion one to the other".

Arnold examines poetry from Chaucer to Burns with the touchstone method to have a real estimate. Chaucer's poetry, according to Arnold, has qualities that make it better than French romance poetry. It also has superior substance and style and relates to human perspectives. Chaucer's poetry offers high criticism of life, has liquidness of diction and liberty with language. However, Arnold does not accept Chaucer as a classic. Chaucer's poetry has excellent subject matter and style but lacks high seriousness of a classic.

Arnold also makes reference to Elizabethan poetry and considers it of high merit. The works of Shakespeare and Milton are hailed as classics. Referring to the age of Dryden and Pope, Arnold appreciates their works as great classics in prose and not poetry. He emphasizes, "Though they may write in verse, they may in certain sense be masters of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose". Arnold finds Gray to be a frail classic because he emulated conventions/modes of classical poets from earlier times. His ideas are aped and not emerging from his own consciousness.

By using the touchstone method, Arnold refers to Burns. As Burns was Arnold's contemporary, he had apprehension about personal biases impacting evaluation. Arnold believes that the real Burns is not visible in English poems but in Scotch. The poems of Burns depict ugliness of the world and lack sincerity of high poetry. A few of Burns poems highlight morality and offer criticism of life but these compositions do not have high seriousness of classic poetry of Dante and Homer. Arnold observes that poetry of Burns has truth of matter and style of great classics but does not possess high seriousness. In comparison to Chaucer's poetry, poetry of Burns

has reckless energy. Burns' poetry has qualities like works of Shakespeare and Aristophanes. These qualities, according to Arnold, make Burns a great poet.

Arnold concludes the essay by asserting that the method used by him is objective and provides real estimate of poetry. In times to come popular literature may be liked by people but this literature disregards concept of classics and division between high and low. The confusion of masses with regard to quality of literature could be exploited for commercial gains. Despite the interest of people in popular art, a few will be interested in the best literature. The best and excellent literature, believes Arnold, will maintain supremacy as it is related to human instinct for self-preservation.

1.5 Major Arguments

Poetry, according to Arnold, has immense future. The poetry of the best quality and the highest standard offers true criticism of life. To have an idea of best poetry, one must use a few lines in poetry of great writers as a touchstone. Judging poetry by touchstone method constitutes a real estimate. The historical and personal estimates are fallacious in nature. If content is true and serious, it will automatically be expressed in appropriate form. Classical poetry must possess beauty, truth and grandeur. Criticism functions without prejudices and discriminations or individual choices. The creative efforts of human spirit are superior to critical efforts but criticism enables the development of high literature.

1.6 Conclusion

Matthew Arnold critiqued the cultural, religious, educational and social issues in his writings. He was a humanist who posed questions within the context of modern industrial society. He was critical about narrow mercantile concerns of the nineteenth century. He condemned the mechanized existence vitiated of moral sensibility. He rejected the growing scientific temper and positivism of the age. Arnold's main concern was to tackle the exteriority of industrialized life and move to an interiority of the self. For Arnold, culture and poetry become modes of interiority to nullify the mechanized influential literary essay is not directed at professional men of letters but the middle class having interest in poetry. It is an essay about judgement and evaluation. It insists on social and cultural functions of literature and its ability to civilize human beings.

1.7 Questions

Q1. Is poetry more significant than science and philosophy? Why?
Q2. Why did Matthew Arnold write 'The Study of Poetry'?
Q3. What does Arnold think about Chaucer's poetry?
Q4. Explain Arnold's concept of classics?
Q5. Why is historical estimate fallacious ?

1.8 Suggested Readings

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MAEM24301T

Literary Criticism

Section B

Matthew Arnold The Study of Poetry

Structure

Unit II

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Function of Poetry

2.2 Historical, Personal and Real Estimates

2.3 Touchstone Method and Limitations

2.4 Conclusion

2.5 Questions

2.6 Suggested Readings

2.0 Objectives

This unit will enable us to understand the following:

- the function of poetry
- supremacy of poetry over religion, science and philosophy
- poetic beauty and poetic truth
- Historical and Personal estimates and their fallacies
- Arnold's Touchstone Method

2.1 Function of Poetry

Transcultural and transhistorical poetry contributes to the moral and spiritual development of man. Poetry cultivates in man qualities required for becoming a good citizen. According to Matthew Arnold, 'the future of poetry is immense'. This statement reveals a loss of faith in religion, science and philosophy. It is the best poetry, discerned not by mere personal preference or historical interest but with a 'real estimate' unencumbered by abstractions which 'will find an ever surer and surer stay'. It is the empirical solidity which makes poetry more reliable than those "shadows and dreams and false shows knowledge", religion and philosophy. Science itself will be completed by poetry which in the words of Wordsworth is the "breath and finer spirit all knowledge".

According to T.S Eliot and Lionell Trilling, 'Poetry, in the future, will replace religion.' It is in poetry that the essential religious sentiments coalesce into one spiritual discipline which will come from the ennobling effects of poetry. "More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us." For Arnold poetry and religion are aspects of a wider entity called 'culture' or the total currents of ideas which a given society lives. George Waston comments, "What Arnold wants to replace is sham religion." In the Victorian age, the accepted creeds were collapsing, therefore, Arnold took poetry to be his creed. He finds religion attaching great importance to concrete evidence which he does not approve of. Such a eulogy of poetry make us agree with critics like Garrod who think that Arnold "religion was poetry".

Science, Arnold believes, is soulless and incomplete without poetry; science analyses but poetry synthesizes. It is poetry which is "interpretress of the natural world as well as the moral world and as the interpretress of natural world it is linked with science yet does what science cannot do". The interpretation of science do not give intimate sense of objects as the interpretations of poetry give it. Science appears to a limited faculty and not the whole man. Therefore man will derive succour from poetry Science emphasizes reason which makes mind a machine. Religion inculcates faith which makes one even run away or escape from the earth bound facts. Poetry is based on imaginative reason. Arnold finds it superior to religion and science. Imaginative reason enables to see the spirit of life, critically interpret life.

Science had made breaches in Christianity owing to which it lost its hold on people's imagination. Arnold wanted poetry to fill this void if Philistinism, Americanism and charlatanism were not to become the principle of life. Therefore, he defines poetry as "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty". He uses a similar expression in other works written at different time. These are:

"The end and aim of all literature is . . . criticism of life" (Essay on Joubect, 1864).

“Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life” (Essay on Wordsworth 1879).

“The main end and aim of all our utterance whether in prose or in verse is surely a criticism of life. In poetry, however, the criticism of life has to be made conformally to the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty” (Essays on Byron 1881).

He reaches conclusion that all our utterances are a ‘criticism of life’ which reveals him as a cultural critic. In calling poetry ‘a criticism of life’, he shows that literature cannot be separated from culture. Edward Caird also observes, ‘Literature is a criticism of life exactly in the sense that a good man is criticism of a bad one.’ It is poet’s criticism of life which contributes to its enrichment. By poetic truth and poetic beauty, he means poetry deals with spirit, soul and aesthetics. It appeals to all the faculties of the soul and so to the whole man.

Poetry exists to make life richer and fuller and gives mankind an answer to the question, “How to live?” This poetry in which the spirit of people will find its “consolation and stay” must be “excellent”, “sound” and “true.” Only the ‘best poetry’ will have a “power of forming, sustaining and delighting us”. Poetry is the voice of inner soul. It gives ‘strength’ and ‘joy’ because a poet speaks from the depths of his soul and opens up new vistas of richer life for the readers.

Oliver Elton points out that Arnold has a vehement belief in the high destinies of excellent poetry which illuminates and inspires man to make him better-fitted for the business of living. It clarifies, provides an insight into life, delights man, makes him judge things correctly and confront the rough and tumble of life with fortitude. Excellent poetry holds criticism of life and power of consolation in balance. The poet represents life in such a way to make it illustrative of certain noble ideas which may console, sustain and inspire the readers. Such ideas may be related to the beauty and glory of life despite evil and suffering which are mingled in its tissue; and also the greatness and dignity of man, the spiritual strength that is hidden in his frail body and the high aspirations of his soul with al frailties of his flesh.

Arnold believes that literature educates and forms man, makes him see things, makes him know himself and gives him serenity. He advocates a ‘poetic view of life’ which is neither traditionally religious nor systematically philosophical but rather emotional and moralistic. Arnold opines, “It is criticism that creates the intellectual atmosphere of the age” and also that poetry has power over the will and hearts of men.

Arnold is confident that great work will never lose ‘currency’ and ‘supremacy’. Despite the ‘momentary appearances’ of popular literature the “currency and supreme are insured” to high literature because of the “instinct of self-preservation in humanity”. He thinks that death of good poetry will involve the death of the human heart and soul. Arnold considers popular literature and soul. Arnold considers popular literature or cheap literature to be serving the taste of Barbarians and philistines. F.R. Leavis also believes that literature is meant for elites and it is this minority which brings changes in the society. According to Arnold, high literature or best poetry will not suffer to sink into permanent oblivion because it is ‘best poetry’ which makes men cultured and is

destined to bring about man's salvation from the bondage of philosophy and religion. Rene Wellek observes that Arnold's conception of an ideal man is the one with 'imaginative reason'.

Arnold attached great importance to poetry in an age of materialism and times bereft of faith in religion and moral values. In such a barren age, men started pursuing wrong purposes. In order to fill the vacuum created by the rejection of religious faith, Arnold highlights the spiritual role of best and truly excellent poetry in the essay. The darker colors assumed by Arnold's own sorrow-tainted sensibilities gave his work a didactic and moralistic tone. As Arnold increasingly required his reading to console rather than to animate, he entrusted poetry with the heavy duty of making the truths of religions and morality more effective.

The function of poetry can be summed as: The best poetry; product of fusion of content and style, truth and seriousness; rooted in wisdom and deep human experience that strengthens its readers will to live and instils in them the courage to come to terms with reality. It provides them with sheet anchor in strong sea of life and also acts as a beaconlight in an age where all principles of conduct and human values have ceased to have any meaning. While style is poet's character comprising moral insights, matter is the poet's mind. High seriousness refers to truth of life which is eternal and common to people of different race, clime, country and history.

2.2 Historical, Personal and Real Estimates

Matthew Arnold believes in transforming and culturing human beings through classics. He expounds his famous doctrine of the "touchstones" to judge the poetry of the highest order of excellence or the best poetry that has the power of "forming, sustaining and delighting us". According to him, transcultural and transhistorical poetry which provides a "criticism of life", "interprets life" and consoles us can be appraised with the help of real estimate or the touchstone method. He believes that the excellent poetry in which the spirit of the people will find its "consolation and stay" is best judged by a comparative method.

Arnold proposes a method similar to that suggested by Longinus. He adopts an objective methods and disapproves of the subjective methods, that is, historical and personal estimates. He spells out his criteria, "Neither the historical nor personal approach will aid us. Both approaches are fallacious since these make us praise or dispraise for reasons that have nothing to do with poetry." Historical estimate tends to overestimate the poet conspicuous of his own age but now obscure and forgotten. Personal estimate arouses preferences, affinities, likes, prejudices and thus creates confusion and vagueness about the real worth of a work of art.

It is fallacious to regard "a poet's work as a stage" in the "course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry". Historical estimate looks for historic significance and not the intrinsic merit. Concern with historic origins and historic relationships makes one heap supreme praises upon poetry of an order immeasurably inferior. For instance, Arnold castigates French critic for regarding Chanson de Roland as 'a monument of epic genius'.He concedes that historically the poem is immensely interesting but insists that intrinsically it is not of the highest order, not comparable with Homer.

Although Arnold condemns historical estimate, he is not against historical approach. Arnold like Taine agrees that a knowledge about poet's life and circumstances as well as his social milieu is essential for correct understading but is should not be overemphasized. In case it is given priority, it will distort the real worth of poetry. For example, language is essential for understanding literature but if one has understood language it does not mean that one has understood literature. Similarly, historical approach is required to some extent to understand literature but that does not mean if one has understood the histories, one has understood literature or the true essence of it. Arnold criticizes the "attempts to acquaint oneself with the time and life and historical relationships" of a genuine classic as 'mere literary dilettantism' which hampers in obtaining a clear and deep sense of the work. Arnold desires to escape his own historicism in which he had been imbued since his youth. He believes that historical estimates absorbs history and ignores the essential. He gives the example of Gray, whose talent was suffocated by his age.

Arnold opines criticism gives 'the best that has been thought and not in the world'. However, he believes that the best thought embodied in the best poetry cannot be known by personal estimate. Intrusion of critics' likes and dislikes, personal affinities liking and circumstances have great power to sway our estimate of poet's work. Personal estimate colors one's judgment, makes one blind to the deficiency and makes someone eulogize things insignificant for others. Personal estimate results in hysterical, eruptive and aggressive manner in literature.

Both fallacies historical and personal estimates lead us astray from the real estimate as Arnold calls it is 'a sense for the best, the really excellent'. Real estimate rises above the personal predilections and prejudices. Arnold observes, 'We must read our classics with open eyes, and not with eyes blinded with superstitions . . . We must rate it at its proper value'. One must look for the high poetical quality. The character of high quality of poetry lies within 'the matter and substance, manner and style of poetry and have an accent of high beauty, worth and power'. The substance and matter will possess truth and seriousness and superiority of diction and movement which marks style and manner. Poetry belonging to such class or having such qualities can be discovered only with the help of the touchstone method.

2.3 Touchstone Method and Limitations

Arnold gives infallible lines sovereign fragments from the works of 'great masters' which are to be used as norms for judging the work of others. Touchstone is a standard for judging other things. Touchstone is to have "always in one's mind lines and expressive of the great masters", and to apply them to the poetry of others. He gives concrete examples, which are like the touchstone of the goldsmith. Just as the touchstone enables the goldsmith to sort out spurious gold from genuine gold, likewise the 'infallible touchstones' enable reader to discriminate best poetry from inferior poetry (classic; 'the dubious classic', 'false classic' from the 'real classic'.)

Arnold further says that only if one has 'tact' can one be able to detect "the presence or absence of high poetic quality". This 'tact' can be acquired by readers who are sensitive and possess highly cultivated sensibility and have come in intimate contact with great literature of their country and of other countries also.

Arnold gives single lines and short passages from the works of Homer, Dante, Milton and Shakespeare and calls them 'infallible touchstones.' He quotes the following lines from Hamlet's dying request to Horatio:

“If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,

Absent thee from felicity awhile,

And in this harsh world would draw thy breath in pain

To tell my story.”

Arnold says whenever some poetical work has to be judged for ‘truth and high seriousness superiority of matter and substance, and manner and style’ the lines and passages from Homer, Dante, Milton and Shakespeare should be used as standards. Arnold applies the touchstone method to make an estimate of the works of Chaucer, Burns, Dryden, Pope and Gray whether these are of a classical status or not. Arnold’s touchstone approaches to criticism resembles F.R. Leaves ‘practical criticism’. Arnold refuses to define abstractly what constitutes high quality in poetry preferring simply to have recourse to concrete examples.

Touchstone Method has a number of limitations so it has been severely criticized. Wimsatt and Brooks comment, “This open appeal to the chunklet, the sample piece of precious stuff is a rather startling shift toward the norm of style and away from the initial classic thesis of 1853 that ‘action is all’.” The infallible touchstones are fine passages but as specimens of great poetry, these are extremely limited in range. They are not always representative of their authors. Voluminous authors like Dante cannot be represented by one or two lines.

Arnold’s celebrated proposal to use touchstones as a norm for judging poetry is a contradiction of the insight into unity, an atomistic principle. In using this method, the organic unity of the poem is destroyed. John S. Eels in his book *The Touchstone of Matthew Arnold* strongly criticizes this method and states that passages given by Arnold are themselves based upon personal estimate. These eleven passages quoted as touchstone; three each from Homer, Dante and Milton, two from Shakespeare are all in tone of sadness and melancholy which are reflective of Arnold’s personal melancholia. Scott James observes, ‘Arnold’s pre-conceived notion of moral excellence has twisted his powers of appreciation.’ The whole is greater than the sum of parts so a thing cannot be judged by a few lines. Also, with the passage of time, selected lines may become irrelevant.

A modern poem cannot be judged by the standard or good lines and expressions which held the attention of the people in the times of Homer. Arnold gives no criteria for determining the ‘great masters’ from whose works the lines to be used as touchstones are to be culled. Even a sympathetic critic like Garrod calls this method to be admirable a fooling as that of Aristophanes in the *Frogs*. He calls it selling poetry by the pound.It is the total impression that matters. Comparison with isolated passages cannot be properly used to evaluate the real worth of a poem. The lines that Arnold gives from *Hamlet* are admired because we know everything that leads upto them. But if these lines are spoken to someone who does not really know anything of its context, especially if we divorce it from all literary context, it loses its excellences. Therefore, John S Eels calls Arnold’s touchstone a “critical blunder buss.”

Arnold considers subject to be the most important aspect of poetry. But if poetry is judged by the touchstone method, there is no space for judging the subject. We can only judge by the poetic quality, the style and manner. R.A Scott James is of the view that the comparative method is no doubt of great value, “an invaluable aid to appreciation in approaching any kind of art” but it must be extended to whole works instead of being limited to short passages and lines. “There is no

reason why we should not extend his comparative method, not resting content with detached judgments from isolated passages."

2.4 Conclusion

According to moods and emotions expressed in the touchstone, these can be classified into two groups: grim perception of human life as a tapestry of loss and pain, the pathetic vicissitude of man and a possibility of divine illumination and the joy of submission to the divine will. Those in the first group are not in consonance with his theory of great poetry which provides 'strength and joy'. These second group reflects Arnold's moving towards religion for seeking consolation which again undermines the worth of poetry.

In this essay Arnold has provided us with excellent examples on how to use the comparative method and has enabled us to see that it may be truthful in the highest degree when employed by a critic of tact and understanding. His emphasis on touchstones shows that Arnold's touchstone method is a "tip for mobilizing our sensibility for focusing our relative experiences in a sensitive point, for reminding us vividly what the best is like." It can be concluded that touchstone method strikes a middle way between extremes of subjectivity and objectivity, intellectual and aesthetic charm.

2.5 Questions

Q1. Give a critique of Chaucer's poetry on the basis of Arnold's 'The Study of Poetry'

Q2. Elaborate on the three estimates discussed by Arnold.

Q3. What is touchstone method?

Q4. Can Arnold's touchstone method be applied to assess the quality of modern poetry? Discuss

Q5. Explain the fallacies of personal estimate?

2.6 Suggested Readings

Arnold, Matthew. 'Function of Criticism at the Present Time', *Literary Criticism.* Ed. B. Das, J.M. Mohanty. Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1985.

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M.A English

Semester-III

MAEM24301T

Literary Criticism

Section C

T.S Eliot: *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

Structure

Unit I

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 About T.S Eliot

1.3 Influences on Eliot

1.4 Eliot's Critical Works

1.5 Introduction to 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'

1.6 Objective Correlative

1.7 Unification of Sensibility

1.8 Conclusion

1.9 Questions

1.10 Suggested Readings

1.0 Objectives

This unit will familiarize learners with the following:

- Literary criticism in twentieth century
- Understand the contributions of poet-critic T.S Eliot
- Influences on T.S. Eliot
- Comprehend concept of Objective Correlative
- Critical principles propounded by T.S Eliot

1.1 Introduction

Literary criticism in the 20th century England witnessed the rise of a wide range of critical theories due to the influence of studies related to psychology, sociology, Anthropology and economics. English criticism, from the mid Victorian age, demonstrated a break from the Romantic theory. There was a perceivable shift towards objective criticism which started with Matthew Arnold's Touchstone method of analyzing poetry. T.S. Eliot took this trend ahead which moved further into the culmination of Anglo-American school of New Criticism.

Eliot's critical enterprise focused on ideas of individualism, externalization of internal emotion, depersonalized poetry and novelty. According to Romantic theory, individual work is opposed to tradition and conventions. Modern criticism saw the emergence of novel critical theories and insights from T.S Eliot, F.R. Leavis, I.A Richards and William Empson. They provided new interpretations of contemporary and earlier works. Matthew Arnold's intellectual and objective criticism and Walter Pater's impressionist criticism were leading critical practices. Arnold gave importance to 'high seriousness' and 'criticism of life' as categories crucial for estimating the value of poetry. Arnoldian criticism was a major cornerstone of T.S Eliot's critical theories. Walter Pater advocated 'art for art's sake' and that enjoyment of art and appreciation of beauty would benefit human life. Therefore, art should be free from any social obligation. Later, Pater inspired the Bloomsbury group of critics including E.M Forster, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey and Clive Bell. These critics assessed literary work on the basis of pleasure derived from it.

1.2 About T.S Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), an American-English poet and critic, is known for his contribution to literary criticism. His works mark a shift from Romantic tradition. He pioneers the Modernist movement in poetry. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, T.S Eliot received education at Smith Academy in St.Louis; Milton Academy in Massachusetts; Harvard University and Oxford University. Eliot taught French and Latin at Highgate School. In 1917, he served as a bank clerk in Lloyds Bank Ltd. He was a reviewer and essayist. Eliot's poetic career can be organized into three periods: the first coinciding with his studies and culminating in *The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock* (1911); the second coincided with World War I, financial and marital stress culminating in *The Waste Land* (1922) and the third coincided with rise of Nazism and Eliot's resentment to economic depression culminating in *Four Quartets* (1943).

T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land* expresses disenchantment and disillusionment of the period after World War I. In a series of loosely linked episodes and legend of the search for the Grail, it portrays a sterile world of lust and of human beings waiting for redemption. The complex poem and allusions used are explained by Eliot. This explanation supplemented to the poem distracted readers and critics as they could not perceive the originality of the poem that rendered universal human predicament of seeking redemption. In his earlier poems, Eliot used many poetic phrases. *The Waste Land* revealed him as a metrist of great virtuosity, capable of modulations ranging from the sublime to the conversational. The five sections of *The Waste Land* proceed on a principle of "rhetorical discontinuity" reflecting fragmented experience of the twentieth-century sensibility of modern cities of the West. Eliot reveals hopelessness and confusion about the purpose of life in the secularized city and the decay of *urbs aeterna* (the "eternal city"). This theme of *The Waste Land* is concretized by the poem's constant rhetorical shifts and

juxtapositioning of contrasting styles. *The Waste Land* is not a simple contrast of the heroic past with the degraded present. Rather, it is timeless sensitizing readers about moral grandeur and evil.

Eliot observed that the poet-critic must write "programmatic criticism"—that is, criticism expressing the poet's own interests as a poet, different from historical scholarship, without referring to the poet in his background. Eliot's criticism created an atmosphere in which his own poetry could be better comprehended and appreciated without reference to the standards of the preceding age. In his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot asserts that tradition as used by the poet, is simply not repetition of work of the immediate past ("novelty is better than repetition," he said); rather, it has the whole of European literature, from Homer to the present. The poet writing in English, observes Eliot, may create his own tradition by using materials from the past period, in any language. This point of view is "programmatic" as it disposes the reader to accept the revolutionary novelty of Eliot's polyglot quotations and serious parodies of other poets' styles in *The Waste Land*.

1.3 Influences on Eliot

The anti-romantic attitude in Eliot was due to the influence of Ezra Pound, Irving Babbit, Paul Elmer More and T.E. Hulme. Human nature, according to Eliot, is essentially impure and finite. The view of man's essential goodness was rejected by Hulme. He asserted that for the realisation of great creative work, belief in Original Sin was necessary. Hulme believed in recognizing limitations of poetry and it could in no way be substitute for religion as Arnold and Pater attempted to prove. In his conception of objective correlative. Eliot was also influenced by French symbolists and Ezra Pound in the concept of objective correlative. Symbolists argued that poetry cannot express emotions directly but can only evoked. Boudelaire maintained that every shade, sound and odour framed an idea of the appropriate emotion and every visual image had its equivalent in other fields. Mallarme insisted that poetry was made not of ideas but words and devoted himself to explore the potentiality of the words. Image, according to Pound, is the union of sense and thought. An image is that which represents and intellectual emotional complex in an instant of time. In *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), Pound says that 'poetry is a sort of inspired mathematics which gives us equations not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres and the like but equations for the human emotions. Eliot's concept of 'objective correlative' is the outcome of this 'equations for the emotions' mentions Pound.

1.4 Eliot's Critical Works

Eliot was one of the most prominent literary figures in the twentieth century British literature. He significantly contributed to all the genres of literature. Eliot's poetic genius was first noticed by Ezra Pound who assisted in the publication of his work in the number of magazines, norably 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' in 1915. His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, was published in 1917. The monumental poem of the 20th century 'The Wasteland' was published in 1922 and Eliot gained reputation as a poet. By 1930, and the next 30 years, he became the most dominant figure in English literary criticism and literature.

As a poet, Eliot praised English Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, especially John Donne and the nineteenth century French symbolist poets, Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue. He was drawn by their radical innovations and poetic techniques as well as subject matter. The poems of Eliot voiced the disillusionment of the post-World War I generation. As a critic, he made huge impact on contemporary literary taste. Eliot was against the close scrutiny of work carried out by

the New Critics. He labelled these critics as “lemon-squeezers” because they focussed on words very closely. He converted to orthodox Christianity in the late thirties due to social and religious conservatism that was evident in his early literary career. He received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

Among the notable works by Eliot are poems, prose, drama, fiction, essays and critical articles/books.

Collected Poems (1962)

Four Quartets (1943)

The Waste Land (1922)

To Criticize the Critic (1965)

The Three Voices of Poetry (1954)

On Poetry and Poets (1957)

After Strange Gods (1933)

The Sacred Wood (1920)

Essays Ancient and Modern (1936)

Sweeney Agonistes (1924)

Murder in the Cathedral (1935)

The Family Reunion (1939)

The Cocktail Party (1950)

Notes towards a Definition of Culture (1948)

The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933)

1.5 Introduction to ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’

“Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919) postulates Eliot's concepts about poetry and the importance of tradition. Eliot emphasizes the need for critical thinking --"criticism is as inevitable as breathing". The word "tradition" connotes that the poet is ‘too traditional’. Eliot argues for praising poetic features which are more individual and differentiate a poet from others. Even the most "individual" parts of a poet's work may be replete with the influence of his poetic ancestors. Eliot emphasizes on the objective and intellectual element. Literature of the past will be "in the bones" of the poet with the true historical sense, " a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." A poet cannot have complete meaning by himself. For proper assessment, one must set a poet, for contrast and comparison, among the dead poets. Eliot envisages a dynamic relationship between past and present writers in this essay. "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them." An artist can be judged only by the standards of the past. It does not mean the standards of dead critics but a judgement of two things, the old and the new, are measured by each other. This resembles to Matthew Arnold's

"touchstone"; the "ideal order" formed by the "existing monuments" provide the standard, a land of touchstone, for evaluation. As with Arnold's touchstones, Eliot's ideal order is subjective and in need of modification from time to time.

Eliot lays stress on the artist knowing "the mind of Europe -- the mind of his own country--a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind". But he does not mean pedantic knowledge, he means a consciousness of the past, and a few persons have a greater sensitivity to this historical awareness. Eliot states, "Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum." Throughout Eliot's poetry and criticism, we find this emphasis on the artist surrendering himself to greater authority. His later political and religious writings also valorized authority. Eliot worked within his own cultural space: religion meant Christianity, while literature, culture and history meant exclusively European literature, culture or history.

Tradition, for Eliot, means an awareness of the history of Europe. This awareness is not knowledge of dead facts but as a ever-changing yet changeless presence, constantly interacting subconsciously with the individual poet. He wants the poet to merge his personality with the tradition. "The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." He suggests the analogy of the catalyst in a scientific laboratory for this process of depersonalization. The mind of the poet is a medium for experiences forming new combinations. When oxygen and sulphur dioxide are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphuric acid. This combination takes place only in the presence of platinum, which is the catalyst. But the sulphuric acid shows no trace of platinum, which remains unaffected. The catalyst facilitates the chemical change, but does not participate in it, and remains unchanged. Eliot compares the mind of the poet to the shred of platinum, which will "digest and transmute the passions which are its material". Eliot shifts the critical focus from the poet to the poetry, and asserts, "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry." Eliot sees the poet's mind as "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together." He says that concepts like "sublimity", "greatness" or "intensity" of emotion are not very relevant. It is not the greatness of the emotion but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the artistic fusion takes place, that is more important. In this way he rejects the Romantic emphasis on 'genius' and the exceptional mind.

Eliot disapproves the idea that poetry is the expression of the personality of the poet. Experiences important for the man may have no place in his poems, and vice-versa. The emotions roused by events in the personal life of the poet are not relevant. The emotion transmuted into poetry and the feelings expressed in the poetry are significant. "Emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him". Eliot rejects Wordsworth's theory of poetry (Wordsworth's comments on poetry in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads: "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility.") For Eliot, poetry is not recollection of feeling, "it is a new thing resulting from the concentration of a very great number of experiences . . . it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation." Eliot believes that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." For him, the emotion of art is impersonal, and the artist can achieve this impersonality only by cultivating the historical sense, by being conscious of the tradition.

Eliot's idea of tradition is rather narrow in two respects. First, he ignores that the poetic tradition is a complex amalgam of written and oral poetry and other elements. It was only in later writings that he realised the fact that in making of verse many elements are involved. In his poetic drama, he gives evidence of having broadened his scope. Second, Eliot is neglecting other traditions that aid social formations. In "Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry," Eliot claims that Pound's mastery is due to escape from rigid forms and systems of metric. The mastery and escape motif is quite evident in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." "Escape from personality," Eliot claims, is possible only for the few who have personality; similarly, "escape from emotion" is possible only for the few who have strong emotions. The poetic genius/mastery involves both knowledge of and control over something. The modernist dialectic is a dynamic interplay of conflicts. Jewels Spears Brooker explains "Escape, however, is not linear movement to an opposite or to a synthesis. It is not escape from one's most recent position, but escape to a broader perspective; it is a transcendence (via a return) in which, as Eliot says of tradition, nothing is lost en route. According to the concept as it culminates in *Four Quartets*, escape is a liberation effected by a return, after knowledge, to the place from which one started. In Eliot's case, the use of the "mastery and escape" motif is deliberate and informed by serious studies in philosophy, studies that shaped not only his critical mind but also his poetry." Eliot also coined certain phrases like 'objective correlative', 'dissociation of sensibility' and 'unified sensibility'.

1.6 Objective Correlative

Eliot uses the phrase 'objective correlative' in his essay 'Hamlet and His Problem' to express the idea that emotion in poetry should employ an appropriate objective correlative. According to Eliot, objective correlative is 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula' for the poet's emotion so that 'when the external facts are given the emotion is at once evoked'.

Hamlet, according to Eliot, is an artistic failure because external conditions do not adequately represent effects of a mother's guilt on her son. The audience cannot relate to excessively presented disgust of Prince Hamlet because the images, characters and action in the play only externalize the disturbed state of Hamlet. However, in *Macbeth* the dramatist reveals agony of Lady Macbeth through sleep-walking scene to shoe an unconscious repetition of her past actions and guilt. Her despair is made objective so that it can be seen as well as felt by the audience. In this case, the external situation adequately communicates the emotional upheaval in Lady Macbeth. Instead of imposing emotions of the character on audience, the dramatist uses a situation or chain of events which indirectly convey the emotions of the character to the audience. Without the use of direct verbal expression, situations and events are employed to arourse similar emotions in the reader. Hence, the emotions get depersonalized.

1.7 Unification of Sensibility and Dissociation of Sensibility

Eliot uses the phrase 'unification of sensibility' in his essay 'The English Metaphysical Poets'. By unification of sensibility, Eliot means a fusion of thought and feeling, recreation of thoughts into feelings, a direct sensuous apprehension of thought. Metaphysical poets showed unification of sensibility wherein there was a union of thought and feeling. However, dissociation of sensibility had set in the late seventeenth century where there was a split between thought and feeling, which is the evident in the poetry of Dryden and Milton. According to Eliot, Present poetry has not be able to recover from such this harmony between thought and feeling. In order to express his appreciation of metaphysical poets, Eliot explains: 'Tennyson and Browning are poets; and they think, but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought

to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility.' Eliot sees the harmonious blend of thought and emotions in the poetry of Donne but Browning and Tennyson fail to transmit ideas into emotions and sensations. Great poetry cannot be written by using logic or intellect. Feelings and thoughts in a mature poet are experiences as odour of a rose, while in the case of immature poet it cannot be. The commemorative plaque on the church wall bears his chosen epitaph from *Four Quartets*, "In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning."

1.8 Conclusion

T.S Eliot was a poet critic who gave importance to society and culture. His literary essays presented a view of the great artist as a part of tradition.Eliot is inseparably linked with international modernism. His mind and his art exemplify in rich particularity the tapestry of modernism. His understanding of history, especially of the relation of the past to the present and the future, descended from the nineteenth-century thinkers such as Marx, Nietzsche, and Pater. Eliot's concept of tradition and the mind of Europe, again inherited from the late nineteenth century but modified to reflect his own analysis of the cultural crisis of the early part of the twentieth century, is indispensable for an appreciation of the works of Yeats, Valery, Joyce, and other contemporaries. Eliot's intellectual comprehensiveness-more specifically, his rejection of synthesis and his insistence on a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" logic-illustrates a foundational pattern in modernist art and thought." Eliot refuted the concept of poetry as an expression of emotion and emphasized on its impersonality. He used the phrase the 'objective correlative' to describe representation of emotions in literature. He focused on the importance of tradition in several essays. His concept of history was linked to the concept of tradition and individuality. His anti-romantic stand was evident in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. His style of writing was characterized by precision and objectivity

1.9 Questions

Q1. Discuss T.S Eliot's contribution to English literature.

Q2. T.S Eliot was influenced by a few critics. Elaborate

Q3. What do you know about 'objective correlative'?

Q4. Explain the term 'historical sense' as used by Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

1.10 Suggested Readings

Blamires, Harry. *A History of Literary Criticism*. Delhi: Macmillan, 2001.

Eliot, T.S. 'Tradition and Individual Talent', *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Modernism through Poststructuralism*. Ed. Robert Con Davis. New York and London: Longman, 1986.

M.A English

Semester-III

MAEM24301T

Literary Criticism

Section C

T.S Eliot: *Tradition and Individual Talent*

Structure

Unit II

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Eliot's Idea of Tradition

2.2 Tradition and Historical Sense

2.3 Sense of Tradition and Continuity

2.4 Impersonal theory of Poetry

2.5 Criticism

2.6 Conclusion

2.7 Questions

2.8 Suggested Reading

2.0 Objectives

This unit will enable learners to understand the following:

- Idea of tradition
- Historical Sense
- Importance of past, present and future
- Continuity of literature
- Impersonal theory of poetry

2.1 Eliot's Idea of Tradition

'Tradition and the Individual Talent' was originally published in two parts in *The Egoist* (1919). The essay was later included in Eliot's book of essays and criticism *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* in 1920. Eliot's critical principles and idea of tradition are highlighted in this essay. Eliot delineates the importance of sense of history in writing and understanding poetry. He argues for impersonality of poetry. The essay is divided into three parts. Part I explains idea of tradition. Part II deals with Eliot's theory of impersonality of poetry. Part III sums up the critical assessment expounded by Eliot.

'Tradition and Individual Talent', regarded as a "classic of our criticism" by F.W Baton is Eliot's seminal essay. It begins a new epoch in the history of literary criticism, a deviation from the New Humanists concept of literary tradition. In this Eliot, the precursor of New Criticism, proposes a radically new way of looking at works of art. He rejects the earlier tendency of giving credence to a compartmentalized view of time with the past, present and future being treated as frozen and well-demarcated blocks. Eliot points out that "honest criticism and sensitive appreciation" of literature is impossible unless one takes a dynamic view of tradition, regarding it as an organic whole comprising the past as well as the present; to realize "not only the pastness of the past, but of its presence".Eliot turns tradition into an alive and a pulsating force which can be harnessed to artistic advantage through the historical sense.

In "After Strange God" (1934) Eliot describes tradition as "rather a way of feeling and acting which characterizes a group throughout generations" It involves "habitual actions, habits and custom" representing the "blood kinship of the same people living in the same place". R. P Blackmur observes, "Tradition for Eliot is the weapon and resource of individual talent." A common vocabulary and background are necessary for communication or else the literary world would break up into small, isolated groups. Therefore, in order to avoid anarchy it is essential to respect the past as a "life giving tree on which the branch of the present was putting forth fruit." In *The Sacred Wood*, he says that it is "part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition to see literature steadily and to see it as a whole."

2.2 Tradition and Historical Sense

According to Eliot there are two traditions in the sphere of art and literature in the western world. First, there is the tradition specific to a country or society and European tradition. Tradition is a recognition of the continuity of literature, critical judgment of writers of past significant in the present and a knowledge about these writers.Eliot shares the view held by Babbit and Ezra Pound that tradition is much more than what it connotes in common parlance, that it does not imply just a transfer of traits from one generationto the other and to cultivate in not to imitate. In his attempt to go beyond Babitt and Pound, he points out that conformity to tradition and originality are not mutually exclusive notions. The 'peculiar essence of man' and even 'the most individual' parts of a poets work "may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors assert their immortality most vigorously." On this Sean Lucy comments "A balance between the control of a system and the freedom of inspiration is essential to art. If the control is lost, the result is creative anarchy, if the freedom is lost, the result is creative sterility."

Eliot attacks the conception of romantic theory of literature: poetry is the product of the inspiration of the poet. They regard the personality of the poet as of great importance. The 'personalist theory of poetry' postulates freedom from all traditional influences. But Eliot stresses tradition. Tradition, he says, is not "blind adherence to the ways of previous generation. It is not a slavish or passive imitation and calls 'novelty better than 'repetition.' Tradition cannot be inherited. It is obtained through historical sense. The historical sense involves a perception "not only of the pastness of the past but also of presence. One who has the historical sense feels that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer down to his own day . . . forms one continuous literary tradition." With the addition of a new work there is a modification in the 'whole'.

Historical sense does not mean that a poet should know only a few poets whomhe admires. This is a signof immaturity and inexperience. Neither should a poet be content merely to know some particular age or period he likes because it will not constitutea sense of tradition. Tradition is acquired and consciousness of past be developed throughoutone's career. Some have to 'sweat for it' but a few can 'absorb knowledge' easily. It does not require bookish knowledge. Eliot believes that "much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility". He illustrates this point with the example of Shakespeare who acquired essential history from the reading of "Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum." The poet should not merely read best writers, the first order mind, the Genius, the Great man but even the 'secondary writers' are important for acquiring the links between the past and the present.

2.3 Sense of Tradition and Continuity

The past and present are not disparate segments of time but two facets of the same organism. It is this historical sense that "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones but with a feeling that the whole of the literature . . . has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order". The whole is coherent and has a continuity. Tradition is not dead but a 'simultaneous order'. The new work is not 'original' as its newness is to be defined in relation to the existing order. So a new work must both change and conform to tradition. New work brings a delicate readjustment and modification in the entire gamut of relations and values within the organic whole. The really new implies the use of methods based in tradition practices adapted to poet's material. It is in this sense of the "timeless as well as of the temporal together." In *Four Quartets* Eliot writes, "The past experience revived in the meaning Is not the experience of one life only But of many generations; Time the destroyer is time the preserver."

The poet or writer has to be well-saturated in literature of past and present to generate in him a feeling for all literature as a collective personality that is belonging to an ideal order. On the arrival of the new work of art 'the existing monuments' which form and ideal order undergo a modification and a re-ordering of the whole edifice. This makes Eliot's concept of tradition dynamic. He believes that there is a reciprocal relationship between the past and the present. In art, as in life, the past and the present act and react on each other so the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. Every great poet like Virgil, Dante adds

something to the literary tradition out of which the future poetry will be written. The past writers help in judging the new; the new in turn help place the previous writers and artists. It is for this reason that "no poet no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone," his significance is belonging to a tradition. Thus tradition gives poet a feeling of belonging; he does not exist in isolation but belongs to a distinguished family of poets.

A sense of tradition is an important part of the literary critic's equipment. The past gives the critic a standard and pattern for analysis and comparison. He uses the past to help the true development of the present and to judge and measure the present. The critic has an important role in re-orienting the view of tradition. In and *The Use of Poetryand the Use of Criticism*, he points out, "From time to time, every hundred years or so . . . critic shall appear to review the past . . . and set the poets and the poems in a new order."

Eliot believes that a sense of tradition leads to impersonality in art. Historical sense enriches the personality and provides the poet subjects and themes. George Watson remarks, "it is an odd historical sense that denies chronology and conceives of the past both as 'timeless and temporal'. He says, "What Eliot calls historical is actually unhistorical".

2.4 Impersonal theory of Poetry

Eliot's being a legislative critic expounds the personal theory of poetry, essential for the creative process, for the budding poets. He believes that art of the poet is not one of self-expression but one self-denial:"The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." In order to objectify a work and universalize it, depersonalization is of paramount importance. The greater the extent to which a writer is able to transcend the limitations of his self, the more varied and profound will be the appeal of his work. The process of creation artist must surrender to the work. An artist must overcome the temptations to articulate his personal feelings. The poet and the man, Eliot asserts are two different beings altogether, the former alchemizes the purely personal experiences of the latter into an art fact of beauty and order. Eliot's concept of creative process often assumes the dimensions of a religious experience. He seems to reaffirm, in literary context, the belief that he who giveth his life on the earth shall regain it in heaven. So does a writer achieve a fuller existence in his work by shearing off all personal eccentricities and oddities. The theory has two aspects: it expresses the relation between the poet and literary tradition and the relation of poet with himself in creation of work of art.

Eliot's theory of impersonal poetry is in direct contrast to Wordsworth's emotion recollected in tranquility." He believes good poetry cannot be the product of subjective impulses or the inner voice and lack of subjectivity to outside authority might lead to chaos. This also corresponds to the view that man is imperfect and perfection can be attained by subjection to outside authority. According to Eliot, emotions are not reflected in tranquility, the experiences unite to produce a new thing. Eliot states, "the bad poet is usually conscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious." Such an error brings in a 'personal'

element in poetry. Eliot believes "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotions but escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."

The process of poetic creation is presented with scientific definiteness and clarity through a chemical process. He gives the process of formation of sulphuric acid in a gas chamber when a piece of platinum is introduced into the gas chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide, sulphuric acid is formed but the platinum itself remains unchanged. Similarly, the mind of the poet is the shred of Platinum which acts upon emotions and feelings which are like the gases to bring new combination of emotions. In this process the mind like the catalyst platinum undergoes no change. Impressions and experiences important for man may find no place in poetry. In a perfect artist mind which creates are separate. The mind digests and transmutes the passions into wider and universal things. It does not mirror the personality of the poet.

Eliot holds:"Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry." This reveals that there is no connection between the poet's personality and the poem. "The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images which . . . unite to form a new compound." The mind is a passive agent which stores heterogeneous experiences out of which 'new compound' is formed. The emotion expressed in the poem (new compound) is not the same as experienced by the poet. According to Eliot, the mind when seizing the experience may be unaware of the significance of the moment like Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' : "I gazed and gazed but little thought what wealth the show to me had brought." The poet's mind works in its own free way. The poet is not an ordinary man who shall remain perennially ungrafted with any striking experience and who forgetting it forever passes onto all that next comes his way like an exceptional child the impression fixes itself and then at the opportune moment springs out from hiding places even twenty years deep. Until the new compound is formed no true poetry can be created and the phrases, images or feelings stored in the mind will remain personal experiences of the poet.

The quality of a poem does not depend on the greatness of emotion which it expresses. It is not the greatness or intensity of emotion "but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure . . . under which the fusion takes place, that counts." Thus poetry is organization rather than inspiration. His mind forms the new compounds but he remains separate from what he creates. In great art, "the difference between art and the event is always absolute."

The classicist theory of Impersonality is reinforced by Eliot's assertion that tradition and individual artist are related. If a writer derives his bearings from the traditional heritage, he will obviously hesitate from indulging in mere personal feelings and emotions. Eliot takes poetry out of two domain of the romantic theory of the inspired poet, unfettered in his flight. He says that extinction of poet's personality and surrender of the private mind to the collective mind is essential for attaining impersonality. He says, "the mind of Europe the mind of his county is more important than his private mind." He says that the collective mind the ideal order of tradition, is not something like a 'dead weight' or a 'lifeless' corpse but is alive and goes on changing and developing. By making poetry impersonal, Eliot seeks to save it from the wayward fancies of the

personal to show it a way of artistic perfection by means of cultivating historical sense and insisting upon striking balance between the past and the present.

True poetry is impersonal in the sense that the man who experiences and the poet who creates cannot be one and the same person: "the more perfect the artist, the more completely. separate in him will be the man, who suffers and the mind which creates". Personality must be sacrificed at the altar of aesthetic "perfection to attain impersonality. Poetry is not direct expression of personality. Eliot says, "Shakespeare too was occupied with the struggle to transmute his personal agonies into and impersonal." Poet escapes into artistic experience which is very much removed from personal experience and has no place in the history of the poet. This is so because the emotion of art is different from emotion of artist. The impressions and experiences combine in unexpected ways making it what Archibald MacLeish says, "A poem does not mean, it is." Eliot explains difference between the artistic emotion and personal emotion of the poet with the help of "Ode to Nightingale" that contains a number of personal emotions which have nothing to do with the nightingale. "The difference between art and event is always absolute. Eliot thus rejects subjectivism and believes that experiences which are important in poetry have no significance for man.

Eliot holds the view that the working of the mind of a poet is different from that of an ordinary man. "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic." The experiences of the poet undergo complete metamorphosis and come out as new wholes which are depersonalized wholes. Eliot says the progress of an artist is a continual self sacrifice and extinction of personality But this does not mean that Eliot advocates a total ban on the expression of personality which occurs indirectly. The personal experience is transformed as it is the material of art.

Eliot's impersonal theory is reworking of emotional material. His theories of objective correlative, Dissociation of sensibility and auditory Imagination combine to give a concrete shape to his theory of impersonality. The impersonality associated with modernism rejects Wordsworthian preoccupation with the self. Eliot's theory of impersonality contains subdued echoes of many voices detached cosmopolitan tone of Laforgue and of Anton Ehrenzweig who saw the creative process as an inherently sacrificial activity and of Gormont who believed: "Life is a process of sloughing off and peeling off the superficial and inauthentic elements in personality."

2.5 Criticism

Inspite of its comprehensiveness, Eliot's theory of impersonality remains open to over objections by critics. It is not without its inherent contradictions and tautologies. Eliot's argument about the perfection of an artist rather tenuous. He makes distinction between the man who suffers and the mind which creates but such dichotomy is impossible. Eliot goes to extreme in the advocacy of his theory. If his theory is taken, we must reject the romantic poets as inferior. According to critics, the poet can pay due allegiance to tradition and yet seek an outlet for his

personality also. For Lord Byron, it is said that the poet is the man and the man is the poet. So Eliot takes just one-sided view. He does not clearly differentiate the terms emotions and feelings.

The scientific accuracy of the catalyst analogy has been questioned. It is difficult to understand how scientific terms such as a catalyst, pressure could be reconciled to purely aesthetic consideration relating to feelings, emotions and impersonality. Critics have objected to the mechanical implication of his remark that the poet's mind is a receptacle to form a new compound. Stephen Spender considers the analogy of sulphuric acid a crude scientific metaphor "probably the most pretentious and questionable of his scientific analogies." Spender feels that scientific model tends to distract from the poetic behavior it is supposed to describe and focuses the reader on the model itself, "and young Mr. Eliot is held up before the reader as a white-coated laboratory assistant."

When we turn to Eliot's early poem like 'Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady' and his work such as *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*, his presence is felt in these. This weakens Eliot's stand point of objectivity. F.R. Leavis criticizes the essay for "its ambiguities, its logical inconsequences, its pseudo precisions and its fallaciousness" and detects a "defeat of intelligence" in a view of impersonality that assumes separation between art and life.

Eliot's theory may be criticized for its occasional brashness but there is no doubt that it served a useful and necessary function in insisting that poem in some sense has its own life, that its parts form something different from a body of neatly ordered biographical data and that the feeling or emotion or vision resulting from the poem different form the feeling or emotion of the poet. It can concluded in the words of George Waston who says "that the emotion of art is impersonal." It has "its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet."

2.6 Conclusion

Eliot's essay provides a new perspective of looking at works of literary art. George Cattaui says that Eliot's own verse is a remarkable example of the interaction between the past and the present. Cattaui stresses that Eliot's concept of tradition is an outgrowth of his own requirements and anxieties as a creative writer. His search for viable resources of creativity led him to consider the utility of traditions when beliefs related to tradition were assumed to be exhausted. Eliot's reflection on the potential uses of tradition not only added an unexplored dimension to his own poetry but gave a direction to literary theory that has not been easy to reverse or supersede. Tradition is not an inert lump composed of the contributions of dead poets and artists but is a principle of order as opposed to anarchy, an artistic norm which may become the locus of a writer's significance

2.7 Questions

Q1. Is there continuity in tradition? Explain

Q2. Discuss T S Eliot's theory of impersonality.

Q3. Why do critics argue about Eliot's theory of impersonality?

2.8 Suggested Readings

Ackyord, Peter. *T.S.Eliot.* Penguin, 1993.

Gordon, Lyndall. T.S.Eliot:An Imperfect Life. W.W. Norton and Company, 2000.

MAEM24301T

Literary Criticism

Section D

Elaine Showalter: *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*

Structure

Unit 1

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 About the Author

1.3 Historical Background/Context

1.4 About the text

1.5 Showalter and Other Feminist Critics

1.6 Reception and Impact of Showalter's Essay

1.7 Relevance of Showalter's Ideas to Contemporary Issues

1.8 Conclusion

1.9 Questions

1.10 Suggested Readings

1.0 Objectives:

This unit will introduce readers to the following:

- Key Components of Feminism
- Explore the Historical Development of Feminism
- Offer Insights into Feminist Literary Criticism
- Apply Showalter's Ideas to Contemporary Issues

1.1 Introduction:

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement that advocates for the rights, equality, and empowerment of all genders, particularly women, who historically have been marginalised and oppressed in various societies around the world. At its core, feminism seeks to challenge and dismantle systems of patriarchy, which prioritise male dominance and control over social, political, and economic institutions, and to create a more just and equitable society for all individuals, regardless of gender identity or expression.

Key Components:

The key components of feminism include:

Gender Equality: Feminism advocates for equal rights and opportunities for people of all genders. This encompasses legal and political rights, such as the right to vote, own property, and participate in decision-making processes, as well as social and economic rights, such as access to education, healthcare, employment, and equal pay for equal work.

Empowerment: Feminism aims to empower individuals to assert their autonomy, agency, and voice in all aspects of their lives. This involves challenging restrictive gender norms and expectations that limit individuals' choices and opportunities based on their gender identity or expression.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a central concept in feminism that recognises the interconnected nature of social identities and systems of oppression, including those based on race, class, sexuality, disability, and other axes of identity. Intersectional feminism acknowledges that individuals experience multiple forms of discrimination and privilege simultaneously, and seeks to address the complex intersections of power and oppression.

Social Justice: Feminism is fundamentally concerned with social justice and the transformation of social, political, and economic structures to address inequalities and injustices. This includes advocating for policies and practices that promote equity and inclusion, as well as challenging systemic discrimination and violence against marginalised communities.

Solidarity and Advocacy: Feminism emphasises the importance of collective action, solidarity, and allyship in the struggle for gender equality. This involves supporting and amplifying the voices of marginalised individuals and communities, as well as engaging in advocacy, activism, and organising efforts to effect systemic change.

It is important to note that feminism is not a monolithic or homogeneous movement, but rather encompasses a diverse range of perspectives, ideologies, and strategies for social change. Different strands of feminism, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, intersectional feminism, and ecofeminism, offer distinct analyses of gender oppression and approaches to feminist activism and scholarship. Ultimately, feminism is a dynamic and evolving movement that continues to adapt and respond to the changing social, political, and cultural contexts of the world. While progress has been made in advancing gender equality and women's rights, feminism remains a critical force for challenging systemic injustices and envisioning a more equitable and inclusive future for all genders.

Feminism, as a multifaceted social and political movement, has been a driving force behind the pursuit of gender equality and justice for centuries. Rooted in the recognition of systemic injustices and inequalities experienced by women and marginalised genders, feminism has evolved through various waves and iterations, each responding to the changing socio-political landscapes of its time. This section offers a comprehensive exploration of feminism, delving into its historical origins, key ideologies, influential movements, and contemporary challenges.

Origin and Development:

The roots of feminism can be traced back to the Enlightenment era, with early thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft advocating for women's rights and education in the late 18th century. The first wave of feminism emerged in the 19th century, marked by movements for women's suffrage, property rights, and access to education. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 in the United States, led by figures such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, laid the groundwork for organised feminist activism and the demand for legal and political reforms.

Early Roots (18th-19th Centuries): The roots of feminism can be traced back to the Enlightenment era, where thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft argued for women's rights and education in works such as "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792). The first wave of feminism emerged in the 19th century, primarily in Western Europe and North America, focusing on issues such as women's suffrage, property rights, and access to education. The Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 marked a significant milestone, where activists including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony drafted the Declaration of Sentiments, demanding women's rights to vote and own property.

First Wave Feminism (Late 19th-Early 20th Centuries): First-wave feminism reached its peak in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with suffrage movements gaining momentum in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and parts of Europe. Notable achievements include the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in the United States in 1920, granting women the right to vote, and similar legislative reforms in other countries. First-wave feminists also campaigned for legal reforms, such as divorce and property rights, and advocated for women's access to higher education and participation in the workforce.

Interwar Period and Second Wave Feminism (1920s-1960s): The interwar period saw a lull in feminist activism, but the seeds of second-wave feminism were sown during this time, particularly with the rise of socialist and Marxist feminist movements. Second-wave feminism emerged in the 1960s, fuelled by the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, and the broader cultural upheavals of the era. Key issues of second-wave feminism included reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, sexual liberation, and the critique of traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures. Influential texts such as Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" (1963) and Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" (1949) provided theoretical foundations for second-wave feminism.

Global Expansion and Intersectionality (1970s-1980s): Second-wave feminism spread globally, with movements emerging in countries around the world, often in response to colonialism, imperialism, and authoritarian regimes. The concept of intersectionality, popularised by scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlighted the intersecting forms of oppression faced by women based on factors such as race, class, sexuality, and disability. Feminist activism diversified to address a broader range of issues, including environmental justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and the rights of indigenous and marginalised communities.

Third Wave Feminism and Beyond (1990s-Present): The 1990s saw the emergence of third-wave feminism, characterised by a focus on individualism, diversity, and the deconstruction of binary gender norms. Third-wave feminists embraced new forms of media and technology to amplify their voices and challenge mainstream representations of femininity.

Fourth-wave feminism: The fourth wave, which began in the late 2000s, further emphasised online activism, grassroots organising, and the intersectional analysis of power and privilege.

Contemporary feminist movements continue to address ongoing challenges such as gender-based violence, economic inequality, reproductive justice, and the backlash against women's rights.

Throughout its history, feminism has evolved and adapted in response to changing social, political, and cultural contexts, while remaining committed to the core principles of gender equality, justice, and empowerment for all individuals, regardless of gender identity or expression.

Ideologies of Feminism:

Feminism encompasses a diverse range of ideologies and perspectives, each offering unique insights into the nature of gender oppression and strategies for resistance. Liberal feminism emphasises equal rights and opportunities for women within existing legal and political frameworks, advocating for reforms such as gender-neutral laws and policies. Radical feminism challenges the root causes of patriarchy and male domination, viewing gender inequality as deeply entrenched in social institutions and cultural norms. Marxist and socialist feminists analyse the intersections of gender, class, and capitalism, highlighting the ways in which economic exploitation exacerbates gender oppression. Intersectional feminism, pioneered by scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, recognises the interconnectedness of systems of oppression based on race, class, sexuality, and other axes of identity, emphasising the importance of addressing multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. While each feminist ideology shares a commitment to challenging patriarchal structures and advocating for the rights and autonomy of women and marginalised genders, they differ in their analysis of the root causes of gender inequality and their approaches to social change. Here, we delve into some of the key ideologies of feminism:

Liberal Feminism: Liberal feminism is grounded in the principles of individual rights, equal opportunities, and legal reform within existing political and social institutions. This ideology seeks to achieve gender equality through legislative and policy changes, such as enacting laws against gender-based discrimination in employment, education, and politics. Liberal feminists emphasise the importance of women's participation in traditionally male-dominated spheres, such as the workforce and politics, as a means of challenging gender stereotypes and expanding women's autonomy.

Radical Feminism: Radical feminism posits that gender inequality is deeply rooted in patriarchy, a system of social, political, and economic domination by men. This ideology advocates for the complete overthrow of patriarchal structures and the establishment of a society based on

principles of gender equality and collective liberation. Radical feminists critique not only specific laws and policies but also the underlying cultural norms and institutions that perpetuate gender oppression, including marriage, the nuclear family, and traditional gender roles.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism: Marxist and socialist feminism examines the intersections of gender, class, and capitalism, arguing that capitalism perpetuates and exacerbates gender oppression. This ideology emphasises the economic exploitation of women within capitalist societies, such as the devaluation of women's unpaid labour in the home and the gender wage gap in the workforce. Marxist and socialist feminists advocate for economic redistribution, social welfare programs, and collective ownership of resources as means of challenging both capitalist exploitation and patriarchal domination.

Intersectional Feminism: Intersectional feminism recognises that gender oppression intersects with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, and disability, creating unique experiences of marginalisation for individuals with intersecting identities. This ideology emphasises the importance of understanding and addressing multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously, rather than focusing solely on gender-based issues. Intersectional feminists highlight the experiences and perspectives of marginalised communities, including women of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, disabled individuals, and Indigenous peoples, in feminist discourse and activism.

Postcolonial and Third World Feminism: Postcolonial and Third World feminism examines the intersections of gender, race, and imperialism, focusing on the experiences of women in colonised or formerly colonised countries. This ideology critiques Western-centric notions of feminism and highlights the ways in which colonialism and globalisation have impacted gender relations and women's rights in non-Western contexts. Postcolonial and Third World feminists advocate for decolonisation, cultural sovereignty, and solidarity among women across national and cultural boundaries.

These are just a few of the many ideologies within feminism, each offering valuable insights into the complexities of gender oppression and the diverse strategies for achieving gender equality. While feminists may disagree on specific tactics or priorities, they share a common commitment to challenging power imbalances and creating a more just and equitable world for all individuals, regardless of gender identity or expression.

Key Movements and Achievements:

Throughout history, feminist movements have mobilised to address a wide range of issues, from reproductive rights and workplace discrimination to violence against women and LGBTQ+ rights. The second wave of feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, focussed on issues such as reproductive rights, sexual liberation, and the critique of traditional gender roles. Notable achievements of this era include the legalisation of abortion in many countries and the passage of anti-discrimination laws in employment and education. The third wave of feminism, which began in the 1990s, emphasised individualism, diversity, and the intersectional analysis of power and privilege. Contemporary feminist movements, often characterised as the fourth wave, have utilised social media and digital technologies to amplify marginalised voices, challenge mainstream representations of femininity, and mobilise collective action on issues such as gender-based violence, environmental justice, and racial equality.

Contemporary Challenges:

Despite significant progress, feminism continues to face numerous challenges in the 21st century. Persistent gender inequalities in areas such as employment, education, and political representation highlight the ongoing need for feminist advocacy and activism. The resurgence of conservative and anti-feminist movements, coupled with backlash against women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights, poses new threats to gender equality and reproductive justice. Intersectional issues, including the disproportionate impact of gender-based violence on marginalised communities and the exclusion of transgender and non-binary individuals from feminist discourse, demand greater attention and solidarity within the movement.

In conclusion, feminism remains a dynamic and indispensable force for social change, challenging systemic inequalities and advocating for the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender identity or expression. By embracing diverse ideologies, mobilising across generations and identities, and confronting contemporary challenges with resilience and solidarity, feminism continues to shape the trajectory of progress towards a more just and equitable world for future generations.

1.2 About the Author

Elaine Showalter is a prominent literary critic, feminist scholar, and writer who has made significant contributions to the fields of literary theory, gender studies, and cultural criticism. Born on January 21, 1941, in Boston, Massachusetts, Showalter grew up in a culturally rich environment that fostered her love for literature and learning. She attended Bryn Mawr College, where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 1962. Showalter went on to pursue graduate studies at Brandeis University, earning her Master's degree in 1964 and her Ph.D. in 1970. Her doctoral dissertation focused on the poet and critic John Donne, showcasing her early interest in literary history and theory.

Throughout her academic career, Showalter held various teaching positions at prestigious institutions such as Rutgers University, Princeton University, and the University of Pennsylvania. However, it was during her time at Princeton that she began to gain recognition for her groundbreaking work in feminist literary criticism.

In 1977, Showalter published her seminal work, "A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing." This influential book explored the history of women's writing in Britain and argued for the importance of recognising and studying the contributions of female authors to literary tradition. "A Literature of Their Own" established Showalter as a leading voice in feminist literary theory and paved the way for further scholarship in the field.

In the following years, Showalter continued to publish extensively on topics ranging from Victorian literature to contemporary fiction, always with a keen focus on issues of gender, identity, and representation. Her works include "The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980" (1985), which examined the intersection of gender and mental illness in literature and society, and "Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle" (1990), which explored the complexities of sexuality and identity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Showalter's interdisciplinary approach to literary criticism has earned her widespread acclaim and numerous awards, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. She has also been recognised for her contributions to academia as a professor emerita at Princeton University. In addition to her scholarly work, Showalter is a prolific essayist and commentator, contributing regularly to publications such as

The New York Times, *The Guardian*, and *The London Review of Books*. Her writing is known for its clarity, insight, and wit, making complex theoretical concepts accessible to a wide audience.

Overall, Elaine Showalter's career has been defined by her commitment to advancing the study of literature through a feminist lens and her dedication to promoting greater inclusivity and diversity within the literary canon. Her influence extends far beyond the academy, shaping the way we understand and appreciate the voices of women writers throughout history.

1.3 Historical Background

Elaine Showalter's essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" is a seminal work that reflects the historical context and intellectual debates of its time, particularly within the field of feminist literary criticism. To elaborate further on the historical background of Showalter's essay, it's important to explore several key aspects:

Second-Wave Feminism: Showalter's essay emerged during the second wave of feminism, which spanned from the 1960s to the 1980s. This period was marked by widespread activism and advocacy for women's rights, including reproductive rights, workplace equality, and an end to gender-based violence. In the realm of literary criticism, feminist scholars began to analyse literature through a gender-conscious lens, uncovering the ways in which patriarchal ideologies permeated literary texts and critiquing the male-dominated canon.

Intellectual Debates: Within feminist literary criticism, scholars grappled with a range of theoretical and methodological questions. Showalter's essay reflects these debates, particularly around the issues of essentialism and separatism. Essentialism refers to the tendency to generalise women's experiences and identities, overlooking the diversity among women. Separatism involves the exclusion of male-authored texts and a focus solely on women's writing. Showalter's critique of these tendencies and her proposal for a more subtle approach to feminist criticism were situated within these broader intellectual discussions.

The "Wilderness" Metaphor: Showalter's use of the "wilderness" metaphor in her essay encapsulates the sense of uncertainty and possibility that characterised feminist criticism at the time. The wilderness symbolises uncharted territory, suggesting both the challenges and opportunities inherent in feminist scholarship. It also underscores the metaphorical journey of

feminist critics as they navigate complex theoretical terrain and seek to redefine the boundaries of the field.

Inclusivity and Diversity: Showalter's call for a more inclusive and diverse feminist criticism reflects broader shifts within feminism towards intersectionality and the recognition of multiple axes of oppression. As feminist scholars began to engage more deeply with issues of race, class, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity, Showalter's essay contributed to ongoing discussions about how to centre marginalised voices within feminist literary criticism.

Legacy and Influence: Showalter's essay has had a lasting impact on feminist literary criticism and continues to be cited and discussed by scholars in the field. Its critique of essentialism and separatism, along with its advocacy for a more subtle and inclusive approach to feminist criticism, laid the groundwork for subsequent developments in the field. Showalter's work remains relevant today as feminist scholars continue to grapple with questions of representation, voice, and power within literature and literary criticism.

In summary, the historical background of Elaine Showalter's "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" encompasses the intellectual debates, activist movements, and theoretical developments of the second wave of feminism. Situated within this context, Showalter's essay represents a critical intervention in feminist literary criticism, challenging prevailing assumptions and proposing new directions for the field.

1.4 About the Text

Elaine Showalter's essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" is a landmark text that critically examines the state of feminist literary criticism in the late 20th century while proposing innovative directions for its future development. Published in 1981, this essay emerged within the context of the burgeoning feminist movement and its efforts to challenge traditional literary canons, redefine gender roles, and promote women's voices in literature. Showalter's essay provides a comprehensive critique of existing feminist literary theories and methodologies, arguing for a more subtle and inclusive approach that transcends essentialism and separatism. Through her concept of "gynocriticism," Showalter offers a framework for analysing women's writing and literary traditions, emphasising the diverse experiences and perspectives of female authors.

In the opening of her essay, Showalter employs the metaphor of the "wilderness" to characterise the state of feminist criticism at the time. Drawing on the imagery of the American frontier, she describes feminist critics as pioneers navigating uncharted territory, grappling with complex theoretical terrain and facing internal divisions within the movement. Showalter acknowledges the achievements of feminist criticism in challenging patriarchal norms and uncovering marginalised voices but also highlights its limitations and internal conflicts.

One of the central themes of Showalter's essay is the critique of essentialism within feminist literary criticism. She argues against the tendency to reduce women's experiences to a monolithic essence, advocating instead for an approach that recognises the diversity of women's perspectives based on factors such as race, class, sexuality, and historical context. Showalter contends that essentialist assumptions not only overlook the complexities of women's lives but also reinforce stereotypes and exclusionary practices within feminist discourse.

Furthermore, Showalter interrogates the separatist tendencies within feminist criticism, which often prioritise women's writing over male-authored texts and advocate for the creation of distinct female literary canons. While acknowledging the importance of reclaiming and valorising women's voices, Showalter cautions against the wholesale rejection of male-authored works and calls for a more balanced and inclusive approach that recognises the interplay between male and female literary traditions.

In response to these critiques, Showalter proposes the concept of gynocriticism as a transformative framework for feminist literary analysis. Gynocriticism, as Showalter defines it, seeks to explore the unique contributions of women writers while also interrogating the gendered dimensions of literary production, reception, and interpretation. Unlike traditional approaches that prioritise authorial intention or textual analysis, gynocriticism emphasises the study of women's writing within its socio-historical context, paying attention to themes, genres, and narrative strategies that reflect women's experiences and perspectives.

Throughout her essay, Showalter provides illustrative examples and case studies to demonstrate the potential of gynocriticism in practice. Drawing on a diverse range of texts and authors, she showcases how gynocritical analysis can uncover hidden patterns, challenge dominant narratives, and enrich our understanding of literature as a site of gendered meaning-making.

Elaine Showalter's "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" stands as a foundational text in the field of feminist literary criticism, challenging scholars to rethink their theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. By critiquing essentialism and separatism while advocating for the development of gynocriticism, Showalter offers a roadmap for a more inclusive, dynamic, and socially engaged feminist literary practice. Her essay continues to inspire scholars and activists alike to explore new avenues of inquiry and to amplify the diverse voices that have historically been marginalised within literary discourse. By situating the essay within its historical context and examining its reception and impact within the academic community, readers can appreciate its contributions to broader conversations about gender, representation, and power in literature.

1.5 Showalter and Other Feminist Critics

Showalter and other feminist critics have contributed significantly to literary theory by challenging traditional approaches that overlook or marginalize women's voices and experiences. They have introduced innovative perspectives and methodologies that center on gender, providing insights into how gender shapes literary production, reception, and interpretation.

Elaine Showalter, Harold Bloom, and Edward Said stand as towering figures in the realm of literary criticism, each offering unique perspectives and contributions to the field. Showalter's pioneering work in feminist literary criticism has been instrumental in challenging traditional literary canons and advocating for the inclusion and recognition of women writers. Through her emphasis on gender dynamics in literature, Showalter has shed light on the marginalized voices of women throughout history. In contrast, Harold Bloom's focus on literary influence and the "anxiety of influence" has provided profound insights into the complex relationships between authors and their predecessors. Bloom's theories have greatly influenced the study of creativity and literary evolution, particularly within the Western canon. On the other hand, Edward Said's critique of Orientalism has had a transformative impact on postcolonial studies, urging scholars to critically examine Western representations of non-Western cultures in literature. Said's work has prompted a reevaluation of cultural stereotypes and power dynamics in literary representation. Together, Showalter, Bloom, and Said exemplify the diverse and multifaceted nature of literary criticism, each contributing in their own distinctive way to the ongoing conversation about literature and its social and cultural significance. Other feminist critics, such as Judith Butler, have

also made significant contributions to feminist literary theory. Butler's theories of gender performativity have revolutionized understandings of identity and agency, providing a framework for analyzing how gender is constructed and enacted in literature.

1.6 Reception and Impact of Showalter's Essay

Elaine Showalter's essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" has left a profound impact on both academic discourse and broader cultural conversations since its publication in 1981. At its core, the essay served as a rallying call for feminist literary criticism, shedding light on the ways in which women writers and their works were marginalized within the traditional literary canon. The metaphor of "the wilderness" invoked by Showalter captured the sense of alienation and obscurity experienced by women writers, highlighting their position on the fringes of literary discourse. However, the wilderness metaphor also carried connotations of potential exploration and discovery, suggesting that these marginalized voices held untapped richness and significance.

One of the most notable impacts of Showalter's essay was its role in legitimizing feminist criticism as a valid and influential approach within literary studies. By articulating the systematic biases and inequalities that had historically excluded women writers from the literary mainstream, Showalter provided a theoretical framework for scholars to analyze and critique traditional literary canons. This helped to pave the way for further scholarship in feminist theory and criticism, as well as encouraging the inclusion of women's voices in literary anthologies and academic syllabi.

Furthermore, Showalter's essay sparked vigorous debates and discussions within academic circles, prompting scholars to reevaluate literary history through a gendered lens. The essay's call for a reexamination of canonical texts and the recognition of women's contributions to literature led to a wave of research and scholarship that sought to uncover forgotten or overlooked works by women writers. Additionally, Showalter's insights into the ways in which gender shapes literary production and reception stimulated interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies, gender studies, and cultural studies.

Beyond academia, Showalter's essay resonated with wider feminist movements, emphasizing the importance of representation and visibility for women writers in all spheres of society. By foregrounding the voices and experiences of women within literature, Showalter's work contributed to broader conversations about gender equality and social justice. It empowered

readers to challenge gender stereotypes and advocate for the recognition of women's contributions to cultural production.

In short, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" remains a foundational text in the field of feminist literary criticism, continuing to inspire scholars and readers alike with its exploration of the intersections of gender, literature, and culture. Its enduring impact lies in its ability to provoke critical reflection and stimulate ongoing conversations about the representation and recognition of women's voices in literature and beyond.

1.7 Relevance of Showalter's Ideas To Contemporary Issues

Showalter's ideas in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" remain highly relevant to contemporary issues in several ways. First and foremost, her call for the recognition and amplification of marginalized voices within literature continues to resonate in today's cultural landscape. In an era where diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the forefront of societal discussions, Showalter's emphasis on the importance of representing women's experiences in literature aligns with ongoing efforts to decolonize the literary canon and broaden the scope of what is considered worthy of scholarly attention.

Showalter's exploration of the ways in which gender shapes literary production and reception remains pertinent in contemporary literary criticism. With increased awareness of gender identity and fluidity, as well as intersectional perspectives that consider how gender intersects with other aspects of identity such as race, class, sexuality, and disability, Showalter's framework provides a foundation for analyzing the complexities of representation and power dynamics within literature.

Her essay highlights the need for feminist criticism to engage with broader cultural and social issues. In today's interconnected world, literature is not created or consumed in isolation, but is deeply intertwined with politics, economics, technology, and other societal forces. Showalter's call for feminist critics to situate women's writing within its historical, cultural, and social contexts underscores the importance of understanding literature as both a reflection of and a catalyst for social change.

Moreover, Showalter's discussion of the "wilderness" metaphor invites contemporary scholars to consider the ongoing challenges faced by women writers in gaining recognition and

validation for their work. Despite progress in recent decades, women writers continue to encounter barriers to publication, critical acclaim, and academic recognition. Showalter's essay serves as a reminder of the ongoing need to advocate for gender equity in the literary world and to create spaces where women's voices can be heard and valued.

Hence, Showalter's ideas in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" remain relevant to contemporary issues by providing a framework for understanding the intersections of gender, literature, and culture, and by advocating for the recognition and amplification of marginalized voices within the literary landscape.

1.8 Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded that by comprehending Showalter's critique of essentialism and separatism within feminist literary criticism, as well as her proposal for gynocriticism as an alternative approach, scholars can gain insights into the complexities of feminist theory and its evolution over time. This unit endeavoured to highlight the significance of Showalter's essay in shaping the trajectory of feminist literary criticism. Showalter's call for a more subtle and inclusive approach to feminist criticism continues to resonate with scholars today, inspiring ongoing discussions and developments in the field.

By exploring Showalter's insights into the gendered dimensions of literary production, reception, and interpretation, scholars can reflect on the ways in which literature reflects and shapes societal norms and values. This critical engagement extends beyond the confines of academia, inviting readers to consider the implications of feminist literary criticism for broader social and cultural movements advocating for gender equality and justice. Overall, a comprehensive study of her essay serves as a catalyst for deeper inquiry into the intersections of feminism, literature, and culture. By unpacking the complexities of Showalter's essay and its implications for feminist theory and practice, scholars are empowered to engage critically with the ongoing challenges and possibilities of gender representation and power dynamics in literature and beyond. Since this unit focussed much on establishing the historical background of the feminist movement, the essay and the author, the next unit will aim to provide a detailed critical analysis of the text.

1.9 Questions

The following questions can serve as starting points for deeper analysis and discussion of Elaine Showalter's essay and its significance in feminist literary criticism.

1. How does Elaine Showalter's essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" contribute to the development of feminist literary criticism?

2. What historical and cultural factors influenced the writing of Showalter's essay, particularly within the context of the feminist movement in the late 20th century?

3. Explain Showalter's critique of essentialism and separatism within feminist literary criticism. How does she propose to address these issues?

4. What is gynocriticism, and how does Showalter advocate for its adoption as an alternative approach to feminist literary analysis?

5. Compare and contrast Showalter's views on feminist criticism with those of other feminist critics mentioned in the text, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and bell hooks.

6. Analyse the significance of the "wilderness" metaphor used by Showalter in her essay. What does it signify, and how does it reflect the challenges faced by feminist critics?

7. Evaluate the impact of Showalter's essay within the academic community and beyond. How has it influenced the field of feminist literary criticism?

8. Discuss the concept of intersectionality within feminism, as mentioned in the text. How does Showalter's essay engage with intersectional issues in literary criticism?

9. Explore Showalter's case studies and examples provided in the essay. How do these examples support her arguments about feminist literary criticism?

10. Reflect on the relevance of Showalter's ideas to contemporary issues in literature and culture. How can her insights into gender, representation, and power inform discussions of intersectionality and inclusivity in literary studies today?

1.10 Suggested Readings

Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 2012.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books, 2011.

Eagleton, Mary (Editor). *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1996.

Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 2000.

- - -. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.

hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. South End Press, 2000.

Serano, Julia. *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. Seal Press, 2007.

Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton University Press, 1977.

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MAEM24301T

Literary Criticism

MAEM24301T

Section D

Elaine Showalter: *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*

Structure

Unit II

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Critical Analysis of the Text

2.2 Pluralism and the Feminist Critique

2.3 Defining the Feminine: Gynocritics and the Woman's Text

2.4 Women's Writing and Woman's Body

2.5 Women's Writing and Women's Language

2.6 Women's writing and Woman's Psyche

2.7 Women's writing and Women's Culture

2.8 Showalter's Engagement with Literary Theory

2.9 Conclusion

2.10 Questions

2.11 Suggested Readings

2.0 Objectives:

The Unit will enable learners to the following objectives:

- Analyse Showalter's Argument
- Examine Showalter's Engagement with Literary Theory
- Explore the Concept of Gynocriticism

- Understand metaphor of Wilderness

2.1 Critical Analysis of the Text

Elaine Showalter's essay, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," provides a thorough analysis of the trajectory of feminist literary criticism. Dividing the movement into three distinct phases, Showalter traces the evolution from the Feminine phase, characterized by women writers seeking validation within existing literary structures, to the Feminist phase, marked by a radical re-evaluation and critique of patriarchal norms in literature. This phase witnessed the emergence of scholars challenging and reshaping literary canons to include women's voices and perspectives.

The culmination of Showalter's analysis lies in the Female phase, which emphasizes the diverse and intersectional nature of women's experiences. In this phase, feminist critics delve into the complexities of gender alongside other axes of identity such as race, class, and sexuality, highlighting the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression. Showalter's essay serves as a foundational text in feminist literary theory, sparking critical dialogue on the role of gender in literature and society and paving the way for subsequent generations of feminist scholars to continue this vital work.

This section of the Unit provides a detailed analysis of the essay

2.2 Pluralism and the Feminist Critique

The text opens with the lines of a poem “Women” by Louise Bogan which presents a stark portrayal of women's internal experiences, contrasting the idea of wilderness with the notion of providence and containment. The opening line, "Women have no wilderness in them," suggests a lack of untamed, unexplored territory within women's psyches. Instead, the poem portrays women as inherently practical and resourceful, embodying providence rather than wildness. The imagery of the "tight hot cell" of their hearts evokes a sense of confinement and constraint. Rather than expansive and free, women's emotional landscapes are depicted as confined spaces, perhaps constrained by societal expectations or personal circumstances. The phrase "to eat dusty bread" further emphasizes a sense of hardship or deprivation, suggesting that women endure and sustain themselves in difficult conditions.

Elaine Showalter's choice to open her essay with Louise Bogan's poem "Women " serves as a deliberate and thought-provoking introduction to the themes she has explored. By beginning with

Bogan's poem, Showalter sets the tone for a subtle examination of women's roles, experiences, and representation in literature. The poem challenges traditional notions of femininity and wilderness, presenting women as practical, resilient, and enduring in the face of adversity and constraint. This sets the stage for Showalter's exploration of feminist literary criticism, which often involves reevaluating and challenging traditional gender roles and representations in literature. The imagery and themes in Bogan's poem provide a rich starting point for discussing the evolution of feminist literary criticism, particularly as it relates to the reclamation of women's voices and experiences in literature.

It seems that Showalter has chosen this poem to signal her intention to delve into the complexities of women's experiences and the ways in which feminist critics have sought to illuminate and celebrate those experiences in literary discourse. By opening her essay with Bogan's poem "Women," Showalter invites readers to reflect on the multifaceted nature of women's experiences and the ways in which feminist literary criticism engages with and reshapes our understanding of gender, representation, and power in literature.

Showalter reflects on the state of feminist literary criticism, drawing upon Carolyn Heilbrun and Catharine Stimpson's analogy of two poles within feminist criticism, likening them to the Old Testament and the New Testament. The "righteous, angry, and admonitory" mode corresponds to the Old Testament, symbolizing a critical approach focused on exposing past injustices and errors. In contrast, the mode characterized by "seeking the grace of imagination" aligns with the New Testament, representing a more disinterested and imaginative approach to literary analysis.

Showalter suggests that both modes are necessary within feminist literary criticism. While the "Jeremiahs of ideology" are essential for critiquing and challenging patriarchal structures, those who seek "the grace of imagination" contribute to envisioning alternative narratives and possibilities. This synthesis, she argues, is crucial for navigating the "wilderness of theory" that lies between feminist ideology and the liberal ideal of disinterestedness.

Moreover, Showalter discusses the evolution of feminist literary criticism, highlighting its lack of a cohesive theoretical basis in the past. She acknowledges the diverse methodologies and goals within feminist criticism, ranging from black feminist perspectives to Marxist critiques and Freudian/Lacanian analysis. Despite this diversity, she notes that feminist criticism has

historically resisted theoretical codification, emphasizing the authority of lived experience over abstract systems of analysis.

However, Showalter also observes a shift towards engagement with theoretical discourse, prompted by a growing awareness of feminist criticism's isolation from broader critical communities. This shift raises questions about how feminist criticism should position itself in relation to emerging critical theories and theorists, sparking debates about the need for dialogue and engagement with wider scholarly networks.

Showalter delineates two distinct modes of feminist criticism, emphasizing the importance of recognizing their differences rather than conflating them. The first mode, which she describes as ideological, involves feminist readings of texts that focus on images and stereotypes of women, gaps and biases in literary criticism, and the role of women in semiotic systems. Showalter argues that this mode of criticism is an essential intellectual act that seeks to challenge existing norms and imagine new possibilities for women's representation and self-understanding. She cites Adrienne Rich's proposition that feminist critique should interrogate literature as a reflection of society and language, aiming to liberate readers from oppressive norms and perspectives.

However, Showalter acknowledges the inherent diversity and eclecticism within feminist criticism, noting that it is just one among many possible modes of interpretation. She highlights the limitations of attempting to impose theoretical coherence on feminist criticism, which inherently resists such constraints due to its eclectic nature. Instead, Showalter suggests embracing pluralism as a critical stance, recognizing the value of multiple interpretations and perspectives.

Showalter critiques the tendency within feminist criticism to remain dependent on existing theoretical frameworks derived from male-dominated traditions. She argues that feminist criticism should strive for independence and intellectual coherence, resisting the temptation to simply revise or supplement male-centric theories. Showalter calls for a feminist criticism that is genuinely women-centered, intellectually rigorous, and capable of defining its own subject, system, theory, and voice.

2.3 Defining the Feminine: Gynocritics and the Woman’s Text

The section "Defining the Feminine: Gynocritics and the Woman's Text" delves into the intricate and evolving landscape of feminist literary criticism, particularly focusing on the elusive concept of femininity as it pertains to women's writing. The opening quotes from Virginia Woolf and Helene Cixous encapsulate the perennial struggle in articulating what constitutes feminine writing: Woolf posits that women's writing inherently embodies femininity, while Cixous contends that defining such a practice is an inherently impossible task. This dichotomy sets the stage for the introduction of "gynocritics," a term crafted to encompass the comprehensive examination of women as writers within literary discourse.

Gynocritics marks a departure from traditional feminist critique by placing women's writing at the forefront of scholarly inquiry. This shift prompts a reexamination of the foundational principles guiding feminist literary analysis, compelling scholars to grapple with the essential question of what sets women's writing apart from its male-authored counterparts. Instead of merely reconciling existing literary paradigms, gynocritics invites scholars to redefine the theoretical frameworks that underpin their approach to understanding women's literary production.

Showalter underscores a discernible shift in feminist literary criticism over recent years, with scholars increasingly directing their attention towards a sustained investigation of literature by women. This encompasses a multifaceted exploration of various elements, including the historical context, stylistic nuances, thematic preoccupations, generic conventions, and structural innovations within women's writing. Additionally, scholars delve into the psychodynamics of female creativity and the trajectories of women's literary careers, aiming to elucidate the intricate interplay between gender identity and literary expression.

The recognition of this paradigmatic shift is attributed to scholars like Patricia Meyer Spacks, whose seminal work illuminated the evolving landscape of feminist literary criticism. Through groundbreaking studies and critical analyses, scholars have endeavored to foreground women's writing as a central facet of feminist literary discourse. Figures such as Ellen Moers, Nina Baym, Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Margaret Homans have played pivotal roles in elevating women's writing to a position of prominence within academic discourse.

Showalter elucidates an ongoing dialogue within feminist literary criticism regarding the nature of women's writing and the challenges inherent in defining and interpreting femininity in literature. She underscores the emergence of gynocentric approaches that prioritize the study of

women's writing, thereby enriching our understanding of the diverse and nuanced contributions of women to literary culture.

In the examination of feminist literary criticism, Showalter's views are deeply rooted in the exploration of the evolution and divergence of feminist theories, particularly within the European context, with a particular focus on French feminist discourse. Showalter elucidates the distinctions and convergences between French and American feminist ideologies, highlighting the emergence of "ecriture feminine" as a pivotal concept within French feminist thought.

Showalter positions French feminist criticism as markedly distinct from its American counterpart, characterized by its theoretical foundations in linguistics, Marxism, psychoanalysis (including Lacanian psychoanalysis), and deconstruction. Despite these disparities, Showalter underscores the shared intellectual affinities and rhetorical energies between French and American feminist theories, signifying a transatlantic dialogue within feminist scholarship.

Central to Showalter's analysis is the notion of "ecriture feminine," which encapsulates the inscription of the female body and female difference within language and text. Showalter acknowledges the theoretical significance of "ecriture feminine" within French feminist criticism, emphasizing its role in reasserting the value of the feminine and reframing feminist critique as an interrogation of difference.

However, Showalter adopts a critical stance towards "ecriture feminine," acknowledging its utopian aspirations while also highlighting its limited manifestation in actual literary practice. She echoes Cixous's acknowledgment that true instances of writing that authentically inscribe femininity are scarce, suggesting that "ecriture feminine" primarily functions as a conceptual framework rather than a prevalent literary reality.

Showalter underscores the increasing accessibility of French feminist criticism to American feminist scholars, facilitated by translations of seminal works by figures such as Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray. This cross-cultural exchange enriches the discourse surrounding women's writing and fosters a more comprehensive understanding of feminist literary theory. She further addresses English feminist criticism, noting its incorporation of French feminist and Marxist theory while maintaining a focus on textual interpretation. Despite differing emphases—oppression in English feminist criticism, repression in French, and expression in

American—Showalter emphasizes the gynocentric trajectory shared by these traditions, aimed at emancipating the feminine from stereotypical associations with inferiority.

Showalter's analysis elucidates the complexities inherent in defining the unique difference of women's writing and underscores the importance of gynocritics in uncovering and analyzing the historical trajectory of women's literary contributions. Through meticulous examination and rigorous scholarship, Showalter advocates for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between women and literary culture.

2.4 Women's Writing and Woman's Body

Showalter introduces this section of her essay by quoting from "The Laugh of Medusa" written by Helen Cixous. Cixous's assertion that "More body, hence more writing" underscores the importance of embracing the embodied nature of women's experiences and using writing as a tool for liberation and self-discovery. Cixous argues that women should infuse their writing with their embodied experiences, emotions, and sensations, reclaiming their voices from male-dominated norms. By writing from the body, women can challenge traditional power structures and create empowering forms of self-expression.

Showalter critiques the concept of organic or biological criticism, which posits that texts are inherently marked by the physical body, particularly gender differences. She argues that while invoking anatomy in literary analysis may seem to highlight gender distinctions, it risks perpetuating essentialist views that have historically oppressed women. She highlights how Victorian beliefs about women's biology were used to justify their perceived inferiority, such as attributing creativity to men due to the belief that women's physiological functions diverted energy away from their brains. She also critiques the idea that women's writing is inherently marked by anxieties stemming from their perceived biological differences, as suggested by Gilbert and Gubar in "The Madwoman in the Attic."

Showalter challenges the metaphor of literary paternity used by Gilbert and Gubar, which equates the author with a father figure and the act of writing with male generative power. She argues that this metaphor ignores the equally valid metaphor of literary maternity, where creativity is likened to the process of gestation, labor, and delivery, and suggests that both genders can engage in the act of literary creation. Showalter advocates for a rejection of essentialist views that

link literary creativity to biological differences and encourages a more inclusive understanding of writing as a process that transcends gender boundaries.

Showalter explores the perspectives of radical feminist critics who advocate for a reevaluation of biological differentiation and its significance in women's writing. These critics assert that women's writing emanates from their bodies and that their sexual differentiation serves as a fundamental source of creativity. Showalter references Adrienne Rich's argument in "Of Woman Born" that female biology holds radical implications beyond conventional understanding and suggests that embracing physicality can empower women by reframing their bodies as resources rather than determinants of destiny. She discusses how feminist criticism from a biological perspective emphasizes the body as a source of imagery, contrasting the more frank anatomical language used by contemporary American women poets with the transcendental themes often found in male-authored poetry. Additionally, Showalter highlights feminist criticism that integrates personal experience and bodily awareness, such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis' confessional style in exploring motherhood.

However, Showalter also critiques the potential drawbacks of such an approach. She warns against reducing women's literary practice solely to their biological experiences and cautions that focusing excessively on the body can lead to prescriptive and essentialist interpretations. Showalter suggests that while the study of biological imagery in women's writing is valuable, it must be understood within the broader context of linguistic, social, and literary structures. Showalter advocates for a subtle understanding of women's literary practice that recognizes the multifaceted influences on their writing, including but not limited to biological factors. She emphasizes the importance of exploring the body within the context of women's lived experiences and societal frameworks while avoiding oversimplification or reductionism.

2.5 Women's Writing and Women's Language

Showalter delves into the complex relationship between language and gender, drawing on insights from feminist theorists such as Monique Wittig, Adrienne Rich, and French feminists. She highlights the critical examination of language as a central aspect of feminist literary theory, emphasizing how language both reflects and perpetuates patriarchal ideologies.

Showalter quotes Monique Wittig's Les Guerilleres: "The women say, the language you speak poisons your glottis tongue palate lips. They say, the language you speak is made up of

words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated" to underscore the idea that language, as a construct shaped by men, perpetuates the subjugation of women. This view is echoed by Rich's critique of "the oppressor's language" and the need for women to reclaim linguistic agency. Showalter discusses how feminist critics across different cultural contexts have interrogated the role of language in perpetuating gender inequalities, focusing on how language shapes perceptions of reality and reinforces male-centered categorizations.

French feminist theorists, in particular, emphasize the need for women to develop a language that reflects their experiences and challenges patriarchal dominance. They advocate for a "revolutionary linguism" that breaks away from patriarchal speech and empowers women to articulate their identities and experiences authentically. This call for a new language extends beyond mere linguistic reform to encompass broader social and political change. However, Showalter also acknowledges the complexities and contradictions inherent in this pursuit. On one hand, there is a desire for a language that disrupts traditional power structures and challenges dominant discourses. On the other hand, there is recognition of the difficulty women face in navigating existing linguistic frameworks while striving for authenticity and agency.

Showalter suggests that the ideal approach may lie in a synthesis of these perspectives: women's writing that operates within existing linguistic norms but also works to subvert and deconstruct them. This entails both challenging the phallogocentric structure of language and establishing alternative discourses that reflect women's diverse experiences and perspectives. Ultimately, Showalter's analysis underscores the importance of language in feminist discourse and the ongoing struggle to redefine linguistic norms in ways that empower women and challenge patriarchal hegemony.

Showalter further delves into the concept of a "women's language" within feminist criticism, tracing its origins in folklore, mythology, and historical accounts. She notes that this idea has ancient roots, often associated with the perception of women's language as secretive and enigmatic, reflecting male fantasies about femininity rather than an authentic expression of female identity. Drawing parallels between the feminist quest for a women's language and the language issues in decolonization movements, Showalter highlights the political and emotional significance of this concept. However, she acknowledges the complexities and challenges inherent in defining and advocating for a distinct women's language.

Contrary to languages of minority or colonized groups, Showalter argues that there is no single "mother tongue" or genderlect spoken by women in society that significantly differs from the dominant language. She critiques attempts to quantitatively analyze language differences between men and women, arguing that such approaches often overlook the nuances of linguistic performance and context. Instead, Showalter suggests that feminist criticism should focus on women's access to language and the ideological and cultural determinants of expression. She emphasizes the importance of expanding women's linguistic resources and challenging the historical silencing of female voices. Showalter invokes Virginia Woolf's assertion that "All that we have ought to be expressed-mind and body," advocating for a more inclusive and expansive approach to women's linguistic expression.

Ultimately, Showalter warns against basing theories of difference solely on language, arguing that women's literature is still affected by historical repression and linguistic limitations. She urges feminist critics to confront and challenge these limitations in order to achieve a more inclusive and authentic representation of women's experiences.

2.6 Women's writing and Woman's Psyche

Showalter explores the perspective of psychoanalytically oriented feminist criticism, which focuses on understanding the difference in women's writing by examining the author's psyche and the relationship between gender and the creative process. This approach incorporates both biological and linguistic models of gender difference into a theory of the female psyche or self, shaped by bodily experiences, language development, and socialization into gender roles.

She critiques some early examples of psychoanalytic reductionism, such as Theodor Reik's suggestion that women have fewer writing blocks because of physiological factors related to urination. Instead, psychoanalytic criticism typically centers on concepts like penis envy, the castration complex, and the Oedipal phase, which define women's relationship to language, fantasy, and culture. Showalter also discusses how French psychoanalytic thought dominated by Lacan extends castration into a total metaphor for female literary and linguistic disadvantage, theorizing that the acquisition of language occurs during the Oedipal phase, leading to female displacement and identification with lack.

Despite the potential of psychoanalysis as a tool for literary criticism, Showalter highlights the ongoing struggle with the problem of feminine disadvantage and lack within Freudian or post-

Freudian psychoanalysis. She references Gilbert and Gubar's feminist revision of Harold Bloom's Oedipal model of literary history, which portrays the woman artist as displaced, disinherited, and excluded. In this view, the nature and "difference" of women's writing stem from its troubled relationship to female identity, with women writers experiencing their own gender as a painful obstacle or inadequacy.

Showalter also discusses Miller's approach to expanding Freud's view of female creativity, which aims to show how criticism of women's texts has often been unfair due to Freudian expectations. Miller argues that a gynocentric reading reveals repressed egoistic/ambitious fantasies in women's writing, challenging the phallocentric model that grants credibility based on conformity to masculine ideals. Thus, psychoanalytically oriented feminist criticism seeks to unravel the complexities of gendered creativity while critiquing traditional Freudian frameworks.

Showalter discusses alternative approaches to feminist literary criticism that depart from Freudian psychoanalytic theory. She highlights the work of scholars like Annis Pratt, Barbara Rigney, and Ann Douglas, who have explored different theoretical frameworks such as Jungian archetypes, Laingian studies of the divided self, and Eriksonian analysis of inner space in women's writing.

One of the most significant developments in feminist psychoanalysis is Nancy Chodorow's work, particularly her book *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978). Chodorow revises traditional psychoanalytic concepts by focusing on the pre-Oedipal phase and the process of psychosexual differentiation. She emphasizes the role of the mother in shaping the child's perception of self and gender identity, suggesting that shared parenting could alter traditional notions of sex difference and gender identity.

Showalter explores the implications of feminist psychoanalysis for literary criticism, particularly the thematic interest in the mother-daughter relationship as a source of female creativity. Elizabeth Abel's work on female friendship in contemporary women's novels draws on Chodorow's theory to analyze the psychodynamics of female bonding and its impact on women writers' relationships with each other and with literary tradition. Abel challenges Harold Bloom's paradigm of literary history, proposing a "triadic female pattern" that balances the Oedipal relation to the male tradition with the pre-Oedipal relation to the female tradition.

However, Showalter also notes the limitations of psychoanalytically based models of feminist criticism. While they offer insightful readings of individual texts and highlight similarities across diverse cultural contexts, they struggle to explain historical change, ethnic difference, or the influence of generic and economic factors. She suggests the need for a more flexible and comprehensive model of women's writing that situates it within the broader context of culture.

2.7 Women's writing and Women's Culture

Showalter proposes a cultural theory as a more comprehensive framework for discussing the specificity and difference of women's writing compared to theories based on biology, linguistics, or psychoanalysis. She draws on Christiane Rochefort's idea that women's literature can be seen as the literature of the colonized, emphasizing the importance of understanding women's writing within the context of their cultural environments.

According to Showalter, a cultural theory incorporates ideas about women's bodies, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to social contexts. This approach acknowledges that women's conceptualizations of their bodies, sexual and reproductive functions, and language use are shaped by cultural forces. It recognizes the diversity among women writers based on factors such as class, race, nationality, and history, but also emphasizes the collective experience shared by women across time and space. She contrasts this approach with Marxist theories of cultural hegemony, which focus on power dynamics and domination within society. Instead, hypotheses of women's culture seek to understand and highlight the primary and self-defined nature of female cultural experience, moving away from masculine systems, hierarchies, and values.

Showalter discusses the significance of examining women's experience in its own terms within the field of women's history. She quotes Gerda Lerner, who argues that women have been excluded from history not due to explicit male conspiracies but because historical inquiry has been conducted from male-centered perspectives. To rectify this, Lerner suggests a woman-centered inquiry that considers the possibility of a female culture existing within the broader culture shared by men and women. This approach aims to include an account of the female experience over time and recognizes the development of feminist consciousness as an essential aspect of women's past.

Showalter explains the concept of "women's culture" as a framework for understanding the collective experience and identity of women, particularly in the nineteenth century. She notes that while the idea of "woman's sphere" was defined and enforced by men, women themselves often internalized its principles, exemplified by the American "cult of true womanhood" and the English "feminine ideal." However, "women's culture" emerges as a redefinition of women's activities and goals from a woman-centered perspective. It implies an assertion of equality and an awareness of sisterhood among women. This culture encompasses a broad range of values, institutions, relationships, and methods of communication that unified the female experience in the nineteenth century, albeit with variations based on class and ethnic background.

Some feminist historians view the transition from "woman's sphere" to "women's culture" to women's rights activism as a linear evolutionary process. Others, including Gerda Lerner, perceive a more complex and ongoing negotiation between women's culture and the broader cultural context. Lerner argues against the characterization of women's culture as a subculture, emphasizing that women live within the general culture while also participating in and contributing to their own cultural sphere.

Showalter highlights the work of anthropologists like Shirley and Edwin Ardener, who explore the concept of women's culture as a muted group whose beliefs and realities overlap with, but are not wholly contained by, the dominant male group. Ardener suggests that muted groups must articulate their beliefs through the allowable forms of dominant structures, often expressing themselves through ritual and art. This perspective underscores the importance of understanding women's experience from within their own cultural framework rather than imposing androcentric models.

Ardener's notion of muted groups raises questions about language and power, suggesting that women's beliefs find expression through alternative channels such as ritual and art, which can be deciphered by those willing to perceive beyond the dominant cultural structures. This insight has implications for feminist literary theory, particularly in discussions about women's participation in literary culture and the ways in which their voices are articulated within dominant discourses.

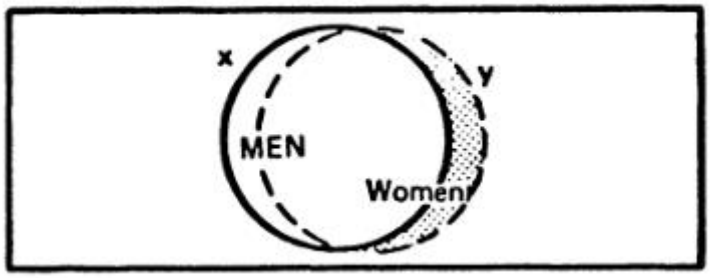

Fig: Ardener's diagram of the relationship of the dominant and the muted group

Showalter delves into the concept of the "wild zone" within women's culture, as discussed by cultural anthropologist Edwin Ardener. Ardener's model represents groups as intersecting circles, with much of the muted circle (representing women) falling within the boundaries of the dominant circle (representing men), but also having a crescent outside the dominant boundary, referred to as the "wild" zone. Showalter explores the spatial, experiential, and metaphysical dimensions of this wild zone.

Spatially, the wild zone represents an area forbidden to men, analogous to the zone off-limits to women within the dominant structure. Experientially, it denotes aspects of the female lifestyle distinct from those of men. However, metaphysically or in terms of consciousness, the wild zone has no corresponding male space because male consciousness is entirely within the dominant structure. Showalter explains that the "wild" is always imaginary from the male perspective, potentially being a projection of the unconscious. Women understand the male crescent through legend or myth, but men do not know what lies in the wild.

For feminist critics, the wild zone holds significance as a theoretical base for women's difference and a space for revolutionary language and writing. French feminist critics, in particular, envision it as the place for revolutionary women's language and writing, often symbolized by the concept of "white ink." Showalter discusses how feminist quest fictions often depict a journey into this wild zone, symbolized by crossing the mirror or entering a realm of liberated desire and female authenticity.

Showalter also touches on the ecological and utopian aspects associated with the wild zone, with some feminists asserting that women are closer to nature and envisioning Amazon

Utopias as liberated spaces for women. However, she emphasizes that no writing or criticism can exist entirely outside the dominant structure, acknowledging the economic and political pressures of male-dominated society. Showalter concludes that women's writing is a "double-voiced discourse," embodying both muted and dominant cultural influences. Showalter's analysis provides insights into the complexity of the wild zone concept within feminist literary criticism, highlighting its theoretical and symbolic significance for understanding women's writing and consciousness.

Showalter argues that women's writing exists within two simultaneous traditions: the dominant male tradition and a muted women's tradition. This duality necessitates understanding women's writing in its historical and cultural relationship with men's writing. Showalter highlights the importance of situating women writers within their specific cultural contexts, considering factors such as race, class, and gender politics. She emphasizes the need for gynocentric criticism to identify the cultural locus of female literary identity and describe the intersecting forces shaping individual women writers' experiences. Gynocentric criticism should also analyze women's writing in relation to literary culture variables like production and distribution modes, author-audience dynamics, and genre hierarchies.

Showalter critiques traditional literary periodization, which often overlooks or suppresses the history of women's writing, leading to gaps in genre development accounts. Gynocentric criticism offers alternative perspectives on literary history, such as Margaret Anne Doody's reassessment of the significance of late eighteenth-century women writers in shaping nineteenth-century fiction paradigms. She highlights feminist rehabilitation efforts for genres like the female gothic, once considered marginal but now recognized as part of the novel's great tradition. In American literature, scholars like Ann Douglas, Nina Baym, and Jane Tompkins have illuminated the transformative power of women's fiction in shaping nineteenth-century American culture.

Showalter asserts that Virginia Woolf's work belongs to a tradition distinct from modernism, challenging previous criticisms of her writing and revealing overlooked dimensions of her literary contributions. Overall, Showalter underscores the importance of gynocentric criticism in reevaluating literary history and recognizing the profound impact of women's writing.

2.8 Showalter's Engagement with Literary Theory

Showalter critiques existing theories of literary influence, arguing that they often overlook or oversimplify the complexities of women's writing. While male texts are typically seen as influenced by other male predecessors, women's texts must navigate both paternal and maternal precursors, dealing with the challenges and advantages of each lineage. She emphasizes the need for more nuanced accounts of influence that go beyond simplistic dualisms and recognize the distinctiveness of women's literary traditions.

Drawing on A. Richards' analogy, Showalter highlights the common oversimplification of women's literary tradition as merely a response or revision to the male tradition. She advocates for viewing women's writing as a source of strength and solidarity in its own right, capable of generating unique experiences and symbols independent of the male tradition. Showalter introduces the concept of a double-voiced discourse in women's fiction, where both dominant and muted narratives coexist. She suggests that feminist criticism should strive to uncover the submerged narratives within women's texts, offering alternative interpretations that challenge traditional readings dominated by male perspectives.

Furthermore, Showalter proposes a contextual analysis approach, akin to Clifford Geertz's "thick description," which seeks to understand the cultural significance of women's writing within its social and historical context. She acknowledges that no theory can replace the close engagement with actual texts but argues that cultural anthropology and social history can provide valuable frameworks for understanding women's literary production.

Ultimately, Showalter rejects the idea of a genderless literary landscape and embraces the "tumultuous and intriguing wilderness of difference" as the true destination for feminist criticism. She emphasizes that understanding the specificity of women's writing is essential for recognizing and valuing the diversity of literary expression.

2.9 Conclusion

Elaine Showalter's essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" is a pivotal work that outlines the historical development, challenges, and achievements of feminist literary criticism. Showalter's analysis highlights the emergence of feminist literary theory as a distinct academic field, tracing its roots from the 1960s to the 1980s. She discusses how feminist critics grappled

with the patriarchal bias inherent in literary canons and institutions, seeking to uncover and challenge the gendered assumptions embedded in literature.

Showalter's essay also explores the various waves of feminism and their impact on literary studies, emphasizing the diversity of feminist perspectives and methodologies. She discusses the tensions within feminist criticism, such as the debates between essentialism and constructivism, as well as the challenges of incorporating intersectionality into literary analysis. Showalter reflects on the metaphor of "the wilderness" to describe the marginalization and exclusion experienced by women writers throughout history. She argues that feminist criticism functions as a means of reclaiming and reinterpreting literary texts from a female perspective, thereby challenging the dominance of male-authored narratives.

In conclusion, Showalter's essay provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of feminist literary criticism, from its nascent stages to its position as a significant force within academia. It underscores the ongoing struggle to achieve gender equity in literary studies and the broader cultural sphere while acknowledging the progress made and the work that remains to be done.

2.10 Questions

1. Showalter discusses the three phases of feminist literary criticism: the feminine, feminist, and female. Analyze each phase, highlighting its key characteristics, contributions, and criticisms.

2. In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Showalter suggests that feminist criticism underwent a process of professionalization. Discuss the implications of this professionalization for the field of literary studies, including its impact on academic institutions, publishing, and scholarly discourse.

3. Showalter argues that feminist criticism functions as a means of "gynocriticism," focusing on women's writing as a distinct literary tradition. Evaluate the concept of gynocriticism, considering its effectiveness in challenging patriarchal literary norms and promoting the recognition of women writers.

4. Discuss Showalter's critique of the "phallic model" of literary history and her proposal for an alternative model based on the androgynous perspective. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these models in accounting for gender dynamics in literature.

5. Showalter highlights the role of feminist criticism in uncovering and reinterpreting forgotten or marginalized women writers. Choose one or more examples discussed in the essay and analyze how feminist critics have contributed to the rediscovery and reassessment of these authors' works.

6. Analyze the metaphor of "the wilderness" as used by Showalter to describe the position of women writers within the literary canon. How does this metaphor resonate with broader themes of exclusion, marginalization, and resistance in feminist discourse?

7. Showalter discusses the challenges of incorporating intersectionality into feminist literary analysis. Choose one or more intersectional approaches mentioned in the essay (e.g., race, class, sexuality) and examine how they intersect with gender in the context of literary criticism.

8. Evaluate Showalter's reflections on the relationship between feminist criticism and literary tradition. How do feminist critics engage with and challenge established literary canons while also drawing on literary traditions to advance feminist agendas?

9. Showalter suggests that feminist criticism operates within a dual tradition of protest and tradition. Discuss this assertion, providing examples from the essay to illustrate how feminist critics simultaneously challenge patriarchal norms and engage with literary traditions.

10. Reflect on the enduring relevance of Showalter's essay in the context of contemporary feminist literary criticism. How have her insights shaped the direction of the field, and what are the implications for future scholarship and activism?

2.11 Suggested Readings:

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