II M.A English

(IV Semester)

English Literature for UGC Examinations

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Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic* (1948); Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (1961); René Wellek, "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History" and "Romanticism Re-examined," in *Concepts of Criticism* (1963); Northrop Frye, ed., *Romanticism Reconsidered* (1963), and *A Study of English Romanticism* (1968); R. S. Crane, "Neoclassical Criticism," in *Dictionary of World Literature*, ed. Joseph T. Shipley (rev. 1970); M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953), and *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971); Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (1981); Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760–1830* (1982); Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (1983); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (trans. 1988); two books by Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (1990), and *The Roots of Romanticism* (2001; transcripts of lectures originally given, 1965); and Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011). See also Stuart Curran, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (1993); *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776–1832* (2001); and Christopher Murray, *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era* (2004). Hugh Honour, in his books on *Neo-classicism* (1969) and on *Romanticism* (1979), stresses the visual arts, while Charles Rosen, in *The Romantic Generation* (1995), focuses on music. For a history of the era in Europe, see Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution: A History* (2011). In *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986), Stuart Curran stresses the relationship of innovative Romantic forms to the traditional poetic genres.

See also *closed couplet*; *decorum*; *deism*; *Enlightenment*; *Great Chain of Being*; *humanism*; *primitivism*; *satire*.

Neoclassic Period: 282; *160.*

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New Criticism: This term, made current by the publication of John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* in 1941, came to be applied to a theory and practice that remained prominent in American literary criticism until late in the 1960s. The movement derived in considerable part from elements in I. A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929) and from the critical essays of T. S. Eliot. It opposed a prevailing interest of scholars, critics, and teachers of that era in the biographies of authors, in the social context of literature, and in literary history by insisting that the proper concern of literary criticism is not with the external circumstances or effects or historical position of a work but with a detailed consideration of the

work itself as an independent entity. Notable critics in this mode were the southerners Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, whose textbooks *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943) did much to make the New Criticism the predominant method of teaching literature in American colleges, and even in high schools, for the next two or three decades. Other prominent writers of that time—in addition to Ransom, Brooks, and Warren—who are often identified as New Critics are Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, and William K. Wimsatt.

An influential English critic, F. R. Leavis, in turning his attention from background, sources, and biography to the detailed analysis of "literary texts themselves," shared some of the concepts of the New Critics and their analytic focus on what he called "the words on the page." He differed from his American counterparts, however, in his insistence that great literary works are a concrete and life-affirming enactment of moral and cultural values; he stressed also the essential role in education of what he called "the Great Tradition" of English literature in advancing the values of culture and "civilization" against the antagonistic forces in modern life. See F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936); *Education and the University* (1943, 2nd ed. 1948); *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); also Anne Sampson, *F. R. Leavis* (1992).

The New Critics differed from one another in many ways, but the following points of view and procedures were shared by many of them:

1. A poem should be treated as such—in Eliot's words, "primarily as poetry and not another thing"—and should therefore be regarded as an independent and self-sufficient verbal object. The first law of criticism, John Crowe Ransom said, "is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object" and shall recognize "the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake." (See *objective criticism*.) New Critics warn the reader against critical practices which divert attention from the poem itself (see *intentional fallacy* and *affective fallacy*). In analyzing and evaluating a particular work, they eschew reference to the biography and temperament and personal experiences of the author, to the social conditions at the time of its production, or to its psychological and moral effects on the reader; they also tend to minimize recourse to the place of the work in the history of literary forms and subject matter. Because of its focus on the literary work in isolation from its attendant circumstances and effects, the New Criticism is often classified as a type of critical *formalism*.
2. The principles of the New Criticism are basically verbal. That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language whose attributes are defined by systematic opposition to the language of science and of practical and logical discourse, and the explicative procedure is to analyze the meanings and interactions of words, *figures of speech*, and *symbols*. The emphasis is on the "organic unity," in a successful literary work, of its overall structure with its verbal meanings, and we are warned against separating the two by what Cleanth Brooks called "the heresy of paraphrase."

3. The distinctive procedure for a New Critic is **explication**, or **close reading**: the detailed analysis of the complex interrelationships and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work. **Explication de texte** (stressing all kinds of information, whether internal or external, relevant to the full understanding of a word or passage) had long been a formal procedure for teaching literature in French schools, but the explicative analysis of internal verbal interactions characteristic of the New Criticism derives from such books as I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929) and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).

4. The distinction between literary *genres*, although acknowledged, does not play an essential role in the New Criticism. The essential components of any work of literature, whether lyric, narrative, or dramatic, are conceived to be words, images, and symbols rather than character, thought, and plot. These linguistic elements, whatever the genre, are often said to be organized around a central and humanly significant *theme*, and to manifest high literary value to the degree that they manifest "*tension*," "*irony*," and "*paradox*" in achieving a "reconciliation of diverse impulses" or an "equilibrium of opposed forces." The form of a work, whether or not it has characters and plot, is said to be primarily a "structure of meanings," which evolve into an integral and freestanding unity mainly through a play and counterplay of "thematic imagery" and "symbolic action."

The basic orientation and modes of analysis in the New Criticism were adapted to the **contextual criticism** of Eliseo Vivas and Murray Krieger. Krieger defined contextualism as "the claim that the poem is a tight, compelling, finally closed context," which prevents "our escape to the world of reference and action beyond," and requires that we "judge the work's efficacy as an aesthetic object." (See Murray Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry*, 1956, and *Theory of Criticism*, 1976.) The revolutionary thrust of the mode had lost much of its force by the 1960s, when it gave way to various newer theories of criticism, but it has left a deep and enduring mark on the criticism and teaching of literature, in its primary emphasis on the individual work and in the variety and subtlety of the devices that it made available for analyzing its internal relations. *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, eds. Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker (1985), is a collection of *structuralist*, *poststructuralist*, and other essays which—often in express opposition to the New Criticism—exemplify the diverse newer modes of "close reading"; some of these essays claim that competing forces within the language of a lyric poem preclude the possibility of the unified meaning that was a central tenet of the New Critics.

Central instances of the theory and practice of New Criticism are Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), and W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (1954). The enterprises of New Criticism are privileged over alternative approaches to literature in René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1964), which became a standard reference book in the graduate study of literature. Robert W. Stallman's *Critiques and Essays in Criticism, 1920–1948*

(1949) is a convenient collection of essays in this critical mode. See also Joseph M. Kuntz, ed., *Poetry Explication: A Checklist of Interpretation since 1924 of British and American Poems Past and Present* (3rd ed., 1980). Additionally, see W. K. Wimsatt, ed., *Explication as Criticism* (1963); the review of the movement by René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, Vol. 6 (1986); and the spirited retrospective defense of New Criticism by its chief exponent, Cleanth Brooks, "In Search of the New Criticism" (1983), reprinted in Brooks, *Community, Religion, and Literature* (1995). For critiques of the theory and methods of the New Criticism, see R. S. Crane, ed., *Critics and Criticism, Ancient and Modern* (1952), and *The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (1953); Gerald Graff, *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (1970); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1993); Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges* (1997). For references to *New Criticism* in other entries, see pages *54, 143, 150, 179*. See also *affective fallacy*; *ambiguity*; *form and structure*; *intentional fallacy*; *tension*.

neoclassic and romantic: The simplest use of these extremely variable terms is as noncommittal names for periods of literature. In this application, the "Neoclassic Period" in England spans the 140 years or so after the Restoration (1660), and the "Romantic Period" is usually taken to extend approximately from the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789—or alternatively, from the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798—through the first three decades of the nineteenth century. With reference to American literature, the term "neoclassic" is rarely applied to eighteenth-century writers; on the other hand, 1830–65, the era of Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne, is sometimes called "the American Romantic Period." (See *periods of English literature* and *periods of American literature*.) "Neoclassic" and "romantic" are frequently applied also to periods of German, French, and other Continental literatures, but with differences in the historical spans they identify.

Historians have often tried to "define" neoclassicism or romanticism, as though each term denoted an essential feature which was shared, to varying degrees, by all the major writings of an age. But the multiplex course of literary events has not formed itself around such simple entities, and the numerous and conflicting single definitions of neoclassicism and romanticism are either so vague as to be next to meaningless or so specific as to fall far short of equating with the great range and variety of the literary phenomena. A more useful undertaking is simply to specify some salient attributes of literary theory and practice that were shared by a number of prominent writers in the Neoclassic Period in England and that serve to distinguish them from many outstanding writers of the Romantic Period. The following list of ideas and characteristics that were shared, between 1660 and the late 1700s, by authors such as John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, and Edmund Burke, may serve as an introductory sketch of some prominent features of **neoclassic** literature:

1. These authors exhibited a strong traditionalism, which was often joined to a distrust of radical innovation and was evidenced above all in their great respect for **classical** writers—that is, the writers of ancient Greece and Rome—who were thought to have achieved excellence, and established the enduring models, in all the major literary *genres*. Hence the term "neoclassic." (It is from this high estimate of the literary achievements of classical antiquity that the term "**a classic**" has come to be

applied to any later literary work that is widely agreed to have achieved excellence and to have set a standard in its kind. Refer to the entry *canon of literature*, and see T. S. Eliot, *What Is a Classic?*, 1945, and Frank Kermode, *The Classic*, 1975.)

2. Literature was conceived to be primarily an "art"; that is, a set of skills which, although it requires innate talents, must be perfected by long study and practice and consists mainly in the deliberate adaptation of known and tested means to the achievement of foreseen ends upon the audience of readers. (See *pragmatic criticism*, under *criticism*.) The neoclassic ideal, founded especially on Horace's Roman *Ars Poetica* (first century BC), is the craftsman's ideal, demanding finish, correction, and attention to detail. Special allowances were often made for the unerring and innovative freedom of what were called **natural geniuses**, and also for felicitous strokes, available even to some less gifted poets, which occur without premeditation and achieve, as Alexander Pope said (in his deft and comprehensive summary of neoclassic principles *An Essay on Criticism*, 1711), "a grace beyond the reach of art." But the prevailing view was that a natural genius such as Homer or Shakespeare is extremely rare and probably a thing of the past, and that to even the best of artful poets, literary "graces" come only occasionally. The representative neoclassic writer commonly strove, therefore, for "correctness," was careful to observe the complex demands of stylistic *decorum*, and for the most part respected the established "rules" of his art. The neoclassic **rules of poetry** were, in theory, the essential properties of the various *genres* (such as epic, tragedy, comedy, pastoral) that have been abstracted from classical works whose long survival has proved their excellence. Such properties, many critics believed, must be embodied in modern works if these too are to be excellent and to survive through the ages. In England, however, many critics were dubious about some of the rules accepted by Italian and French critics and opposed the strict application of rules such as the *three unities* in drama.

3. Human beings, and especially human beings as an integral part of a social organization, were regarded as the primary subject matter of the major forms of *literature*. Poetry was held to be an *imitation* of human life—in a common phrase, "a mirror held up to nature." And by the human actions it imitates, and the artistic form it gives to the imitation, poetry is designed to yield both instruction and pleasure to the people who read it. Not art for art's sake, but art for humanity's sake, was a central ideal of neoclassic *humanism*.

4. In both the subject matter and the appeal of art, emphasis was placed on what human beings possess in common—representative characteristics and widely shared experiences, thoughts, feelings, and tastes. "True wit," Pope said in a much-quoted passage of his *Essay on Criticism*, is "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." That is, a primary aim of poetry is to give new and consummate expression to the great

commonplaces of human wisdom, whose universal acceptance and durability are the best warrant of their importance and truth. Some critics also insisted, it should be noted, on the need to balance or enhance the general, typical, and familiar with the opposing qualities of novelty, particularity, and invention. Samuel Johnson substituted for Pope's definition of true wit the statement that wit "is at once natural and new" and praised Shakespeare because, while his characters are species, they are all "discriminated" and "distinct." But there was wide agreement that the general nature and the shared values of humanity are the basic source and test of art, and also that the fact of universal human agreement, everywhere and always, is the best test of moral and religious truths, as well as of artistic values. (Compare *deism*.)

5. Neoclassic writers, like the major philosophers of the time, viewed human beings as limited agents who ought to set themselves only accessible goals. Many of the great works of the period, satiric and didactic, attack human "pride"—interpreted as presumption beyond the natural limits of the species—and enforce the lesson of the golden mean (the avoidance of extremes) and of humanity's need to submit to its restricted position in the cosmic order—an order sometimes envisioned as a natural hierarchy, or *Great Chain of Being*. In art, as in life, what was for the most part praised was the law of measure and the acceptance of limits upon one's freedom. The poets admired extremely the great genres of epic and tragedy but wrote their own masterpieces in admittedly lesser and less demanding forms such as the essay in verse and prose, the comedy of manners, and especially satire, in which they felt they had more chance to equal or surpass their classical and English predecessors. They submitted to at least some "rules" and other limiting conventions in literary subjects, structure, and diction. Typical was their choice, in many poems, to write within the extremely tight limits of the *closed couplet*. But a distinctive quality of the urbane poetry of the Neoclassic Period was, in the phrase often quoted from Horace, "the art that hides art"; that is, the seeming freedom and ease with which, at its best, it meets the challenge set by traditional and highly restrictive patterns.

Here are some aspects in which **romantic** aims and achievements, as manifested by many prominent and innovative writers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, differ most conspicuously from their neoclassic precursors:

1. The prevailing attitude favored innovation over traditionalism in the materials, forms, and style of literature. Wordsworth's preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 was written as a poetic **manifesto**, or statement of revolutionary aims, in which he denounced the upper-class subjects and the *poetic diction* of the preceding century and proposed to deal with materials from "common life" in "a selection of language really used by men." Wordsworth's serious or tragic treatment of lowly subjects in common language violated the neoclassic rule of *decorum*,

which asserted that the serious genres should deal only with the momentous actions of royal or aristocratic characters in an appropriately elevated style. Other innovations in the period were the exploitation by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, and others of the realm of the supernatural and of "the far away and the long ago"; the assumption by William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley of the persona of a poet-prophet who writes a visionary mode of poetry; and the use of poetic *symbolism* (especially by Blake and Shelley) deriving from a world-view in which objects are charged with a significance beyond their physical qualities. "I always seek in what I see," as Shelley said, "the likeness of something beyond the present and tangible object."

2. In his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth repeatedly declared that good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." According to this view, poetry is not primarily a mirror of men in action; on the contrary, its essential component is the poet's own feelings, while the process of composition, since it is "spontaneous," is the opposite of the artful manipulation of means to foreseen ends stressed by the neoclassic critics. (See *expressive criticism*.) Wordsworth carefully qualified this radical doctrine by describing his poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility," by specifying that a poet's spontaneity is the result of a prior process of deep reflection, and by granting that it may be followed by second thoughts and revisions. But the immediate act of composition, if a poem is to be genuine, must be spontaneous—that is, unforced, and free of what Wordsworth decried as the "artificial" rules and conventions of his neoclassic predecessors. "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree," Keats wrote, "it had better not come at all." The philosophically minded Coleridge substituted for neoclassic "rules," which he describes as imposed on the poem from without, the concept of inherent organic "laws"; that is, he conceives that each poetic work, like a growing plant, evolves according to its own internal principles into its final *organic form*.

3. To a remarkable degree external nature—the landscape, together with its flora and fauna—became a persistent subject of poetry and was described with an accuracy and sensuous nuance unprecedented in earlier writers. It is a mistake, however, to describe the romantic poets as simply "nature poets." (See *nature writing*, under *ecocriticism*.) While many major poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge—and to a great extent by Shelley and Keats—set out from and return to an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape, the outer scene is not presented for its own sake but as a stimulus for the poet to engage in the most characteristic human activity, that of thinking. Representative Romantic works are in fact poems of feeling-ful meditation which, although often stimulated by a natural phenomenon, are concerned with central human experiences and problems. Wordsworth asserted, in what he called a "Prospectus" to his major poems, that it is "the Mind of Man" which is "my haunt, and the main region of my song."

4. Neoclassic poetry was about other people, but many Romantic poems, long and short, invited the reader to identify the protagonists with the poets themselves, either directly, as in Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805, rev. 1850) and a number of lyric poems (see *lyric*), or in altered but recognizable form, as in Lord Byron's *Childe Harold* (1812–18). In prose we find a parallel vogue in the revealingly personal essays of Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt and in a number of spiritual and intellectual autobiographies: Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822), Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817), and Thomas Carlyle's fictionalized self-representation in *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34). And whether Romantic subjects were the poets themselves or other people, they were no longer represented as part of an organized society but, typically, as solitary figures engaged in a long, and sometimes infinitely elusive, quest; often they were also social nonconformists or outcasts. Many important Romantic works had as protagonist the isolated rebel, whether for good or ill: Prometheus, Cain, the Wandering Jew, the Satanic hero-villain, or the great outlaw.

5. What seemed to a number of political liberals the infinite social promise of the French Revolution in the early 1790s fostered the sense in Romantic writers that theirs was a great age of new beginnings and high possibilities. Many writers viewed a human being as endowed with limitless aspiration toward an infinite good envisioned by the faculty of imagination. "Our destiny," Wordsworth says in a visionary moment in *The Prelude*, "our being's heart and home, / Is with infinitude, and only there," and our desire is for "something evermore about to be." "Less than everything," Blake announced, "cannot satisfy man." Humanity's undaunted aspirations beyond its assigned limits, which to the neoclassic moralist had been its tragic error of generic "pride," now became humanity's glory and a mode of triumph, even in failure, over the pettiness of circumstance. In a parallel way, the typical neoclassic judgment that the highest art is the perfect achievement of limited aims gave way to dissatisfaction with rules and inherited restrictions. According to a number of Romantic writers, the highest art consists in an endeavor beyond finite human possibility; as a result, neoclassical satisfaction in the perfectly accomplished, because limited, enterprise was replaced in writers such as Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley by a preference for the glory of the imperfect, in which the artist's very failure attests the grandeur of his aim. Also, Romantic writers once more entered into competition with their greatest predecessors in audacious long poems in the most exacting genres: Wordsworth's *Prelude* (a rerendering, at epic length and in the form of a spiritual autobiography, of central themes of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*); Blake's visionary and prophetic epics; Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (emulating Greek drama); Keats' Miltonic epic *Hyperion*; and Byron's ironic conspectus of contemporary European civilization, *Don Juan*.

See *Enlightenment*, and refer to A. O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948); James Sutherland, *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (1948); Walter

The New Historicism

Louis Montrose describes the New Historicism as "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history." History is not a set of fixed or objective facts. Like literature history needs to be interpreted as a text. On his part, Stephen Greenblatt, who coined the term "New Historicism", asserts that "history cannot be divorced from textuality." Further, New Historicism attempts to situate literary works within an historical matrix. Leonard Teenenhouse, another theorist, says, "The history of a culture is a history of all its products, literature being just one such product, social organization, the legal apparatus, yet another, and so on." It is interesting that New Historicism has a portmanteau quality as it brackets together literature, ethnography, anthropology, art history, and other disciplines.

The key assumptions of New Historicism include that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices, literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably, and no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths. Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) asserts that a literary text is a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes. Again in *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982) he discusses specific discourses and signifying codes of the Renaissance. He contends that social energy is the permanent source of literary power and it is a product of collective physical and mental experiences. Language at the heart of literary power is the supreme instance of a collective creation. No art form is free from social energy and there is no spontaneous generation of social energy. Artistic expression is never perfectly self-contained. Stephen Greenblatt argues as to how these social energies are in circulation. For example, the Elizabethan notion of power is based on predation, fraud, force, deceit and hypocrisy, which is nothing but Machiavellian. In *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), he gives a selection from Thomas Harriot's *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588) which he claims as a representative discourse of the English colonizers of America. The English power structure was built by using ruthless oppression against the American Indians. Greenblatt identifies a parallel power-discourse in *The Tempest* between Prospero, the colonizer and Caliban, the oppressed native. Interestingly, both works record the counter discourse of American Indians and Caliban. However, the Elizabethan audience were manoeuvred and manipulated by Shakespeare's plays to accept and glorify the power structure. Any political or cultural order allows 'subversion' to a certain level in order to effectively 'contain' such challenges to existing order. Greenblatt applies to these plays the conceptual pattern of 'subversion-containment dialectic' which is the central concern of new historicist critics. The New Historicists

working vocabulary include marketplace metaphors like circulation, negotiation and exchange.

The next important component is the status of the anecdote within New Historicism's practices. In their book *Practicing New Historicism* (2000) Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher discuss anecdote or 'anecdotalism,' as a useful tool in analysing the past, which of course has invited the charge of bad historiography. According to Greenblatt, the anecdote appears as the "touch of the real," a means of reviving canonical texts, the canon in turn, must lend some of its lustre to the marginal anecdote and its subjects. For Gallagher, the anecdote forms an important part of a tradition of counterhistory in both British and French materialist discourses.

New historicists borrow Foucault's concept of power and power relations in a political context of history. According to Foucault, even social relations are intrinsically relations of power. A panoptic state to maintain its surveillance does not use intimidation; instead it uses what Foucault terms as 'discursive practices.' The discursive formations of an era determine what is at that time accounted 'knowledge' and 'truth' as well as humanly normal. Any challenge to the socio-political stand or oppositional behaviour would be termed abnormal or deviant. That is, a state circulates its ideology through multiplicity of discourses so that its power structures are well guarded. Literature actively participates in the consolidation and/or construction of discourses. In a way it is 'thought control' and a state does it in order to perpetuate or sustain its power. For instance, the English in their colonies characterized the diseases ravaging native population as God-sent punishment for their disobedience to their colonial masters.

Clifford Geertz's semiotic anthropology treats culture or a cultural event like the Balinese cock-fighting as a text or a signifying system. In fact, Geertz insists that all culture is 'manufactured' and for all practical purposes without origin. In order to understand the socio-cultural production of an event and the conventions and codes that produce meaning, one needs to possess local knowledge which may be gained through close reading of the 'thick description.' Geertz uses the Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle's term 'thick description' to refer to minutely observed social and cultural practices that are recorded in great detail. Thick description, which new historicism appropriates, inspires interpretation and encourages the reader to look for meaningful exchanges. Geertz shows that thick description dissolves apparent contingency and arbitrariness by demonstrating that historico-cultural differences can be meaningfully at odds with our own related sign systems.

To conclude, it can be said with certitude that giving 'equal weighting' to literary and non-literary material is the foremost new historicist practice. As Hayden White points out, New Historicism challenges 'reigning orthodoxies' of literary and historical studies in its insistence on naming textuality as the key to understanding representations, culture and the past.

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Postmodernism

Postmodernism does not designate a systematic theory or a comprehensive philosophy. It is simply a depiction of a multitude of interrelated phenomena. A postmodern world is characterised by a continual change of perspectives, with no underlying common frame of reference. In fact, the term 'postmodernism' has been used to talk about architecture, literature, film, theatre, dance, visual arts, aesthetic criticism and theory, anthropology, historiography, geography, theology, pedagogy, etc. Today, many forms of postmodernism are seen in the arts and other discourses. Some continue to see postmodern as a moment, a movement, a condition or a period. David Harvey in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* calls it a situation in which the world finds itself after the breakdown of the 'Enlightenment Project.'

Postmodernism differs from modernism in that it contests the exclusive 'either/or' binary oppositions of modernity and asserts the value of inclusive 'both/and' thinking. Postmodern paradox, ambiguity, irony, indeterminacy and contingency replace modern closure, unity, order, the absolute, and the rational. In particular, postmodernism challenges the modernist view of autonomy of art and its deliberate separation from life. To the postmodernist, art is not merely an aesthetic experience but a way of knowing the world. In the words of John Barth, postmodernism is based on its being an extension, intensification, subversion or repudiation of modernism. There are at least two types of postmodernism – the first type is non-mimetic, ultra-autonomous and anti-referential; and the second type is historically engage and problematically referential. It must be remembered that a poetics of postmodernism would not set up a hierarchy and privilege a particular theory or practice.

Ihab Hassan, an early postmodern theorist, discusses two constitutive tendencies in postmodernism: one of indeterminacy, the other of immanence. He coins a neologism 'indetermanence' to describe how the immanence called language engenders indeterminancies like ambiguities, ironies, epistemic conundrums, fragments, ruptures, silences, differences, discontinuities, randomness, pluralism and so on in literature. Thus postmodernism veers towards open, playful and optative discourse – 'a white ideology.'

Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon that uses and abuses, installs and subverts the very concepts it challenges in literature and in all forms of arts. To illustrate her point, she uses the label 'historiographic metafiction' to refer to popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet lay claim to events and personages as in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Midnight's Children*. Historiographic metafiction accepts the notion that history and fiction are human constructs as it makes grounds for rethinking and reworking of

the forms and contents of the past. She cites Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which is inherently contradictory as it is not pure metafiction and nor is it a historical novel. Linda Hutcheon claims that works like Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* expose the myth or illusion making tendencies of historiography.

Jean-Francois Lyotard takes his discussion of postmodernism to another level by defining postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives of legitimation." According to him, a metadiscourse makes an explicit appeal to some grand narrative and thereby legitimates itself. For example, a metanarrative implying a philosophy of history is used to legitimate knowledge. As a result of the collapse of the universal metanarratives the local narratives come into prominence. Lyotard adds that we pass judgement on truth, beauty and justice without criteria for the judgements. In other words, a postmodern writer is in the position of a philosopher; the text he produces is not in principle governed by pre-established rules and cannot be judged by applying familiar categories to them. Besides, an author's originality and individuality are lost in a pervasive use of and references to other texts, trying to create intertextuality. For example, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* is filled with hidden quotes and allusions to other texts. Ultimately, the text is characterized by pastiche and collage. It breaks the "tyranny of the straight line" and becomes non-linear or curvilinear, ornamental and unpredictable, even without a formal closure. B.S Johnson's famous shuffle novel *The Unfortunates* does away with pagination and by extension linearity of structure or plot.

Jean Baudrillard perfectly sums up postmodern debate by using the concept of simulacrum. According to him simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false' and between 'real' and 'imaginary.' Simulation is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. A hyperreal is the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. Ultimately it is a play of illusions and phantasms. The Disneyland is a perfect example and so is a computer-generated virtual world. In fiction writing, postmodernist writers compose texts which mock, interrogate and subvert the 'classical' realist-empiricist assumption that language can reflect or render "things as they really are." Barth, Barthelme, Coover, Gass, Nabokov, Pynchon and Vonnegut write 'self-reflexive' works in which the narrative conventions are exploited, parodied and subverted.

Finally, as Terry Eagleton points out postmodernism persuades us to relinquish epistemological paranoia and embrace the brute objectivity of random subjectivity. 'Eclecticism' marks a subject's behaviour and choice in the contemporary general culture. The difference between 'high culture' and 'mass culture' disappears. Individual tastes vary from reggae music to 'retro' clothes and fast food to folk arts. The concepts of universality and homogeneity give way to heterogeneity, multiple identities, multiple realities and multiple truths as cultures interpenetrate. Nothing but 'playful pluralism' is the hallmark of our postmodern condition.

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momentum during the idealistic decades of romanticism. Many writers found their voice in the struggle to improve society.

The feminist **MARGARET FULLER** (1810–50), for example, was an exceptional essayist and the first professional woman journalist in America. Her popular book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century,* explores woman's role in society and uses transcendentalist principles to analyze the difficulties faced by women. Other reformers included **HARRIET BEECHER STOWE** (1811–96), whose sentimental novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the most popular novel of the 19th century. It appealed to the reader's emotions and dramatized the contentious social issues surrounding slavery that led the country into civil war. Abolitionism and other social reform issues were at the heart of the women's literary movement.

SOJOURNER TRUTH (ca. 1797–1883) represented this movement as well, and though she was illiterate her entire life, her *Narrative of Sojourner Truth,* transcribed by the editor Oliver Gilbert, tells the remarkable story of her work as a charismatic women's rights advocate.

EMILY DICKINSON (1830–86) was ahead of her time in many ways. Writing at the end of the transcendentalist period in New England, Dickinson loved nature and studied the birds and plants in her surroundings, which often found their way into her poems. She was also a loner and an extreme individualist, all of which made the principles of transcendentalism appealing to her. But unlike the writers of that period, Dickinson wrote poems that were extremely modern in their reliance on images and their insistence on brevity. Hers was a chiseled and mystical style that captivates modern literary critics. The novelists and fiction writers most associated with the Romantic period include NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville, writers who were more interested in the larger-than-life characteristics of their protagonists than they were in presenting realistic figures. Characters like Ahab in *Moby Dick* and Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* struggle with their own anguished souls in the mystery of life that rises from the dark and unknown unconscious. The drama is centered in the human interior. The loners of early American literature reflected the lack of tradition in early American culture. Communities were not as settled as in Europe, and society was relatively classless compared to that of England. The constantly changing American frontier was reflected in the literary landscape, where the novelist had both the freedom and burden of inventing and defining the democratic American society in which he or she lived.

THE RISE OF REALISM, 1860–1914

With the Civil War (1861–65) came significant change in America's vision of itself. Where idealists had focused on the abolition of slavery and on promoting human rights prior to the war, they increasingly looked toward economic progress and

materialism afterward. Great industries were founded, and business boomed. Railroads crossed the country, and with them the telegraph, linking town to town and America to the world. The population of the country moved from the countryside to the city. Immigrants flooded harbors on both coasts, providing cheap labor, as well as a wealth of diversity. The Age of Realism (1860–1914) took hold as American writers began to grapple with the dehumanizing forces of the capitalist economy. As industry and cities grew larger, the individual seemed to matter less. Literature of this period illustrates the harm done to the weak and vulnerable in such a competitive and impersonal society. Triumph comes in realist fiction through hard work and kindness.

Mark Twain (1835–1910),a Mississippi River phrase meaning "two fathoms deep" was the pseudonym of Samuel Langhorne Clemens American writer and humorist. In 1867 Twain lectured in New York City, and in the same year he visited Europe and Palestine. He wrote of these travels in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), a book exaggerating those aspects of European culture that impress American tourists. In 1870 he married Olivia Langdon. After living briefly in Buffalo, New York, the couple moved to Hartford, Connecticut. Much of Twain's best work was written in the 1870s and 1880s in Hartford or during the summers at Quarry Farm, near Elmira, New York. *Roughing It* (1872) recounts his early adventures as a miner and journalist; *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) celebrates boyhood in a town on the Mississippi River; *A Tramp Abroad* (1880) describes a walking trip through the Black Forest of Germany and the Swiss Alps; *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), a children's book, focuses on switched identities in Tudor England; *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) combines an autobiographical account of his experiences as a river pilot with a visit to the Mississippi nearly two decades after he left it; *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) satirizes oppression in feudal England.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), the sequel to Tom Sawyer, is considered Twain's masterpiece. The book is the story of the title character, known as Huck, a boy who flees his father by rafting down the Mississippi River with a runaway slave, Jim. The pair's adventures show Huck (and the reader) the cruelty of which men and women are capable. Another theme of the novel is the conflict between Huck's feelings of friendship with Jim, who is one of the few people he can trust, and his knowledge that he is breaking the laws of the time by helping Jim escape. Huckleberry Finn, which is almost entirely narrated from Huck's point of view, is noted for its authentic language and for its deep commitment to freedom. Huck's adventures also provide the reader with a panorama of American life along the Mississippi before the Civil War. Twain's skill in capturing the rhythms of that life helps make the book one of the masterpieces of American literature.

Other offshoots of realism include the naturalist novels of THEODORE DREISER (1871–1945) and JACK LONDON; the investigative journalism of UPTON SINCLAIR; Western writers like BRET HARTE and WILLA CATHER; (1873–1947) cosmopolitan realists EDITH WHARTON (1862–1937) and HENRY JAMES (1843–1916); and Chicago poets EDGAR LEE MASTERS, (1868–1950) VACHEL LINDSAY (1879–1931), and CARL SANDBURG (1878–1967).

Mark Twain's realism was unconventional, arriving as it did at the tail end of romanticism. It was a fresh way to speak the truth and get society's attention. *Huckleberry Finn* dramatizes Twain's vision of a harmonious community and restores the open road and the American wilderness as the ultimate destination, in opposition to the already established American myth of success in the material world. Twain's frontier humor and regional sketches represented literary currents that became prevalent in the late 19th century. Although numerous writers prior to this time were interested in specific regions, the regionalists, or local colorists as they have sometimes been called, were interested exclusively in portraying a particular place as realistically as possible. Bret Harte was an extremely popular author of western tales, portraying the mining frontier. MARY WILKINS FREEMAN (1852–1930), Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96), and SARAH ORNE JEWETT (1849–1909) all depicted New England with intimate detail. Later in this period, the novelists ELLEN GLASGOW (1873–1945) and Willa Cather explored women's lives and their own regions— Richmond, Virginia, for Glasgow and the Nebraska prairie for Cather— in novels that resist categorization due to their exceptional ability to speak universally. Henry James and Edith Wharton were both brought up in wealthy, educated New York families who spent much of their time in Europe. Consequently, the novelists often contrasted Europeans and Americans. Their novels frequently focused on the gulf between the inner reality of individuals and the social conventions surrounding them. Naturalist writers like Theodore Dreiser insistently probed the increasingly industrial age. Naturalism developed as an extension of realism and was concerned primarily with depicting life as accurately as possible, without artificial distortions brought about by literary conventions or philosophical ideals. The characters in naturalist novels were helpless victims of environmental and biological forces beyond their control. *An American Tragedy,* Dreiser's best-known novel, is a scathing portrait of the American success myth gone awry. It reflects the dissatisfaction and despair of the poor and dispossessed at the bottom of America's social structure. The investigative journalism of the muckrakers came about in response to these social ills and gave rise to writers like Upton Sinclair, whose literary work played a significant role in instigating social change. *The Jungle,* Sinclair's famous portrayal of the Chicago meat-packing industry, caught the attention of the American public

as well as the political elite, creating a hotbed of discourse that ultimately led to new laws and more protection for the general population.

James, Henry (1843-1916), American expatriate writer, whose masterly fiction juxtaposed American innocence and European experience in a series of intense, psychologically complex works. James's work is characterized by leisurely pacing and subtle delineation of character rather than by dramatic incidents or complicated plots. His major writings, highly sensitive examples of the objective psychological novel, deal with the world of leisure and sophistication he had grown to know intimately in Europe. In his early novels and tales, James's theme was the impact of European culture on Americans traveling or living abroad. Examples from this phase are *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The American* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1879), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). In time James began to explore the types and manners of the English scene, as in *The Tragic Muse* (1890), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), and *The Awkward Age* (1899). His last three great novels, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), again take up the theme of contrast between American and European societies. several of his works have been successfully dramatized and adapted for films, including two of his many tales, "The Aspern Papers" (1888) and "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), and two of his most famous novels, *The Europeans* (1878) and *Washington Square* (1881).

Jewett, Sarah Orne (1849-1909), American writer, born in South Berwick, Maine, and educated at Berwick Academy. Her stories of New England life depict the fading charms of the provincial New England countryside. Her works won her a place as one of the most important writers of the local-color literary genre in American literature. Among Jewett's works are *Deephaven* (1877); *A Country Doctor* (1884); *The Life of Nancy* (1895); *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), her most outstanding work; and *The Tory Lover* (1901).

Dreiser, Theodore Herman Albert (1871-1945), American novelist and journalist of the naturalist school. Although some critics regarded his style as clumsy and plodding, Dreiser was generally recognized as an American literary pioneer. His career as a novelist began in 1900 with *Sister Carrie*, which he wrote in the intervals between work for various magazines. The novel tells the story of a small-town girl who moves to Chicago and eventually becomes a Broadway star in New York City. It also traces the decline and eventual suicide of her lover. As a result of public outcry against the novel for its depiction of unrepentant and unpunished characters and for its frank treatment of sexual issues, the publisher withdrew the book from public sale. The American writer Sinclair Lewis hailed *Sister Carrie* as "the first book free of English literary influence." In *The Financier* (1912) and *The Titan* (1914), he drew harsh portraits of a type of ruthless businessman. In *The "Genius"* (1915), he presented a study of the artistic temperament in a mercenary society. This novel

increased his influence among young American writers, who acclaimed him leader of a new school of social realism. Real fame, however, did not come to Dreiser until 1925, when his *An American Tragedy* had great popular success.

Cather, Willa Sibert (1873-1947), American writer, one of the country's foremost novelists, whose carefully crafted prose conveys vivid pictures of the American landscape and the people it molded. Influenced by the prose of the American regional writer Sarah Orne Jewett, Cather set many of her works in Nebraska and the American Southwest, areas with which she was familiar from her childhood.

From her college years on, Cather wrote short stories and poetry; her first published book was a collection of verse, *April Twilights* (1903); her first published prose was a group of stories, *The Troll Garden* (1905). Not until 1913, however, after having written her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), and having resigned from McClure's, did Cather devote herself solely to writing. Her subsequent novels, *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918), depict the resolute, dignified life of immigrant farm families on the Great Plains, in contrast to that of the native-born town dwellers. In these works Cather is noted for her skills in evoking the pioneer spirit. Cather also used the prairie setting in her novels *One of Ours* (1922; Pulitzer Prize, 1923) and *A Lost Lady* (1923). In these books her theme is the contrast between encroaching urbanization and the achievements of the pioneers. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), considered by some critics to be Cather's greatest novel, she deals with the missionary experiences of a Roman Catholic bishop among the Native Americans of New Mexico. Cather's last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, was published in 1940.

Frost, Robert (1874-1963), American poet, who drew his images from the New England countryside and his language from New England speech. Although Frost's images and voice often seem familiar and old, his observations have an edge of skepticism and irony that make his work, upon rereading, never as old-fashioned, easy, or carefree as it first appears. In being both traditional and skeptical, Frost's poetry helped provide a link between the American poetry of the 19th century and that of the 20th century.

In England, Frost achieved his first literary success. His book of poems *A Boy's Will* (1913) was printed by the first English publisher that Frost approached. The work established Frost as an author and was representative of his lifelong poetic style: sparse and technically precise, yet evocative in the use of simple and earthy imagery. His second collection, *North of Boston*, was published in 1914 and also won praise. **In 1961, at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy, Frost became the first poet to read a poem—"The Gift Outright"—at a presidential inauguration.**

Frost disliked free verse, which was popular with many writers of his time, and instead used traditional metrical and rhythmical schemes. He often wrote in the

standard meter of blank verse (lines with five stresses) but ran sentences over several lines so that the poetic meter plays subtly under the rhythms of natural speech. The first lines of "Birches" (1916) illustrate this distinctive approach to rhythm: "When I see birches bend to left and right/ Across the lines of straighter darker trees,/ I like to think some boy's been swinging them."

Frost listened to the speech in his country world north of Boston, and he recorded it. He had what he called "The ruling passion in man ... a gregarious instinct to keep together by minding each other's business." Frost continued to mind his neighbors' speech and business in his volume *Mountain Interval* (1916), which included the poems "The Road Not Taken," "An Old Man's Winter Night," "Birches," "Putting in the Seed," "Snow," and "A Time to Talk."

Frost's 1923 volume *New Hampshire* earned him the first of four Pulitzer Prizes that he would win over the next 20 years. The volume included longer poems that told stories, such as "Paul's Wife" and "The Witch of Coös," as well as short meditations on various subjects. These meditations include "Fragmentary Blue," "Fire and Ice," "Nothing Gold Can Stay," and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," which is perhaps Frost's best-known poem. The poem's ending, in which the line "And miles to go before I sleep" is repeated, indicates Frost's philosophy of continual and productive work—whether it be work on his New England farm, or the written work required to create his poetry.

In the title poem of *New Hampshire*, Frost makes an explicit statement about his beliefs. He declares how much he would "hate to be a runaway from nature," and asserts that people must make the best of life. He accepts pain or pleasure with indifference but expects more of the former than of the latter, saying that he makes "a virtue of my suffering" and that he will "not lack for pain to keep me awake."

Frost's *Collected Poems* (1930) won him his second Pulitzer Prize. And his next two collections—*A Further Range* (1936) and *A Witness Tree* (1942)—also won Pulitzers. He then wrote two plays in blank verse. The first, *A Masque of Reason* (1945), received lukewarm praise from critics. The second, *A Masque of Mercy* (1947), which is a modern treatment of Christian biblical figures, was more successful.

Frost's final volumes of poetry were *Steeple Bush* (1947) and *In the Clearing* (1962). The masterpiece of the first collection is "Directive." In this complex poem, rich words and images direct a reader to escape the present that is "now too much for us" by remembering a past time and place, which memory has "...made simple by the loss/ of detail..." The poem concludes with symbolic lines about the value of returning to one's roots: "Here are your waters and your watering place./ Drink and be whole again beyond confusion."

Sinclair, Upton Beall (1878-1968). The author of 90 books, Sinclair became well known after the publication of his novel *The Jungle* (1906), which exposed the unsanitary and

miserable working conditions in the stockyards of Chicago, Illinois, and led to an investigation by the federal government and the subsequent passage of pure food laws. Sinclair wrote other social and political novels and studies advocating prohibition and criticizing the newspaper industry. His well-known series of 11 novels concerned with Lanny Budd, a wealthy American secret agent who participates in important international events, includes *World's End* (1940) and *Dragon's Teeth* (1942), which dealt with Germany under the Nazis and won the 1943 *Pulitzer Prize* in fiction. He also wrote *The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair* (1962).

The Chicago Renaissance, led by Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, and Carl Sandburg, concerned itself with portraying the common people, using colloquial language, and openly dealing with taboo subjects such as sex. It was the voice of the Midwest, rising up to meet the East Coast literary establishment on its own terms. Sandburg, often thought of as a latter day Walt Whitman, sang the song of the Midwest in everyday, ebullient language that captured the heart of Americans across the land. Lindsay foreshadowed the Beats with his love of public readings and his populist spirit. Edgar Lee Masters is remembered for his daring and original *Spoon River Anthology*, which presented Master's collection of epitaphs on the 250 people buried in a fictitious small country village cemetery.

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Feminism

Feminism, as it is understood today, is both political and polemical. The centrality of the position of women in a patriarchal and parochial society is often a moot point in a social or political discourse or for that matter literary discourse. Indeed, it is a very revolutionary discourse with many contradictory concepts intervening in the history of evolution of women's physiological, psychological, spiritual, economical, social, and political aspects of life. The etymology of the term "feminism" is to be found in the Latin word *femina* meaning "woman" (through French *feminisme*) and thereby refers to the advocacy of women's rights, status and power at par with men on the grounds of "equality of sexes." In other words, it relates to the belief that women should have the same social, economic and political rights as men. Perhaps the earliest voice was that of Mary Wollstonecraft who in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) powerfully and cogently articulated the demands for women's rights soon after the French Revolution in 1789. A woman, who meekly subscribed to patriarchal dictates and took refuge in domesticity, was considered a Perfect Lady or an Angel in the House. Showalter quotes Cynthia Ozick who calls it 'custodial' that is "a set of opinions, prejudices, tastes and values prescribed for a subordinate group to perpetuate its subordination." It promoted submissiveness and helped evolve a female subculture, which simply meant 'a habit of living' involving puberty, menstruation, sexual initiation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause. The term 'feminism' became popular from the early twentieth century struggles for securing women's suffrage or voting rights through movements led chiefly by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the US and Emmeline Pankhurst in the UK. It had a spill over effect on other socio-political movements for women's emancipation from all kinds of tyranny by men. Feminism is, indeed, an attempt to analyse or comprehend how and why is femininity or the feminine sensibility, feminine experience, feminine expression different from masculinity or the masculine experience. It is undeniably a biological fact that men and women are inherently different.

It is appropriate here to make a conceptual distinction of each of these terms – "femaleness", "femininity" and "feminism". The "femaleness" refers to the physical and biological distinction between man and woman. It is decided at the time of birth itself by the basically different reproductive organs, skeletal structure and muscular curvature. . Such differences are not only applicable to human beings, but also common to all living species. Femininity is the social, cultural and psychological transformation of gender as distinctive category bearing social

meanings. Such a construction is created through institutionalized internalization of moral and ethical values, standardization of norms, typecasting of roles, existing communal structures of patriarchy, life style, internalizing customs like widowhood, prostitution, unwed mothers, emphasis on virginity, fidelity, religious rituals, notions of purity and pollution and attitudes of preferences and prejudices for and against one gender over another.

Feminism is an ideological position, which aims at structural and cultural transformation for equality of opportunity for women and eradication of all societal forces which lead to discrimination, oppression and exploitation of women in visible or invisible, open or hidden, overt or covert processes and patterns. It has developed through women's movements and has articulated women's voices in cognitive-theoretical ways and activist-transformative forms for status equality in gender-based divisive world and world view. Literature reflects the social position and cultural positioning of women through any suitable genre available to feminist writers. However, it would be pertinent to note that all women-centred writing do not become feminist. In other words, women's writing cannot be a synonym for feminist writing. As Rosalind Coward and Michele Barrett point out feminism is "an alignment of political interests."

The foremost among the feminist pundits is Simone De Beauvoir, who in her most influential work *Second Sex* (1953), asserts that women have been held in thraldom by men through relegation to the status of being man's "other." One of the most influential feminists of the late 20th century, Betty Freidan published a book entitled *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, which depicted the various roles of women in different fields such as industrial societies and specifically the stifling role of full-time homemaker offered to all women. Betty herself is the mother of three children and has analysed the plight of women like her who belong to the privileged upper middle strata of the American society. The next important contribution comes from none other than Kate Millet who examines the other side of power-structured relationships in her *Sexual Politics*. In 1970, when Kate Millet published her now classic work, she used the word "patriarchy" which has become part of the standard vocabulary of feminist writing. Millet made use of the term "patriarchy", which literally translated from the Greek means "the rule of the father."

In her collection of essays entitled *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf has raised objections to many common needs that are denied to women and enjoyed by the other sex alone. She raises sensitive questions related to drinking habits, poverty, creativity, and so on. When the reasons for the intellectual subjugation are explored, Woolf identified the primal one to be the struggle for money. Even to buy the basic articles like pen and papers for expressing their ideas, they need to depend upon men or work under men again. She ironically states that if Shakespeare had a genius sister, extremely intellectual and well-versed in writing plays like Shakespeare, she would have been stamped as a witch by the Elizabethan audience.

In her illuminating book *A Literature of their Own* (1978), Elaine Showalter traces the literary history, literary tradition, literary imagination, and the aesthetics that were exclusively women produced and women centred. As Ellen Moers observes, "Women studied with a special closeness the works written by their own sex." To make her study clear Elaine Showalter identifies three distinct phases in the development of literary tradition which she calls as Feminine phase (1840-1880), Feminist phase (1880-1920) and Female phase (1920-1960). The period thereafter she refers to as a period of self-awareness. To her goes the credit of coining the term *gynocritics* which means that women offer their critique of women's imagination and on feminization of literary discourse from a female point of view. Gynocritics is related to feminist research in history, anthropology, psychology and sociology, all of which have developed hypotheses of a female subculture.

There are feminists like Juliet Mitchell and Nancy J Chodorow who discussed how Freudian theory could be used to understand the nature of masculinity and femininity and the cause of male domination over female. Psychoanalytic criticism begins with Freud who claimed that the father-dominated Oedipus complex originated the binary division – masculine and feminine. In the work of the French psychoanalyst, Luce Irigaray, femininity is theorized as an effect of the organization of the female desire in a female libido. Irigaray argues that the patriarchal definition of female sexuality caused women to lose touch with their essential femininity, which is located in the female body and its capacity for multiple and heterogeneous pleasure. Her work *This Sex which is not One* (1985) offers a theory of the "female" rather than the "feminine". For Irigaray, the psyche is never bisexual, but always male or female. When freed from their patriarchal definition and the repression of their sexuality, women are assumed to be fundamentally different from men and their use of language is other than the logical language of the symbolic order. Helene Cixous, on the other hand, represents a distinctively French brand of radical feminism which centres on the concept of *ecriture feminine* or feminine writing – 'the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text' as Elaine Showalter defines it. She also attacks the patriarchal culture, especially Lacan's symbolic 'phallus' and Derrida's 'logocentrism' which are seen as two aspects of a pervasive and oppressive 'phallocentrism'.

Judith Butler, an American post-structuralist philosopher, who has contributed to the fields of feminism, queer theory, political philosophy, and ethics, highlights in her book *Gender Trouble* (2006), that the coherence of the categories of sex, gender and sexuality—the natural-seeming coherence, for example, of masculine gender and heterosexual desire in male bodies—is culturally constructed through the repetition of stylized acts in time. These stylized bodily acts, in their repetition establish the appearance of an essential, ontological "core" gender. This is the sense in which Butler famously theorizes gender, along with sex and sexuality, as performative. The performance of gender, sex, and sexuality, however, is not

voluntary choice for Butler, who locates the construction of the gendered, sexed, desiring subject within what she calls, borrowing from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, "regulative discourses." Judith Butler's contribution to feminist political thought is usually approached in terms of her concept of performativity, according to which gender exists only insofar as it is ritualistically and repetitively performed, creating permanent possibilities for performing gender in new and transgressive ways.

The voices of the black women gained popularity with the term "womanism" – the term coined by Alice Walker. Reading the "womanism" of black women offers the readers not only the possibility of changing one's outlook of the world, but also of changing the world itself. The black women, commonly known as African-American women, did not want themselves to be called "feminists" alone, because the strand of feminism advocated the basic rights of ordinary women whose status was not so miserable as that of black women. However, their beliefs and activism ignited a tradition of anti-racist and anti-sexist political movement and thoughts defined as Black American Feminism. Barbara Smith avers that a Black feminist approach to literature embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers.

Sheryl Sandberg, feminism's new boss and CEO of Facebook, in her book *Lean In* calls for redefining the notion of gender equality. She says, "First, we must decide that true equality is long overdue and will be achieved only when more women rise to the top of every government and every industry"(*Lean In* 92). Many women have high profile visibility now and they are holding positions which can transform our socio-cultural history. Marissa Meyer of Yahoo, Indra Nooyi of Pepsi, England's Prime Minister Theresa May, Christine Lagarde of IMF – to name a few - are redefining the role of women in a world that faces challenges from all quarters.

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