

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
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Lecture - 03
Key Terms and Concepts

One of the most important and influential terms in the twentieth century, literary criticism is affective fallacy, a term defined by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in the work, *The Verbal Icon*, published in 1954. Wimsatt and Beardsley defined the term as a confusion between the poem and the results the poem and its results that is what it is and what it does, it is believed to be the fallacy, therefore, crucial error. So, that is what they mean by the word fallacy. A crucial error in evaluating a work of art in terms of its results in the mind of the audience.

I will give you an example. Very often we judge a poem a work or a text by its affect, affect, as in a, double f, e, c, t or the feelings it arouses in us. You must have come across people calling a film or a book, any work, using certain adjectives such as the gut wrenching, heart rending, tear jerker, spine tingling, what do these mean? They mean, that the work had a certain effect on the readers on the audience and that is how they respond driven by the feelings that the work aroused in them. So, as a result of judging a work by the effect it produces on us, the poem itself as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear so that criticism ends in impressionism and relativism and now this is nothing new.

This is nothing new. Aristotle in his *poetics* tells us, the great tragedy should produce a catharsis in the spectators. The way a work affects us emotionally or the emotional impact of a work is called affective fallacy. So, this, these things have been discussed in *poetics* by Aristotle and he gives us the word catharsis, the kind of emotions, the kinds of emotions, that are produced in us while watching a word or reading a poem and for Aristotle, it was all very positive.

So, the way a work affects us emotionally or emotional impact of a work is an effective fallacy according to the 20th century critics Wimsatt and Beardsley. Wimsatt and Beardsley wrote their essay in direct response to the great I. A. Richards and his book, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, which was published in 1923 and Richards holds, that

the value of a poem can be measured by the psychological responses it insights in his riddles. And the essays of the affective fallacy was Beardsley and Wimsatt, Wimsatt's and Beardsley's response to Richard.

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Ambiguity

Next term is ambiguity. Now, you may have come across this word very frequently in, in various places. The work is ambiguous; there is a certain ambiguity that the speaker resort it to. So, that means, the sense was not too clear. What the write, what the writer or the speaker was trying to convey there is sense of duality or it is not something very straightforward to put it very simply.

Now, in literary criticism the word ambiguity gained currency since the publication of William Empson's seven types of ambiguity in 1930. For Empson, an ambiguity means something very pronounced and as a rule, witty and deceitful. So, keywords here, witty and deceitful. One example, in Lewis Carol's, Through the Looking Glass, humpty dumpty uses a word slythe and explains it as a mix of lithe and slimy. Now, what are we talking about here? It is we are discussing notion of portmanteau. So, slythe is the portmanteau word, which takes part from two different words, slimy and lithe. So, we is, it results in a new word slythe.

So, literature can mean different things at different times. For instance, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom's cabin meant something different at the time of the American civil war. We all know, American civil war between 1861 and 65, it, America was a very

different place at the time. So, the word Uncle Tom was generally used in extremely sympathetic tone. However, by 1954, at the time of civil rights act, to call someone Uncle Tom was seen as a deadly insult. So, you see same work of art, same work of literature and how it is received differently at different points at different periods

Again, T.S. Eliot calls Shakespeare's Hamlet, the Mona Lisa of literature, you see, it is very ambiguous, it, it has multiple layers to it, it is not easily decipherable. So, therefore, Hamlet is also akin to Mona Lisa. So, why, because every age interprets the play and its complexities very differently . Here's how Oscar Wilde reads the play, I cite him from Wilde's text De Profundis and other writings.

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- “the Hamlet madness is a mere mask for the hiding of weakness. In the making of fancies and jests he sees a chance of delay. He keeps playing with action as an artist plays with a theory. He makes himself the spy of his proper actions, and listening to his own words knows them to be but 'words, words, words.' Instead of trying to be the hero of his own history, he seeks to be the spectator of his own tragedy. He disbelieves in everything, including himself, and yet his doubt helps him not, as it comes not from scepticism but from a divided will.”

So, Oscar Wilde on Hamlet, the Hamlet madness is a mere mask for the hiding of weakness. In the making of fancies jests, he sees a chance of delay. He keeps playing with action as an artist plays with a theory. He makes himself the spy of his proper actions, and listening to his own words knows them to be but words, words, words. Instead of trying to be the hero of his own history, he seems to be the spectator of his own tragedy. He disbelieves in everything, including himself, and yet his doubt helps him not, as it comes not from scepticism, but from a divided will. So, this is how Oscar Wild interprets the play.

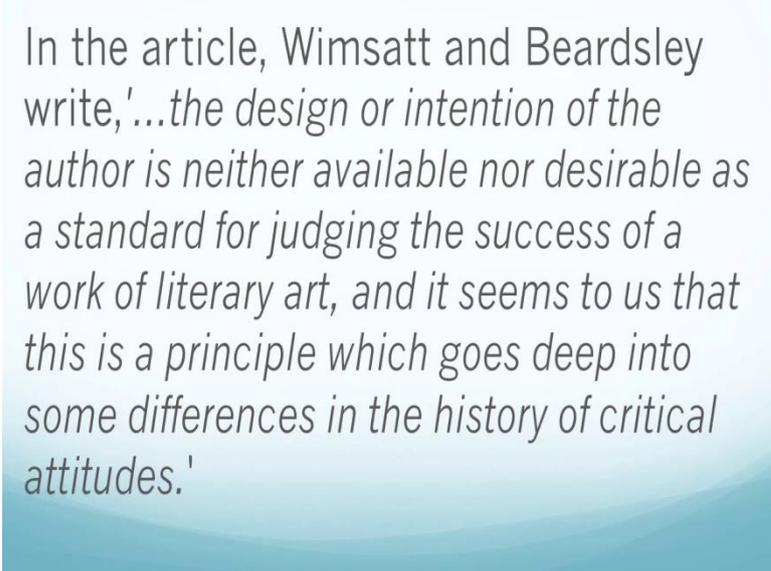
So, what is ambiguity? Ambiguity is a literary device, which entails the use of a single word or expression to signify two or more distinct references. This is how we define

ambiguity. Now, Empson's analysis were further put to use by the exponents of the new criticism. Very soon, in this course, you are going to get familiar with this concept also, the theory of new criticism. Now, and in 1967, Jacques Derrida tells us in his work writing in difference, the difference is the essence of literary expression. So, you see, ambiguity is a very successful, very popular and extremely relevant device in literary theory and criticism.

I just talked about affective fallacy and if we are talking about affective fallacy, we must talk about intentional fallacy also, which is yet another word by the same authors Wimsatt and Beardsley. So, this was a kind of a ground breaking criticism by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley and they published, when they published the work intentional fallacy in it to counter the contemporary assumption, that the original creator's intention for a work was equal to the meaning and merit of the work. These are very important ideas, we must understand them extremely well, that they called it a fallacy, an error to interpret a work of art assuming the original creator, the author's, the writer's intention for writing that work.

So, this raises serious questions in the critical realm about intentionality, autobiography, cultural context and the fixed or unfixed nature of meaning. So, all these work are not to be taken according to the assumed intention of the writer, that is what is a fallacy according to these two critics.

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Archetype

Next word archetype, and we also have a very popular literary criticism, literary theory, the archetypal criticism. What is an archetype? Archetype is a very popular notion in literary criticism. It means, original pattern and the Greek philosophers try to explain the concept of archetypal forms such as beauty, truth, goodness, justice.

An archetype and we are just attempting to define what is an archetype? It is a pattern, it is a prototype that represents the most typical characteristics shared by a particular class. I will give you a few examples and perhaps that would make it better to understand. Let us think of damsel in distress, that is an archetype. We know one when we see one, as we know a femme fatale when we see a femme fatale. Don Juan is an archetypal womanizer. So, every man who has these issues and we call him, we give a very broad generic name, a term to this person, he is a Don Juan, which means, he is a philanderer.

Some of the archetypal patterns and themes include the quest motive, the pursuit of vengeance, trial by fire and redemption rituals, all these are discussed at length. For example, in a world, in a work like hero with a thousand faces by Joseph Campbell, we will be talking about these works subsequently.

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Allusion

Next term is allusion. Allusion is reference to a literary or historical person, place or thing. Allusions rely upon the shared knowledge between the author and his audience in reader. We often assume or the writers often assume, that they are talking to a set of generally educated readers who will get the allusions they are referring to. It is a sort of a shared understanding between the authors and to illustrate a little, so between a film maker and his audiences, between an author and his readers. A reader while reading the work understands what the author is trying to suggest, where he is coming from.

Now, let us see how Geoffrey Chaucer opens his immortal Canterbury Tales by alluding to the Italian poet Petrarch. We know, that Francis Petrarch was the most distinguished literary authors of this time. He was regarded by Boccaccio as his revered teacher, father and master and was crowned poet laureate in 1341. Now, Chaucer's Clerk's Tale closely follows Boccaccio's Decameron. So, in Italian it would be the Patient Griselda. Petrarch's elegant Latin adaptation of the Last Tale in Boccaccio's Decameron and let us see how Chaucer alludes to Petrarch.

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• *I wol yow telle a tale which that I
Lerned at Padow of a worthy clerk,
As preved by his wordes and his werk ...
Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete,
Highte this clerk, whos rethorike sweete
Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie*

The Clerk's Prologue (l. 26-33)

This is old English, of course, so therefore, you will have some interesting spellings happening here. I will you tell a tale, which that I learned at Padow of worthy clerk as proved by his words and his work. Fraunceys Petrak, the laureate poet, highte this clerk whose rhetoric sweet enlumyned at ytaille of poetry. This is the Clerk's prologue from the Canterbury Tales.

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TS Eliot: The Wasteland

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of seven branched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,

Now, this is how T.S. Eliot's immortal, The Wasteland goes. I will read out a few lines. The chair she set in, like a burnished throne, glowed on the marble where the glass held

up by standards wrought with fruited vines from which a golden Cupid peeped out. Another hid his eyes behind his wing, double the flames of seven branched candelabra reflecting light up on the table as the glitter of her jewels rose to meet it.

So, what is T.S Eliot trying to do by referring to Shakespeare? Now, the poet is definitely not trying to impress or dazzle the readers by his phenomenal knowledge of the classics because we all know, that *The Wasteland* is saturated with multiple allusions and references and T.S Eliot naturally has an encyclopaedic knowledge of literature. But by alluding to Shakespeare and Dante and James Fraser and several other writers and poets, Eliot is not trying to show off his, if I may say, if I may use the word show off, his phenomenal knowledge, but he is trying to assert the tradition within which a modern poet must work. And by this I urge to refer to Eliot's monumental essay, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*.

Coming to more recent times and the art of allusion or the literary device of illusion is not just restricted to literature. We have the Coen brothers and their film *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, which was a 2000 movie, which is based on an allusion to Homer's, *The Odyssey*. Again, the title of comic Mccarthy's, *No Country for Old Men* alludes to WB. Yeats poem, *Sailing to Byzantium*, and the poem starts with the lines, that is, no country for old men.

At this point I would like you to look at an assignment and this is your assignment and we expect you to do this work and submit it as early as possible. So, please look at the questions.

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Assignment

Name the allusions in the following titles:

- For whom the Bell Tolls (Hemingway)
- Far From the Madding Crowd (Hardy)
- Tender is the Night (Fitzgerald)
- Of Human Bondage (Somerset Maugham)
- A Passage to India (Forster)

So, this is your assignment. We would like you to name the allusions in the following titles. You have to tell us from where do these titles, the originals, ok.

So, here I go. For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway; Far from the Madding Crowd by Thomas hardy; Tender is the Night by F. Scottt Fitzgerald; Of Human Bondage, Somerset Maugham; and A Passage to India by E.M. Forster. So, please send your responses to us by the deadline.

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Base and Superstructure

Next important idea that we are going to discuss is base and superstructure, which is Marxist in origin. This is essentially a Marxist idea. It means or it elaborates, that any economic system seeks to perpetuate itself and power holders seek to make us share their ways of thinking including the idea that it is fitting, that they be in control. So, this is a key term in Marxist, Marxist criticism, base and superstructure.

For the Marxist thinkers base controls the superstructure and is concerned with the means of production, all of course, all means of production are owned by the bourgeoisie and relations of production where the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat. Superstructure for the Marxist thinkers, it maintains and legitimates the base it includes and I am referring to what the Marxist refers to as the superstructure. So, it includes religion, politics, mass-media, family and education everything that has got nothing to do with production in society.

Let us also get familiar with another great thinker in the Marxist tradition, Antonio Gramsci. He gives us the concept of hegemony and for Antonio Gramsci, hegemony describes the winning of consent and supports dominant ideology within the western world. It is the white middle class heterosexual male that is the dominant groups that govern. Subordinates are made to see, that it is in their general interest to collaborate and collude with that group. This consensus, according to Gramsci, happens not only by coercion, but also from a desire to belong to a socio-political cultural system. So, this very simply put is the notion of base and superstructure.

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We move on to talk about another concept, that is, culture, which is a highly contested term. It was with the publication of Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* in 1867, that the word has come into such a popular discussion and has gained such currency. So, according to Matthew Arnold, culture in the realm of the civilized class. We are not going to get into the discussion of what the civilized class means, but I would urge you to read Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, to have a better understanding of the term.

So, cultures are made from the production, circulation and consumption of shared meanings we make and encounter in our everyday lives. Literature and cinema, also music, also popular books, are the major constituents of any culture. We also have a term, which is popular culture. So, therefore, I use the word popular fiction.

T. S. Eliot and his notes towards the definition of culture elaborate on what is culture and he says, if we take culture seriously we see, that the people does not need merely enough to eat, but a proper cuisine. So, you see, it is not just eating, but what is needed is a cuisine. Eating is for the common people perhaps that is what he means. Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living.

Another key writer is Raymond Williams and his *Culture and Society* published in 1958 and Williams considered canonical literature and cultural works in terms of their role in the development of culture. All these are extremely expensive areas and I would suggest,

that you read and get familiar. If culture and popular culture studies interests you, then you should be familiar with the writings of Raymond Williams, Matthew Arnold and also German critics, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer who are also major names associated with understanding culture studies.