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## UNIT 1: I. A. RICHARDS

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### Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
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- 1.7 The Achievement of Richards
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### 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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I.A.Richards and T.S.Eliot are considered the "fathers" of New Criticism. In this unit, you will read and understand critical essays by Richards, and work towards an assessment of his achievement as a critic.

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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In his book *The New Criticism* (1941), John Crowe Ransom begins his chapter on Richards by saying, "Discussion of *The New Criticism* must start with Mr Richards. *The New Criticism* very nearly began with him." In terms of the influence he wielded, I.A.Richards is generally considered the most important theoretician in the first half of the twentieth century. We shall begin with a look at the positivist criticism he rejected. After a brief note on his life and writings in general, we shall examine his works, *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism*. Next we shall discuss his views on language. The next section will provide a summing up, highlighting his achievements. The glossary will explain technical terms in detail. It is possible that you might find some other words difficult to understand, but I am sure you can solve this problem by using a good dictionary, such as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. It is a good idea to have a personal copy, at home. (The ninth edition is priced at Rs.425.00; you can get it at a discount at book fairs).

Please note that Richards, like T.S.Eliot or W.K.Wimsatt and many other New Critics, often uses the term "poem" as a kind of shorthand for any artistic creation. What they say about a "poet" generally applies to all literary artists.

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### 1.2 POSITIVIST CRITICISM

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Positivism stands for a philosophy first formulated in the work of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, whose *Cours de Philosophie Positive* was published in the period 1830-1842. The object of this philosophy was to extend to the humanities the methods and principles of the natural sciences. The positivist philosopher was concerned with perceptible facts rather than ideas, and how these facts arise, not why. All knowledge not wholly founded on the evidence of the senses was dismissed as

idle speculation. Positivism in literary criticism is summed up by Taine's famous slogan of "race, milieu, and moment". In the introductory chapter of his history of English literature published in 1863, the French scholar Hippolyte Taine said that a literary text should be regarded as the expression of the psychology of an individual, which in its turn is the expression of the milieu and the period in which the individual lived, and of the race to which he belonged. All human achievements can be explained by reference to these causes. Literary criticism was devoted to the causal explanation of texts in relation to these three factors. Critics paid attention to the author's life, his immediate social and cultural environment, and any statements he made about why he wrote. Research was directed towards the minute details of the writer's life, and tracing sources. Critics were not interested in the features of the literary text itself except from a philological and historical viewpoint. They disregarded questions concerning the value or the distinctive properties of literature, since these could not be dealt with in a factual or historical manner. Twentieth century criticism reacts against this extrinsic approach to literature. Attention shifts from the author to the text and the reader.

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### 1.3 I.A.RICHARDS: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

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I(vor) A(rmstrong) Richards (1893-1979) was educated at Clifton College, Bristol, and Magdalene (pronounced Maudlin) College, Cambridge, where he studied philosophy. In 1919 he started teaching at the newly created School of English at Cambridge. In 1926, he was made a Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge. For some time, he was teaching in China. In 1939 he moved to the United States of America, and taught at Harvard, where he was University Professor Emeritus. He published three volumes of poetry, but he is remembered primarily as a literary critic and teacher, not as a poet. Richards was a scholar of semantics, and along with C.K. Ogden, formulated Basic English. *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) written with C.K. Ogden, is an important contribution to linguistics. *Principles of Literary Criticism* published in 1924, was followed by *Science and Poetry* (1926), *Practical Criticism* (1929), and *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934). Richards believed that literary criticism should be objective. He was fascinated by the newly developing science of psychology, and wanted to evaluate art in terms of the state of mind induced by it. He promoted a psychological theory of value. This theory has become outdated due to later researches in psychology. But his comments on language, and on the practical analysis of poetry, are still valid, and have had an enormous influence on Anglo-American literary criticism in the twentieth century.

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### 1.4 PRINCIPLES OF LITERARY CRITICISM

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In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, I.A. Richards set out to establish a theoretical framework for criticism which would free it from subjectivity and emotionalism. He made some isolated observations which could make profitable starting points for reflection. But they provide no answer to the central question of criticism: "What is the value of the arts, . . . and what is their place in the system of human endeavours?" Richards proposes a psychological theory of art; art is valuable because it helps to order our impulses.

In the second chapter, "The Phantom Aesthetic State", he dismisses the concept of a special aesthetic state. Modern aesthetics, starting with Kant, rests on the assumption that there is a special kind of pleasure which is disinterested, universal, unintellectual and not to be confused with the pleasures of sense or ordinary emotions. They believed that art experience was a special kind of experience, in a class of its own, not

to be compared with the experiences of ordinary life. Richards feels that there is no such special mode. The aesthetic experience is not a new or different kind of thing; it is similar to ordinary experiences. Richards uses a very graphic analogy to explain this point: "When we look at a picture, or read a poem, or listen to music, we are not doing something quite unlike what we were doing on our way to the gallery or when we dressed in the morning" (p.10). He mentions ordinary activities like putting on clothes or walking down to an art gallery, to emphasize his point that art experience is not of a fundamentally different kind; art experience is more complex, and more unified. Those who believe in a special aesthetic state would postulate a peculiar unique value for it. Richards believes that aesthetic experiences are not *sui generis*, that is, they do not merely have intrinsic value. It is possible to analyze art experience, and examine its value in terms of ordinary life, because it is not a special state cut off from ordinary life.

According to Richards, "The two pillars upon which a theory of criticism must rest are an account of value and an account of communication" (p.18). Richards believes that the human mind has developed because it is an instrument for communication. The arts are "the supreme form of the communicative activity" (p.18). Of course, the artist himself may not be conscious of this; he is not as a rule deliberately and consciously engaged in a communicative endeavour" (p.18). The artist is concerned with getting the work "right", regardless of its communicative aspect. Whether it is a poem or a play or a statue or a painting, the artist is wholly involved in making the work embody his experience. He cannot stop to consider the communicative aspect. It is always there at a subconscious level. The very process of getting the work "right" involves endowing it with great communicative power; "efficacy for communication" (p.19) is a main part of the "rightness".

Criticism should not concern itself with the avowed or undeclared motives of the artist. Richards believes that the mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation. It is dangerous to try to analyze the inner workings of the artist's mind by the evidence of his artistic work. It is not possible to verify what went on in the artist's mind, just as we cannot be sure what goes on in a dreamer's mind. Very often, the most plausible explanations of the artist's mental processes may be quite wrong. To prove this point, Richards takes up Coleridge's famous poem, *Kubla Khan*. I am sure you would be familiar with the poem, and may have heard that Coleridge wrote it under the influence of opium. Critics like Graves have presented a complex psychological explanation for the sources of the imagery in the poem. Richards points out that the explanation is much simpler: Coleridge was influenced by Milton. Richards examines lines 223-283 from *Paradise Lost*, Book IV. He quotes many lines from Milton's poem to establish it as the source of the underground river, the fountain, and the Abyssinian maid "singing of Mount Abora" of Coleridge's poem. Richards brings up this example to show the difficulties of speculating about the poet's mental processes; he feels that it would be a wrong application of psychology.

Richards believes that the arts can improve the quality of our lives by communicating valuable experiences. It is not easy to communicate complex experiences; Richards believes that the arts provide the only way of doing so. "In the arts we find the record in the only form in which these things can be recorded of the experiences which have seemed worth having to the most sensitive and discriminating persons" (p.23). He believes that "The arts are our storehouse of recorded values" (p.22). He gives a very high place to the artist. "He is the point at which the growth of the mind shows itself" (p.47)

Literary criticism should concern itself with value: Richards believes that "Art for Art's sake" is wrong. He declares, "The critic is as closely occupied with the health of the mind as the doctor with the health of the body" (p.25). He says that it is wrong to consider value a transcendental idea. Metaphysical or ethical considerations should be

kept out of literary criticism. He proposes a psychological theory of value. Anything is valuable which satisfies the impulses or appetencies, as he calls them. These desires or aversions may be conscious, or they may operate at the subconscious level. Appetencies include both conscious and unconscious desires. because the more important appetencies may be ones which are not consciously felt. So Richards defines value thus: "Anything is valuable which will satisfy an appetency without involving the frustration of some equal or *more important* appetency" (p.36). This naturally raises the question, "Which are the important appetencies?" Richards believes that the importance of an appetency can be gauged by the extent to which other appetencies which will be disturbed by the thwarting of the impulse involved, that is, the importance of an impulse can be judged by the way it involves other impulses. If the impulses are properly organized, a maximum number can be satisfied. He proposes a kind of psychological Benthamism: value lies in the number and importance of impulses satisfied within the individual mind.

States of mind are valuable in so far as they involve coordination of activities as opposed to curtailment of them. Richards says that the function of the arts is to organize our impulses; the effect of art is "the resolution, inter-animation, and balancing of impulses" (p.113). In some respects, Richards's theory resembles Aristotle's catharsis, which suggested that the function of tragedy was to restore emotional balance. Later researches into psychology and neurology have shown that the workings of the human brain and psyche are much more complex.

Richards has proposed a very simplistic process, and his psychological theories have become outmoded with the passage of time. Moreover, it is difficult to accept the high claims Richards makes for art as an ordering of the mind. In the words of René Wellek, "If we think of the poets there is ample evidence that Richards's view of poetry as an ordering of the mind and the making of a perfect human being is false: there were madmen, suicides, scoundrels and many horribly unhappy and disorganized men even among the great poets."

Richards was one of the first to indicate the importance of the response of the audience. Beauty is "not inherent in physical objects, but a character of some of our responses to objects". But he did not investigate this theme of subjectivity further: critics of Reception Theory and Reader Response schools, like Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, David Bleich and Stanley Fish have presented much more sophisticated and far-reaching analyses of the response of the reader. The value of Richards as a critic lies more in his theories of language and the methods of practical criticism he proposed.

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## 1.5 RICHARDS ON LANGUAGE

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I have mentioned Richards's interest in semantics. His first book, *The Foundation of Aesthetics* (1922) was co-authored with two friends of his undergraduate days, C.K.Ogden and James Wood. He continued his collaboration with C.K.Ogden, the inventor of Basic English. Their book, *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) created new technical terms for literary discussion; they drew attention to the "symbolic" use of language in science and its "emotive" use in poetry.

Chapter Thirty-four of *Principles of Literary Criticism* is devoted to "The Two Uses of Language". Richards observes that the terms we use to discuss poetry are ambiguous and fail to record the correct distinctions. In this book, he has used words like causes, characters and consequences when analyzing mental activity, in place of *thought, feeling, and will*. Richards distinguishes between two kinds of causation for "mental events". The first kind is represented by the stimuli affecting the mind through the senses immediately, and also combining with what survives from

comparable stimuli in the past. The second kind of causation lies in the mind itself, its needs and its receptiveness. In the scientific field, the impulse should be derived from what is external. The scientific use of language thus relies on *reference* undistorted by the receiving mind. By contrast there is an *emotive* use of language which is designed to arouse emotions. Richards says, "A statement may be used for the sake of *reference*, true or false, which it causes. This is the *scientific* use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude produced by the reference . . . This is the *emotive* use of language. The distinction once clearly grasped is simple. We may use words for the sake of the references they promote, or we may use them for the sake of the attitudes and emotions which ensue" (p.211). These two uses of languages are analogous to the denotative and connotative functions of words; the scientific use should avoid ambiguity, it should have a fixed, single meaning. But the emotive use encourages multiple meanings; various connotations of the word are brought into play.

The scientific and emotive use have different criteria for success. For science, the connections and relations of references to one another must be logical. The references should not contradict one another. But a logical arrangement is not necessary for emotive purposes. They can reject logic in favour of their own internal emotional connection; as long as they have a coherent organization, it does not matter even if they contradict each other. Richards goes on to illustrate his proposition by discussing the way the word "truth" is used. In the scientific sense, a reference is true "when the things to which it refers are actually together in the way it refers to them" (p.212). In criticism, the most usual sense is of acceptability. Truth may also be used in the sense of sincerity, when we are discussing art. In *Science and Poetry*, Richards uses the term "pseudo-statement" for poetical statements. Truth in a scientific statement is a matter of laboratory verification; "a pseudo-statement is 'true' if it suits and serves some attitude or links together attitudes which on other grounds are desirable".

Richards uses the word "symbolistic" for the referential use of language, but there is a difference between his views of language and Saussure's. You would learn about Saussure in the next block, so it would be a good idea to come back to this unit after you are acquainted with semiotics. Like Saussure's *Cours, The Meaning of Meaning* starts with the proposition that there is an essential disjunction between language and reality, that it is wrong to believe that "words are in some way parts of things" (to use the words of Ogden and Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*). From this common starting point, their ideas develop in different directions. For Saussure, the meaning of words does not depend in any way on their relationship with things, it is wholly determined by the arbitrary and conventional structure of language. Ogden and Richards, in contrast, stress that words are used to "point to" things, and that their meaning does depend on the things they are used to point to, their referents. Language may be different from reality, but it reflects it. Their position is thus an empiricist one, in that it rests on the principle that knowledge is the product of experience.

Richards continues his discussion of language in *Practical Criticism*, when he analyses the "Four Kinds of Meaning". All articulate speech can be regarded from four points of view:

1. *Sense* -- the state of affairs or the items presented for consideration.
2. *Feeling* -- By feeling he means the whole range of emotional attitudes, desire, pleasure etc. that the words evoke. Feeling does not enter into some types of discourse -- mathematics, for example.
3. *Tone*: the attitude of the speaker to the audience.
4. *Intention* -- the speaker's conscious or unconscious intention, the effect he is trying to promote.

## 1.6 PRACTICAL CRITICISM

Richards asked a sample audience in Cambridge to describe their responses to a set of thirteen poems supplied without titles or the authors' names. The students were not given any clue to the period in which the poems were written. The students were encouraged to read the poems more than once, and given one week's time to write down their comments. A selection of these comments, (which he calls "protocols") forms the substance of the book, followed by an analysis of characteristic errors and suggestions for educational reform. Richards says in his introduction that he had three objectives: (1) to document "the contemporary state of culture", (2) to provide a new technique for responding to poetry, and (3) to reform the teaching of literature. The book *Practical Criticism* analyses the different mistakes of interpretation and evaluation that Richards saw in these responses, and seeks to identify their causes. He was concerned by the low level of critical competence that was revealed, for he had chosen a set of educated Cambridge students. Let us look at the obstacles to proper response that Richards catalogues: I am following the system of numbering by alphabets used by Richards himself in *Practical Criticism*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964, pp.13-17).

A. The difficulty of *making out the plain sense of poetry* -- a large number of readers failed to understand it, both as a statement and as an expression.

B. The difficulties of *sensuous apprehension* -- many readers do not appreciate the sound, the rhythm and movement of the text.

C. The problems of *imagery*, primarily visual imagery -- some readers have a poor imaging capacity.

D. *Mnemonic irrelevancies* -- the reader remembers some personal experience which is not relevant to the poem.

E. *Stock Responses* -- the reader may have fully prepared views and emotions, which are simply triggered off by the poem. He does not respond to the poem in question -- he already has a ready-made response.

F. *Sentimentality* -- the reader may be too emotional.

G. *Inhibition* -- the opposite extreme to sentimentality, the reader experiences less emotion than he ought to.

H. *Doctrinal Adhesions*. Poetry may contain or imply certain beliefs about the world, or at least seem to contain certain views. A clash between the reader's own views, and the views he finds expressed in the poetry, are a fertile source of erratic judgement.

I. The effects of *technical presuppositions*. When some poem succeeds by using a certain technique, we expect similar themes to be handled with the same technique, and do not respond when a new or different technique is used. The converse is also true -- if a technique has failed in one case, we jump to the conclusion that the technique itself is useless. Many readers make this mistake of confusing cause and effect.

J. *General critical preconceptions*. The reader may have preconceived notions about the nature and value of poetry. Whether these preconceptions are conscious or unconscious, they create an obstacle between the reader and the poem.

He felt that readers can, and should be, trained to have the proper response. The decline in speech and the loose use of words lie at the root of the problem. Richards suggests that the quality of communication between persons, and the level of discussion, can be raised by a "conscious and deliberate effort to master language." A student should learn how language works, which means studying "the kinds of meaning that language handles, their connection with one another, their interferences" (p.330). The student should not rest with studying the rules of syntax or grammar or lexicography. Richards believed that when we remove the obstacles in the way of the poet communicating with the reader, he will be open to the poet's mental condition and can experience the poem properly. Richards was not bothered by problems of interpretation, unlike the hermeneutical critics who are concerned with the subtle problems of correctly understanding a text.

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## 1.7 THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RICHARDS

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Richards did not recommend unhistorical reading, isolated from the context. But his emphasis on the text as an autonomous entity, and his example of a criticism that is practical rather than pedantically historical, was enthusiastically taken up by the New Critics. *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, by Robert Graves and Laura Riding, published in London in 1927, contained a detailed analysis of Shakespeare's 129th sonnet, "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame". They demonstrated how several meanings may be interwoven together within a single line of verse. This inspired Empson, a student of Richards, and formed the model for a study of multiple meanings in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). William Empson (1906-1984) defines ambiguity as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions" and classifies it into seven types representing advancing stages of difficulty. In his next book, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), interest shifts to the total meaning of whole works; the close readings present here reveal the influence of Marx and Freud. Empson's later essays, on Shakespeare, Milton and the novel, take due cognizance of the context of the work. He had no hesitation in going against one of the tenets of New Criticism, and declared (in 1955) that "A critic should have insight into the mind of his author, and I don't approve of the attack on 'The Fallacy, of Intentionalism'."

Richards's own analysis of specific texts is in the organicist tradition of poetic theory descending from Aristotle through the Germans to Coleridge. But his literary theory was quite original: the radical rejection of aesthetics, the resolute reduction of the work of art to a mental state, the denial of truth-value to poetry, and the defence of poetry as emotive language ordering our mind and giving us equilibrium and mental health. I.A. Richards was unusual in combining interest in reader response with scientific aims, but he took a simple psychological view of the reader. Later critics have investigated the role of the reader in much more sophisticated terms. The Constance school of phenomenologists (Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss) recognize that the reader's cultural and historical situation is a key factor in responding to the text. Some features of Richards's theory, such as his materialistic concept of poetic value, or his theory of communication, lack clarity and sophistication. It remains unclear why a more complex organization of impulses should be better than a less complex one and how a system of balances can be said to contribute to the growth of the mind. Nor is it clear that poetry is communication of specific emotional experiences of an author and that reading a poem enables us to have an identical or very similar experience.

But many features of Richards's criticism have not become outdated. They have become established parts of the Anglo-American critical tradition. These are his empiricism and humanism, and his organicist insistence on close reading, on careful attention to every detail of a text, on the principle that a literary text, like a living organism, functions through the interaction of all its constituent parts. In *Practical*

*Criticism*, he carefully distinguished between the sense, feeling, tone and intention of a text. The discussion of rhythm and metre in *Principles of Literary Criticism* clearly showed that sound and meaning, metre and sense cannot be separated. Content is not something that can be discussed in isolation from the expression. In the words of R. n. Wellek, "The stimulus that Richards gave to English and American criticism (particularly Empson and Cleanth Brooks) by turning it resolutely to the question of language, its meaning and function in poetry, will always insure his position in any history of modern criticism."

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## 1.8 GLOSSARY

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- Basic English:** A simplified form of English, with a limited vocabulary of about 850 words, intended for international communication.
- Bentham:** Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was a leading British economist. His theory was called Utilitarianism. He believed that "the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation."
- Croce:** Benedetto Croce (1862-1950) is a leading Italian critic. His most important book, *Aesthetica* (1902) propounds a theory of art as intuition which is at the same time expression. Art for Croce is not a physical fact, but purely a matter of the mind. There is no distinction between form and content. Croce is not a defender of "art for art's sake", he believes that art does play a role in society. Croce's aesthetics has no place for rhetorical categories, for style, for symbol, for genres, literary history, psychology, biography, sociology, philosophical interpretation, or stylistics, even for distinction among the arts.
- Idealism:** in philosophy, the doctrine that considers thought or the idea as the ground of knowledge or existence; the objects of knowledge are considered to be in some way dependent on the activity of the mind.
- Privileging:** to privilege (transitive verb) is to invest something with special advantages or rights, consider it worthy of special attention.

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## 1.9 QUESTIONS

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1. Write a note on communication, and its importance for the artist.
2. Comment on Richards' theory of value.
3. What are the two uses of language? What influence did this theory of Richards have on other critics?
4. **Present** an evaluation of I.A. Richards as a critic.
5. Write a note on *Practical Criticism*.

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## 1.10 READING LIST

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### Part I

- \* Richards, I.A. *Principles of Literary Criticism*. London, 1924. Indian paperback edition Universal Book Stall, 5, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110001.



----- *Practical Criticism*. London, 1929. Indian paperback edition Universal Book Stall, 5, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110001.

I.A. Richards

----- *Coleridge on Imagination*. London, 1934.

----- *Science and Poetry*. London, 1930.

## Part II

Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. London, 1930.

Ransom, John Crowe. *The New Criticism*. New York: New Directions, 1941.

Wellek, René. *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950* Vol.V. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, pp.

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## UNIT 2 T.S. ELIOT

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
- 2.3 "The Function of Criticism"
- 2.4 "The Dissociation of Sensibility" and "The Objective Correlative"
- 2.5 The Achievement of T.S. Eliot as a Critic
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Glossary
- 2.8 Questions
- 2.9 Reading List

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we will discuss "Tradition and the Individual Talent", the most influential essay Eliot wrote, and "The Function of Criticism" where he talks about the tools of the critic. We shall also acquaint ourselves with some critical catchwords he coined—"The Dissociation of Sensibility" and "The Objective Correlative". Our aim will be to evaluate his achievement as a critic, and try to gauge his influence on later critics.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) is probably the best known and most influential English poet of the twentieth century. His work as a critic is equally significant. He was born in St Louis, Missouri; his parents belonged to New England, from a section of society which has been called WASP: White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, that is, part of the mainstream of society which colonized the eastern coast of America. He joined Harvard University in 1906, obtained his M.A. in 1911, and started work on a doctoral thesis on the philosophy of F.H. Bradley. In 1912 he was appointed an assistant at Harvard, but he was already under the influence of the symbolists, and had started writing poems in the manner of Jules Laforgue. He spent one year (1910-11) in Paris, and in 1914 he joined Merton College, Oxford. He settled in London, and became a member of the Anglican church and a British citizen in 1927, preferring to renounce his American heritage. He left academic pursuits to earn a living, working first in a bank, later as an editor with the publishing firm of Faber and Faber. In 1922 he founded *The Criterion*, a cultural quarterly, and *The Waste Land* was published in the inaugural issue. In 1924 he published *Homage to John Dryden*, which contained studies of Dryden and the metaphysical poets. This was followed by *For Lancelot Andrews: Essays on Style and Order* (1928) in which he announced himself to be "classicist in literature, royalist in politics and Anglo-Catholic in religion." His major books of criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957). I am sure you are already familiar with his achievements as a poet and dramatist. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.