T.E. Hulme may be credited with the attempt to find the standards that determine the making of good poetry. Literary standards had their source in the firmness of belief and an attitude towards contemporary values. Hulme's critical outlook was strongly rooted in moral questions of order and authority, i.e. classicism, its action upon the sensibility of the poet, his technique and the effect upon the reader, who also was required to be oriented in a similar outlook in order to appreciate modern poetry. Before his untimely death, Hulme had already engaged himself in a whole range of interests which aimed at an integrated approach to literature and attitude. Hulme precedes T.S. Eliot in apprehending the complexity of the times and the poet-critic's response to it. It is because Hulme found a crisis in expression and the simultaneous undefined critical attitude, that he focused on these two aspects, endeavouring to discover the interlinks and new influences upon them. Eliot had located the problem of criticism in the lack of study. He observed that without the knowledge of the past poets, we stand the danger of continuing with the very same defects that afflicted them.¹

Though Hulme refrains from naming any individual poet, he formulated a theory of poetry that broke the traditional techniques and concerns. Beginning as a poet experimenting with new rhythm, new conceptualization of the image and metaphor as vehicles of feelings, effacement of the poet from the poem and other principles of brevity and suitable subject, Hulme gradually progressed towards an understanding of literature as a receptacle of a complex of influences and
sensibilities. His sensibility had been shaped by a consciousness of the times. His approach was the moral philosophic, aimed at integrating the creative process to larger sociological issues.

Hulme reviewed a debate on whether literary criticism should simply serve to further explain the motives behind a particular form or it was a reflection of attitude and that attitude had to be questioned in order to find an answer to a genre of current writing. Hulme not only turned his speculation towards the mental activities of the artist in the creative act, he also sought to establish a theoretical base for art. He was convinced that the concepts of Romanticism and Classicism had a great bearing upon the belief and philosophy of man and these in turn were reflected in literature and art. While formulating his principles of poetry and art, Hulme realized that the inevitable confrontation between the two critical outlooks would cast significant light on the future literary and artistic output.

The overwhelming question before Romanticism and Classicism is whether there is another reality; whether a veil has to penetrated. The moral experience of piercing the veil assumes the distinguishing mark between Romanticism and Classicism. The romantic travels beyond the veil, attempts to draw universals from the particular. A classicist in Hulme’s mould, would find it incomprehensible to describe the experience of ‘reaching beyond.’ Unlike the romantic, Hulme did not assign any extraordinary properties to poetic imagination, he attached the greatest importance involved in the task of rendering the particular. The classical point of view where the relation between work of literature or art and the reader guides the necessity that the object under consideration does not become obscure due to the overt reflections of the artist.
Romantic philosophy can be detected in different facets in the views and opinions of critics and writers. Romanticism when understood as an individual conception of the world can be found underlining almost every form of expression. The sense of an unique consciousness, of sharing an especial relationship with the aesthetic object is perhaps to be found in poets. However, the distinction emerges in the transformation of that relationship into language. An appreciation of language used by Coleridge, Arnold and later by Hulme and Eliot will allow us to see the perspective of the world represented in highly self conscious language in the former and the familiar, day to day language in the latter. The unique vision of the artist in a moment of deep contemplating mode is obvious in the romantic poets and their followers. The uniqueness of experience is not communicated through the seriousness of vision in Hulme but it is done through the complexity of structure and metaphor, the latter being psychologically controlled insight and a corresponding representation and dislocation through rhetorical devices.

Hulme began a re-examination of the creative process. He explored various means of communicating the exactness of experience. The concept of the image changed the literary form, particularly poetry. His essays on poetry developed a new artistic medium of expression. While keeping his primary objective of transferring proportional and coinciding thoughts into language, he also encountered the difficulty of using same medium that was the basis of all communication in life.

Bergsonian metaphysics provided ‘intuition’ and ‘intuitive language’ as a means of communication. It does seem ambiguous that Hulme was apparently using two irreconcilable factors in his aim of concrete expression. The
transcendental quality of Bergson’s intuition is undisputed, yet if we examine, it also reveals that Hulme had wanted to skirt all the relative counters like description, analysis and history. He wanted to install the artist within the ‘absoluteness’ of the object itself; the authenticity of the experience would remain constant as a result of holding on to the original representation. The installation within is also indicative of the difficulty of rendering the experience in words. Yet the placing of the perceiving mind ‘within’ acted as a check on wandering outside the object like the subjectivity of the vision and the personality of the artist. The poet’s approach to the reality of experience is fastened on the particular, the immediate sensation around or grasped.

The conflict between the transcendentalism of Bergson’s intuition and the anti-transcendental rendering of the intuitive moment has always followed Hulme’s reputation. Pure intuition in Bergsonian terms was no doubt a transcendental concept that ran counter to the ‘dry, hard classical verse’ Hulme had campaigned for. The mechanism of creativity however works in a complex manner. And intuitive understanding is necessary to apprehend a reality not readily available to reason. But apprehension of the object or experience is the only enclosed territory within which intuition can be active. Intuition understood and captured something indescribable in rational terms. Poetic activity was not the reliance on this faculty alone, though it provided an enriched experience so essential for continuous creativity. The creative powers of an artist began from consciousness of reality and ended in the objectification of that reality. It had to progress in this fashion to abstract a product which actually worked as a construct derived from interaction between intuition and fancy.
The organic or deeper significance between things which Coleridge had looked for, was turned out in another way by Hulme. Fancy was his watch word and the metaphor was used to reinforced impression within the context of the poem. The organism of the image was the movement of one into another to create yet another. The creativity of the artist was to suggest a deeper significance which was not apparent on the surface but gathered energy as it intermingled within contexts. Stability of the image and the contexts marginalised the mystical element of intuition and gradually removed it from the ultimate general effect of the poem.

While analyzing the creative process, Hulme revealed interesting aspects of interpretation and the employment of a new vocabulary. Assimilating current philosophical and psychological thoughts, he began a movement in the re-orientation of the understanding of the creative impulse and also placed a substantial case for an ethical and moral inspection of art.

There are several lines of thought that converge in Hulme. Though it was undoubtedly an ethical understanding that he was aiming at, Hulme was deeply aware that the modern discerning mind would never accept something completely irrational. As a man who was also a participant in the cross currents of modern thought, Hulme explored avenues to locate his observation on a logical and rational basis. This urge did not pose any contradiction in his classicist stance, as he sought to explain it in practical terms.

In the essay ‘Humanism,’ Hulme delved to quite an extent into the principles that crystallized a new anti-humanist reaction in modern times, particularly in the works of Husserl, Dilthey, Moore and Russell. One important fact stands out that Hulme never decreed the renouncing of scientific and logical
thought and the simultaneous freedom to express them. He appreciated that this
was a contribution of the humanist tradition. However, the chief premise being the
unchanged moral status of man, Hulme developed a new anti-romantic concept of
ethics and values governing all the manifestations in art and attitude.

The scientific element of philosophy did not dwell on the interpretation of
life. Avoiding the human element; logic and scientific philosophy concentrated on
the signs and their entities. G.E. Moore’s method of freeing propositions from
humanistic determinism appealed to T.E. Hulme. The consideration of concepts
and entities without the relation to the human indicated that ethics was not about
investigating human conduct, but it was an investigation into the assertions about
the property of things which is denoted by the term ‘good’ and the converse
property denoted by the term ‘bad.’ Moore proceeded through logic to scrutinize
words in sentences to try and understand the clarity and exactness of meaning.
Moore believed that the aim of life was the promotion of the intrinsically good.
Any action directed at enhancing the intrinsically good was to be adjusted as
correct. Moore endeavoured to analyze ethical questions of good and what is
available in the form of sense data. His method was to first have a concept of the
good in mind and then set everything against it. The constancy of Hulme’s
absolute values was the edifice against which expression and behaviour was set in
order to explore the rightness. Moore’s analysis of the arbitrary character of
proposition, sentences and words showed that the truth can get muddled without
the logic. Even the concept of sense data that took account of experiences that do
not exist in the physical sense much used in the analysis of Moore could be seen in
close connection with Hulme’s visual perception and intuitive understanding.
Besides, the freedom of the experience gained through the sense data also indicated the absence of human relativism.

The importance of logical and reasonable language had also formed the basic assumption of Bertrand Russell's philosophy:

All sound philosophy should begin with an analysis of propositions.4

This pronouncement was made in 1900; and further discussed in 'On Denoting' in 1905 and in an unnamed paper in 1910.5 Russell and Moore were realists in the sense that they accepted relations only as external. Hulme found that he could agree with this particular perception of reality. Moore and Russell's philosophy replaced the mind-dependent philosophy propounded by F.H. Bradley. Bradley had wanted to denote appearance and reality as two separate entities, while Moore and Russell understood appearance and reality as a unified entity. We can well understand the proximity between such a metaphysics and the objective of Hulme's classicism. All along Hulme not only refuted romanticism by the simple statement of his metaphysical tilt but also by noting the advances made in common sense and logical thinking in philosophy. It provided him the essential ideas of Imagism and a classicist sensibility in literature and art.

The Husserlian approach of phenomenology was considered by Hulme as an affirmation of the validity of intuited truths, as in logic and mathematics. Husserl's non-empirical investigations into the things as they exist in thought implied that there could be a scientific and rational base to the knowledge of essences. Phenomenology not only assured Hulme that the belief in absolute values and
morals could constitute an objective sphere of enquiry, it also revealed that such an
enquiry could be free from humanistic relativism.

Hulme distinguished his own ideas on Weltanschauung from Husserl's. The absolutis
sion did not coincide with the development of personality as a pre-
condition for a Weltanschauung. Hulme disagreed with Husserlian notion that
Weltanschauung was the expression of developed humanism.

Apart from the difference, the concept of eidetic imagination postulated in
phenomenological enquiry was a close and possible apprehension of objects and
phenomena, as perceived by Hulme. ‘The Notes on Language and Style’ and
‘Romanticism and Classicism’ discusses principles of the creative process much on
the lines of the eidetic enquiry. Speculations and Further Speculations does not
reveal Hulme’s realization of the concept of eidetic perception, it is only for the
purpose of establishing the relevance and significance of his ideas that the
resemblance has been taken into account. The critical ideas of Hulme reflect the
engagement of the times. His absorption of the exploration of new ideas of
metaphysical enquiry and the links with the artistic impulse, gave fresh insight into
the working of the mind and grasping of the moment, though his contemporaries
did not view it in that manner.⁶

In ‘The Plan for a Book on Modern Theories of Art’ Hulme had wanted to
span the philosophy of France, Germany and Italy to construct a systematic study
of the creative imagination based on aesthetic and philosophical standards. We
have already learnt about his emphasis on the exact and concrete expression. The
use of illusive unrhythmic arrangement of lines, metaphor and image imply
technical dexterity, compression of form and description, and at the same time
leads to a confrontation with issues of creative imagination and the use of language. The psychological explanation of the artistic process was a method of reducing the mystical nature inherent in it. It was Hulme who tried to systematically analyse the process in the ‘Notes on Language and Style,’ ‘Romanticism and Classicism,’ ‘A Lecture on Modern Poetry’ and ‘The Philosophy of Modern Art.’ He broke new ground in electing to concentrate on the microcosm of experience, as the wider picture would be infiltrated by the subjective element or personality.

There are three aspects in Hulme’s principle of fancy: firstly, it was formulated in response to the problem of poetic language as against the language of discourse or prose; secondly, it was a principle of reduction, closing the chasm between exactness and approximation; thirdly, it avoided the mimetic and the visionary element of imaginative inspiration. In later years, the principle of fancy developed in many forms and in scope through the writings of Eliot, Richards, Empson and the New Critics.

Implicit in Hulme’s attempt to explain the internal process of creativity and representation, is the psychological grasp of the moment. The illusive moment of actual experience and its apprehension in concrete terms was sought to be scrutinized on the lines of psychology. Such an approach implied that even an indescribable activity could to a large extent be explained in acceptable rational and demystified terms. Hulme included a chapter on ‘the psychology of artistic creation,’ in his ‘Plan for a Book,’ making poignant observation about the ultimate debate posed for ages about the aesthetic meaning of art and its reciprocal relation with human needs:
Is there any specific emotion which characterizes them all ...a specifically aesthetic emotion, the experiencing of which constitutes beauty – the sceptical answer to this question – the affirmative – if there is, then what is the nature of this emotion, how it can be defined.... If art is merely a means of conveying ordinary human emotion, then it cannot be defined by any specific aesthetic emotion – in this region come old disputes – romantic, classic, etc.  

The aesthetic of art is closely linked with philosophy. It reveals to us the presuppositions held at a particular time. As such it is also a historical enquiry. Art is not the expression of emotion, as we understand, i.e. to arouse emotion. It lets us have an insight into the very nature of the mental creative activity as it existed in the mind of the artist and the way he communicated it. Herein again the philosophical questions in the mind of the artist has to be considered in order to understand their representation in a particular work.

The ontology of art is the meeting point of the mental state in a unified process with philosophy and belief. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Hulme had included a section on Benedetto Croce, which indicates his movement towards understanding the entire philosophical system affecting art. Croce’s central idea was the ‘idealist notion of art as intuition and expression.’ Hulme had certain similarities with the idea of art as an expression of the inner mental consciousness together with outward impressions of Croce. Croce believed that ‘The work of art per se should not be identified with any physical artefact or external manifestation but with an inner state of knowledge (intuition) that
transforms and unifies impressions aided by imagination (a process he called expression).'

T.E. Hulme's basis of interpreting history or art, whether the literary or the visual, was the value dimension of the religious attitude. At the same time, this attitude was concerned with the particular and the concrete because retrieving the value in manifested form was the greatest aesthetic encounter. His endeavour was to place an aestheticism founded on the consciousness of absolute morals through a process of establishing the reasonable counters of a demystified mental activity and the consciousness of a thing or value as it exists in the mind.

Hulme combined the apparently irreconcilable poles of moral outlook along with practical tools of the creative process. Though he pushed for a religious conscious attitude he took up technical issues governing the writing of poetry. The language of poetry, 'the withinness' of poetry, the irrelevance of serious subject, the importance of form and the impersonal and anti emotional depiction of experience were some of the crucial points on which he focused.

We may view Hulme's contribution to modern poetry and critical attitude as a rethinking, reinterpretation and restatement of moral critical appreciation. His endeavour to organize a body of principles gave to a large extent a concrete formation of critical judgement towards poetry and art. Modernism was not only a changed creative presentation, it was also the attempt to change the taste of the public. Hulme tried to give a new vocabulary, a new thrust and new energy to poetry. He reflected the early 20th century because he was actively engaged in experimenting with form and expression.
Notes:

1. The past unexamined perpetuates itself. 'If our predecessors cannot teach us to write better than themselves,' Eliot wrote in 1918, 'they will surely teach us to write worse: because we have never learnt to criticize Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth...' quoted from *The Invisible Poet* by Hugh Kenner, London, W.H. Allen, 93, 1960.

2. Patricia M. Rae thought that intuition and anti-transcendentalism did reconcile in Bergson because the 'artist's gaze was in a world within and not beyond time.'


3. 'The humanist period has developed an honesty in science and a certain conception of freedom of thought and action which will remain.' 'Humanism,' *Speculations*, 58.


5. *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* provides that the discussions on the sense and reason of things that we actually come in contact with and common sense utterances of things that does not exist but are known through the knowledge of description, were presented in the two essays.

6. In 'Cavalcanti' Pound stated that he could not understand Hulme's fuss about philosophy. *Selected Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot, Faber and Faber,

