CHAPTER IV

IMPACT OF THE CRITICAL TENETS OF SHELLEY AND KEATS ON TWENTIETH CENTURY CRITICISM
In each age one or two men of genius find something, and express it. It may be in only a line or in two lines, or in some quality of a cadence, and thereafter two dozen, or two hundred, or two or more thousand followers repeat and dilute and modify.

Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*

If one agrees with Rene Welleck's contention that all critical theories are derivative and that every literary theorist deliberately relates himself to his literary ancestor, it won't be difficult to trace the origins of the theoretical stance of both Shelley and Keats. Shelley's overt moral and political concerns and predilections for the supersensible world and Keats's manipulation of poetry as a reflection of self-effacement and his response to the sensuous beauty of the phenomenal world suggest links and continuities with the principal theories of Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle, explored the self-sufficiency of a work of art as a finally organized structure, and Plato, conscious of the social and political corruptions of his age, viewed art and poetry in a moral perspective; together they chalked out paths which critics have followed since.

The neo-classicists gave a marked evidence of following

the traditional structure of Aristotle and the pragmatic orientation of Philip Sidney. Romanticism, viewed by T.S. Eliot as 'a new literary disease', for all its breaks and discontinuities with orthodoxy in literary tradition, retains much of the Platonic ethical tendency and trans-empiricism. Thus the two methods bequeathed to criticism by Aristotle and Plato respectively, one predominantly aesthetic and the other dominated by ethical and political considerations, remain the guiding principles of literary criticism. Some critics have advocated the combination of the two methods but the course taken by subsequent literary theorists has been to prefer one method to the other instead of accommodating them in an all-inclusive approach to literature. In fact, literary theorists until the emergence of the second generation of Romantics on the literary scene, instead of effecting a synthesis of the three principal theories, viz. Mimetic, Pragmatic and Expressive theories, had emphasized one of them. It would be illuminating to know to what extent Shelley and Keats took over the first principles of literary theory and developed and explained them or failed in part or wholly in their task of building theories. 'Intellectual revisionism' and 'inevitability of influence' have now and then been stated to contribute not only to the continuity of literature but also to guide and regulate the poets' activity. However, Harold Bloom's coinage
of 'perverse revisionism' or 'poetic misprison', without implying discredit to the 'poet-fathers' or literary failure in the 'poet-son', substantiates Shelley's remarkable repentence and destruction of the Rousseauian insight on which he turned his poetry to account. Again, Shelley's is not an isolated instance because Keats, too, gives some evidence of breaking with his rarefied Romantic sensibility in The Fall of Hyperion. The present chapter proposes to explore this complex pattern of influence affecting Shelley and Keats with a view to placing them in the historical process of criticism. Against their similarities will be set their profound differences of opinion by which later critical theory was largely affected.

Shelley's definition of the poet as the 'unacknowledged legislator' gives a marked evidence of the impact on him of the Platonic scheme. One can say that it is another of those evidences according to which a writer makes his place as part of a continuing tradition of thought. Both Plato and Shelley are notable for their common perception of the social value of poetry. This use of poetry in achieving persuasion in the audience emerges with Shelley as an illuminating method of literary theory. Plato in The Republic and The Laws lays down certain guiding ideas and standards
of moral excellence for his contemporaries. Shelley shares this stance with Plato. How far both Plato and Shelley remained enslaved by overt moral concerns is well discernable from the following lines:

"In The Republic, for instance, he (Plato) is found commanding both tragedy and epic under certain conditions, that is, provided they dealt with themes that inculcated courage, purity, temperance, and the like."

And, Shelley's compliance with this concern becomes evident from his own comment:

"Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb."

This socio-political approach to poetry continued to sustain its universality of appeal throughout the Romantic era as is reflected from Wordsworth's turning of the self outward to sympathy and fellowship. Hazlitt's remark on Wordsworth as 'raising trifles into importance' only serves to highlight the latter's humanitarian compassion for the rustics and the primitive. Wordsworth's views on poetic diction, and his poetics, break thoroughly with the Augustan criteria of propriety and decorum rooted as they are in a primarily moral standpoint. Eliot, despite his hostility towards Wordsworth's zest for unfettered spontaneous expression of


emotion and inspiration, lends him a certain respectability for "his appeal to the humanitarian instincts and impulses". Eliot speaks of the prevailing social conditions affecting the author's observations about poetry. He goes further to point out how this concern eventually directs the poet to promote the acceptance of underlying social principles and values.

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Thus the view that literature can neither be understood nor divorced from the cultural context, the social, economic, ideological and material matrix which engenders it, finds an expression in writers who promote aesthetic representation as ultimately autonomous.

Hazlitt, in the anthology of essays entitled The Spirit of the Age, does without a discussion on Shelley because of the latter's having committed certain literary trespasses. Hazlitt practically refused to accord Shelley the status of a poet and wrote of him as "not a poet, but a sophist, a theorist, a controversial writer in verse."  


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reflecting upon his own experience of writing poetry, uses multifarious images for the poet and gives to poetry political and philosophical basis and an ethical foundation. On the other hand, Keats's tendency and practice was to sift the incompatible images to expound his theory of literary autonomy. But, with Shelley these images dwell amicably together:

"Chameleon, soilder, silkworm? Skylark, the blithe spirit hidden 'in the light of thought' or nightingale 'who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds? Or Aeolian Lyre swept by the wild winds of inspiration? ... Keats wrote, 'what shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the chameleon poet'. Shelley would not have recognised the distinction: for him the chameleon poet was the virtuous philosopher or nothing."  

Inherent in Shelley's ideologically orientation of art were the elements of its dissolution as the content of his prose and poetry offered contradiction of received propositions. His heretical views and subversive opinions gave rise to great anxiety and intellectual debates. The
field of valuation for Shelley's critics remained restricted as each critic put his finger on this particular weakness, the weakness which Frye termed as his being 'antithetical to Christianity'. Peacock, in his various caricatures of Shelley in Headlong Hall (1915), Melricourt, Gryll Grange (1950) and Nightmare Abbey (1918) draws particular attention to this unsatisfactory note in the revolutionary enthusiast always moving in conflicting directions. According to Peacock, such is the contradiction and conflict of Shelley's exploration of the ways towards his struggle for political and religious freedom that his views cannot be attributed to a single character but to a number of characters. The reactions to Shelley's fervent denouncement of political and religious authority remained an important moment in the critical awareness of the limitations of the Romantics which was to serve as the disjunction between the Romantics and the moderns. This hostility was eventually to take the form of statement about Romantic poetry at large:

"... the moral and the Romantic are heartfelt foes: the Romantics 'offer a fallacious and dangerous view of the nature both of literature and of man." 7

Shelley's reputation was definitely affected by these extreme comments and in the Victorian age, he came to be applauded more for his lyric virtuosity:

"The consensus of this late-Victorian or late Romantic criticism was that Shelley's minor works were his major works; that admirable as his longer works may be, they show his limitations in a way that his lyrics do not; that Shelley was England's greatest lyric poet."3

This difference in the opinions about art and poetic practice of the late-Victorians is nothing but a reflection of the spirit of the times especially on Walter Pater who upheld the Impressionistic critical canon which assessed a poem not as a vehicle for the poet's ideology but for its sensational effect. But, all the same, Matthew Arnold is seen propogating a literary movement with certain shared aims and critical axioms of Shelley in so far as both point the way towards the moral conditions which ought to be obtained in human society. While Arnold's deprecation of Shelley, in the remark 'beautiful and ineffectual angel', draws attention to Shelley's ethereal qualities it does not abate Arnold's admiration for the young crusader's

preoccupation with the art of living. Arnold's art-criticism as an embodiment of the best that is known and thought in the world sought a remedy to the malaise of his times and was not far from Shelley's customary views. Arnold's denunciation of the Romantics for their lack of ethical and moral consideration was determined by their desire to subvert religious and political order:

"Matthew Arnold's judgement that the Romantics 'did not know enough' is well known, but he nonetheless ranks Wordsworth highest in the language since Shakespeare and Milton in offering us a 'criticism of life' and the means of dealing with the puzzle of 'how to live'. Great literature is the application of 'moral ideas' to life,... and a 'poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life."9

However, with the Formalist school one perceives an antagonism emerging towards the introverted writings of the Romantics and Shelley seems to have suffered outright condemnation for his anathema to the role of reason and

9The Ethics of Romanticism, pp. 1-2.
empirical evidence. But, all the same, there are some famous critical authorities who remain irrevocably committed to a sustained elaboration of the social and ethical value of poetry:

"... C.K. Stead, in The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot (1964), has discussed the modern poet's desire to rewrite the roles of seer and public spokesman."\(^{10}\)

For Laurence Lockridge the general course of the modernistic and post-modernistic criticism is a continuity, development and revival of the ethical stance:

"... some modern critics have long acknowledged the claims of ethics; Lionel Trilling speaks of literary texts as expressions of authorial moral will, and Kenneth Burke provides a grammar of human motives applicable to literary texts. Paul Ricoeur asks whether a presumed 'ethical neutrality of the artist' may 'suppress one of the oldest functions of art, that it constitutes an ethical laboratory where the artist pursues through the mode of fiction experimentation with values'. In the past four or five years a relatively small group of critics has begun to refocus our attention on the ethical."\(^{11}\)


\(^{11}\) The Ethics of Romanticism, p.24.
However, the most radical re-assessment of the proclivity and desire to employ literature for the ultimate aim of establishing social justice and study literature in the context of the economic history of the time has been launched by the Marxist School. It would be both interesting and illuminating to record how far Shelley's deeply ingrained convictions regarding poetry to investigate the social problems of his day form a background to the study of the main philosophical tenets of Marxist school. One would easily corroborate the argument regarding the affiliation between the Marxist School and Shelley's art-criticism by quoting directly from Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* which was a comprehensive examination of poetry to counter Peacock's attack against poetry:

"But poets ... are the institutions of laws and the founders of civil society and the inventors of the arts of life and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. ... Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called in the earlier epochs of the world..."
legislators or prophets; a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters."\textsuperscript{12}

Marxism undertook a fearless investigation of the established order so that the outmoded tyrannizing morality of the Church and malversation of the despot's might be eradicated and a realistic scientific approach to the problems of life be adopted. Shelley's *A Philosophical View of Reform* wherein he remarks that "he has deserted the odorous gardens of literature to journey across the great sandy desert of politics,"\textsuperscript{13} is an epitome of his view of the contemporary political situation and of human history. He actively takes part in the issues of his time and the essay interpreted in the light of the political context of the time presents a comprehensive social picture. The Romantic manipulation of poetry for self-projection has generally been slighted as bourgeois hypocrisy but Shelley's political propaganda remains comprehensible to the vast masses as it seeks to alter the conditions of the working class:

"The broad principle of political reform is the natural equality of men, not with relation to their property but to their rights. That

\textsuperscript{12} *Shelley's Prose*, p. 279.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, p. 279.
equality in possessions which Jesus Christ so passionately taught is a moral rather than political truth ...

Morals and politics can only be considered as portions of the same science, with relation to a system of such absolute perfection as Christ and Plato and Rousseau and other reasoners have asserted and as Godwin has, ... systematized and developed,

Equality in possessions must be the last result of the utmost refinements of civilization; ... our duty to tend."14

Thus Shelley takes his place among those, who are known in Marxist terminology, the leftists or the left-wing dualists, directing attention towards certain goals with the aim of changing the world. All his major works: The Mask of Anarchy, The Revolt of Islam which had been entitled at the outset as The Revolution of Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century, Prometheus Unbound, Lines written Among the Eupenean Hills, Ode to Liberty and To Naples are a reflection of his political ideas and his utopian, millenial views. In these works Shelley is seen as assimilating, utilizing and expressing all the contemporary political and economic issues to claim for the function of literature the

14 Shelley's Prose, pp. 253-254.
extra-literary critical legislation and to account for literary works in terms of the political and social conditions that produced them. Shelley, therefore, represents the earliest application of literature for political theory and political propaganda to supply the basic doctrines for Marxism. The development of literature was not an independent process existing in a vacuum for Karl Marx for whom Shelley remained, in a sense, the pioneer:

"Marxist critics of Shelley frequently cite Marx's declaration that "the real difference between Byron and Shelley is this: those who understand and love them rejoice that Byron died at thirty-six, because if he had lived he would have become a reactionary bourgeois; they grieve that Shelley died at twenty-nine, because he was essentially a revolutionist and he would always have been one of the advance guard of socialism."  

That literature occupies a definite place in the socioeconomic environment and that it is directly influenced by the ideological framework produced in such an environment remains the salient and persistent feature of modern and

15Shelley, p. 272.
post-modern Marxist theorists like Raymond Williams, Mikhail Bakhtin, Terry Eagleton, Stephen J. Greenblatt and Frederic Jameson who use art as a weapon and look upon the artist as an 'intellectual proletariat' to subvert the traditional paradigm of the bourgeoisie culture in order to unleash an apocalypse:

"The literature is there from the beginning as a practice in the society. Indeed until it and all other practices are present, the society cannot be seen as fully formed. A society is not fully available for analysis until each of its practices is included ... We cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws." 15

This millenial tendency in Shelley and the Marxist critics is rendered possible only when they subvert the concept of determinism both in its theological and sociological dimensions. Shelley's apocalypse, however, is totally freed from the restriction of realism as his touchstone for the conduct and solution of problems in the world of action is

referred to the ideal entities as against the Marxist reference to the objective reality. However, art does play a role in society and can even be controlled by it — the parallels regarding this particular stance between Shelley and the Marxist theorists are often so striking that one can but assume direct influence.

Shelley's defence of poetry against the charges levelled by Peacock is based not only on its socialistic and humanitarian concerns but his penetrating insight and evaluation of poetry as a special kind of product of the plenary inspiration. It was this side of Plato that remained most appropriate to the Romantic conception of the artist. The Romantics, therefore, assigned to the powers of inspiration and intuition a pivotal role in the production of creative art. In fact, this theory is seen to resonate in the creative and critical responses of James Joyce who views 'epiphany' as the divine attribute in man. Where this rhapsodical element elevated the status of poetry, it also lent support to the unsatisfactory note of Peacock that, "... a poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community." 17 This threatening note attributed to the poet and poetry testified to Shelley's reservations regarding poetry in the wake of his dominating susceptibilities to the

promotions of the Ideas of Enlightenment at the outset. Before his recourse to the theory of Inspiration, Shelley rationally and consciously pleaded that the divine afflatus produced nothing but entranced states as he remained an outright defender of the 19th century rationalistic epistemology.

Shelley turned to The Encyclopedists which embodied the scientific and realistic doctrines of religious and political freedom. The Encyclopedists, an epitome of all that was provocative and pernicious in religion and philosophy, encouraged Shelley's sceptical awareness and he came to rely completely on the deterministic view of nature which meant "the laws of the physical world, not the spiritual force which animates Wordsworth's poetry."[13] And, quite naturally, his attention was engrossed by such writers as Albertus Magnus, Paracelsus, Hume and Locke who satisfied his scientific curiosity bringing all theories and opinions regarding the origin of life, immortality, the nature of reality and the constitution of the mind to the test of reason. All his works, viz., The Necessity of Atheism, Essay on a Future State, Essay on Life and Essay on Christianity quite vehemently deny the existence of God and reflect his materialism:

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"...who believe that we live after death recur to the interposition of a supernatural power which shall overcome the tendency inherent in all material combination to dissipate and be absorbed into other forms."¹⁹

Shelley's deeply ingrained convictions neither evolved nor can be understood independently of the empirical order of the 19th century which engendered it. Therefore, when the 19th century aesthetics swayed from the scepticism of Hume's passivity of mind to the Berkeleyean idealism, Shelley attempted to adapt to this change.

The deephold of this change was most suggestive on language as a source of true knowledge or as representation of the objective phenomenon. Locke had privileged an unembellished language, what Anoela Leighton terms as 'linguistic literalism', as a transparent medium to capture the sense perception — although later he was to acknowledge the tendency of language to obscure and disguise its object. But prior to Locke's awareness of the dynamic quality of language, attempts were made by various poet-philosophers like Joseph Addison and Berkeley who stated the metaphorical and

¹⁹ Shelley's Prose, p. 175.
figurative properties of language to express the psychological activity and sensibility of the writer. The mental images thus bodied forth in language may or may not correspond to the external objects. Emphasis came to be placed on a creative responsiveness to the magnanimous and captivating universe, attributing to language a certain ambivalence in its failure to recover the event but being, all the same beautiful and forceful for this defiance of sense perception because of its figurative and decorous shaping of the vision. The distance between rhetorical contrivance and the literal event was looked upon as the incapacity of language to render theological speculations:

"... in eighteenth century theories of the sublime, words, by their very inadequacy and inferiority, signal the magnitude and superiority of their object."

For Shelley, however, this inadequacy of words only stood to support his empirical argument. This failure of aesthetic vocabulary confirmed his mistrust of poetry because of its fictitiousness to evade reality. For Shelley a contrived work of art tends towards the divine and mysterious as well as inspirational power — the original impulse which generates

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it. With the result rhetorical poems have to be dealt with reference to the processes of the poet's mind exclusively, as they fall short of and remain antipathetic to the representation of external reality. Hence, "... when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline." This insufficiency of language displays for Shelley his early hostility and doubts regarding poetry as making false and presumptive claims to truth. Yet, it is this elusiveness and unpredictability, attributed to poetry by Shelley in his Defence, that not only celebrates and affirms the unattainable presence of God but remains in the words of Angela Leighton an "aesthetic of creativity" which is "strangely modern in the scepticism and imaginative relativism."

It is this scepticism of Shelley regarding composition as remote and impoverished, deferring reference to the phenomenal world that associates him with the 'terrorist weapon' Deconstructionism. The Formalists had insisted on the richness and multiplicity of the meaning of words as a guarantee in their claims and defence of the uniqueness of art against science. The principal argument of the Formalists and structuralists was not only to displace the content but also to pronounce the 'death of the author', so that a work

21Shelley's Prose, p. 294.
of art to them was a unique, self-sufficient and finely organized structure where words, despite their defamiliarization through rhyme, rhythm, had relation to objective reality. Deconstructionism like structuralism, a purely linguistic phenomenon, offers a complete description of the etymology of words to slash the claims of the Formalist's/Structuralist's idea of the poem as a self-contained entity in which meaning rose from the intricate verbal ingenuity. A poem, for that matter any literal discourse including philosophy, these avant-garde philosophers asserted is not an objective structure of meaning because the rhetorical strategies defy all notions of a definite reading or interpretation (the structure of an artefact is a 'rhetorical jugglino' which defies a referential meaning). It is in this scepticism towards the very possibility of communication that we can draw a line of continuity between the preoccupation of Shelley and the doctrines of the post-structuralists. That Shelley anticipated this school is evident in these lines from \textit{Dolcevita}:

"The winoed words on which my soul would pierce
Into the height of Love's rare Universe,
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire --
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire."\textsuperscript{22}

Kant had adumbrated these subversive tendencies when he stated the impossibility of ever arriving at any plausible and definite knowledge of the Universe. Kant in his Critique of Judgement had laid emphasis on 'psychological performance' in having turned the physical nature into something which is ineffable and indemonstrable, leading the poet towards the processes of his own mind and the reader achieving some sort of identity with the consciousness of the writer. Saussure, having released a work of art from its authorial bonds, had mentioned the arbitrary relation between the sign and the word and this relation, he had argued, attributes towards the disjunction between word and thing. But, all the same, he held a system -- Lacoue -- chastening, quickening and governing the individual utterances besides lending support to the conventional idea of the text as conveying stable meanings. The Deconstructionists challenged these fundamental notions about literature and language causing major re-orientation in literary studies. By stating that elusiveness was the very condition of language Derrida highlighted a problem which Saussure's own theory of language had brought into view. Language, he pointed out, belies the intention of the author and is therefore never a transparent medium of communication. Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man, John Hillis
Miller precipitated such subversive tendencies by advocating this 'linguistic nihilism':

"... all words are metaphors — that all are differentiated, differed and deferred each leading to something of which it is the displacement in a movement without origin or end."

These views propounded by the Deconstructionists are present not only in Shelley's theoretical stance but also in his creative works which are but a demonstration of this fact of deferring meaning as has been discussed in Chapter-III. In fact, the Deconstructionists discover in the Romantic poets a set of paradoxical themes violating their manifest argument and intention:

"The pattern for Hartman's confessional narrative is clearly Wordsworth's Prelude, where the poet looks back to his moment of illumination with a sense of belatedness and well-nigh unbridgeable distance. For Hartman this is the impasse encountered by all Romantic and post-Romantic thought, the 'unmediated vision' lies beyond reach of language, because language brings along with it a mediating

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structure of awareness which can never coincide with its object in a pure, self-authenticating knowledge."\(^{24}\)

However, Shelley's is the standard example of a poet who was consistently cognizant of the indeterminate quality of language towards the finality of meaning both in his invocation of the mysterious power of the Universe and his zest for an uninhibited and unfettered expression of enthusiasm and inspiration. For a corroboration of the reminiscence of Deconstruction in Shelley's poetical lines, one can only quote Angela Leighton's illuminating statement:

"Although, Shelley affirms the presence of the power, it remains inaccessible to the human mind. Its place is dark, unexplored, silent and secret. Shelley's language is still pulling in two directions at once: towards presence and absence."\(^{25}\)

Such avant-garde proportions in Shelley can be traced to his deep-rooted materialism which bred into him the skepticism about ultimate reality and the overwhelmingly surcharged and prevailing attitude in the 19th century study of art -- the tradition of sublime which was governed and conditioned by Berkeleyan idealism. In fact, most of Shelley's poems are


\(^{25}\)Shelley and the Sublime, p. 71.
notable for what they retain of these contrary tendencies. This scepticism was to creep into his aesthetics of poetry and Shelley discovers in language qualities which place him precisely in the development of post-structuralist thought — only strengthening his view of the seraphical tendencies of poetry and poetic language. In the parlance of the post-structuralists each word in the poems discussed in Chapter III becomes a 'signifier' in its turn leading to more 'signifieds'. Thus, Shelley initiated a number of trains of thought which were to become hallmarks for much of the most important contemporary trend — Reconstructionism.

But, prior to the Deconstructionists, this rhetorical texture of art-criticism without a reference to meaning was distrusted and discredited by the New Critics who furnished a defence of poetry against the onslaught of science by establishing its distinct identity. These new critics advocated a scientific use of language which would re-constitute the original experience through images. Words, they suggested, should be translucent and language should be absolved of all rhetorical suggestion, pre-existing and pre-determined emotion. Their preference for 'hard and dry' presentation of precise images automatically led them to refute the 'positivistic' dimensions of language and literature, or what Kenneth Burke
terms as the function of literature as an 'equipment for living'. They viewed art as an autotelic and autonomous artefact having salvaged it from moral, historical, biographical and philosophical approaches — a fallacy that informed both the Expressionistic and Impressionistic criticism. In the same manner, they rejected the theory of Inspiration. The New Critics perceived serious disadvantages in this theory as it paved way to behavioural and psychological approaches to view the poem as an expression of the poet's personality. Besides, the abstract and rhetorical suggestions of its medium rendered it remote from the New Critics' concrete nature of imagery. The New Critics' main target was to save poetry from being subjective and personal—the particular approach of the 19th century Romantics to poetry and literature. Shelley as mentioned in Chapter III adversely suffered at the hands of the New Critics.

The New Critics, much like the Romantics, were led to demonstrate the incompleteness and inadequacy of scientific truth and knowledge but, in the process of doing so they stressed the need to deviate from the Romantic emotional and psychological status of creativity. Where the Romantics had defended poetry by recommending an evaluative approach to the author, the New Critics pre-occupied themselves with the
evaluation of the work of art with no concern whatsoever for its extrinsic considerations. Ransom's preference for 'anonymity', as against the writer's propensity to tell his 'own story', or his 'fictitious personality'; Eliot's theory of 'Impersonality' and concept of 'tradition', Cleanth Brooks's 'indirect method of art' and Tillyard's contention that 'all poetry is more or less oblique', point to their preoccupation with the literariness of a work of art and their attempt to defend poetry as a complex and conscious art.

This concern with the intrinsic worth of poetry can be traced back to Aristotle's aposteriori method as against the apriori methodology of Plato. For Plato the conflicting claims of the 'real' and the 'actual', brought into focus the hiatus between the rhetorical language and the real world but for Aristotle the 'real' remains inherent in the 'actual'. Plato's neglect of the aspects of technique unlike Aristotle's close attention to the internal character of a poem led him towards the extra-literary elements of literary production. Aristotle's concern with the question of technique exhausted its significance in the Wordsworthian era except for Keats who finds in this concern with the internal character of a work an aesthetics to meet his own requirement of a true artist. This concern with the poem per se was repeated in
later 19th century by Edgar Allan Poe who claimed poetry to be a distant category of value and knowledge in the face of utilitarianism. This aesthetic movement of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde made a decisive impact on the anti-Romantic stance of the New Critics, devoted as it was consciously to save the poem from subjective and personal conditions and plead for its self-sufficiency.

This aesthetic movement with a pronounced aesthetic bias can be traced to the Romantic era, the 'era of arrogant solipsism'. Keats can be said to have heralded this scheme of thought which was to become the hallmark of modernism. The question of the modernists' affinity with the Romantics has been discussed by C.K. Stead, Northrop Frye and Frank Kermode who are unanimous in their statements regarding the wide diffusion of modernism in the 19th century — Frye going to the extent of terming Modernism as Post-Romantic. These three have attempted to record the complex pattern of shared ideas and influences between literary theorists and their theories of the two ages. We can further elaborate on this historical continuity by showing the indebtedness of the twentieth century Impersonal theories to Keats who, unlike the other Romantics, was quicker to grasp the dangerous signs of the 'cramp and confinement of personality.' The individuality of
his perception takes the form of a thorough critique not only of his contemporary practitioners of poetry but his own writings. In the words of T.S. Eliot, Keats can be looked upon as "the important critic ... absorbed in the present problems of art,"²⁶ seen as he is wrestling with the eighteenth century rationalistic imitative stance to seek refuge in the expressive/projective aesthetics of the Romantics only to find it moribund and finally lead the way to the Impersonal theories of the twentieth century:

"As to the poetical character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or exaltistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is everything and nothing — It has no character -- it enjoys light and shade, it lives in ousuo, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated -- It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion poet .... A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity -- he is continually in for -- and filling some other Body --

The sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute — the poet has none; no identity — he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.²⁷

This observation on the art of poetry wherein the poet has no identity but has the dramatic capacity to enter into the person or the object he contemplates is exceptional for Keats's times which believed in the manipulation of poetry for self-projection. The poet, according to Keats, is to lose his sense of self. This aesthetic representation as autonomous, and hence severed from the social ideological and biographical matrix, emerged as the Impersonal Theory of Art among the twentieth century critics and was a challenge to the egotistical aesthetics of the Nineteenth Century Romantic poets.

T.S. Eliot is perhaps the leading champion of Impersonal art among the twentieth century critics who not only criticizes the Romantic preoccupation with the self but also points to the inadequacy of extrinsic considerations which turn literature into a surrogate for sociology, politics and

philosophy. Viewing all literature in its historical setting, Eliot in his classic essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* makes an attempt to release a work of art from its subjective bindings. He discounts the Wordsworthian poetics as nothing but a unique piece of ventriloquism:

"Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion: it is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality."\(^{23}\)

He propogates an objective way of treating a work of art which echoes Keats's subversion of the accepted Romantic paradigm. His classic statement of Impersonality, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, represents his earliest application of classicism in both its parts: (i) the relation of the artist with the past and (ii) the relation of the artist with his material. The first, involves, according to Eliot, the 'historical sense'. Eliot points out that the past is an inseparable element of the present and is to be viewed in close proximity with it. The poet, having acquired the historical sense, will assimilate, express and utilize the past in such a way that it becomes a part of the present and the resulting work of the artist bears an indelible imorint of this consciousness of the continuity of time. It is only

by responding and committing himself to the aegis of the past that a writer can accommodate the varying developments in literary criticism. The artist must, therefore, submit himself to this continuity of literary tradition. In the second part of the essay, Eliot dispenses with the author and his intentions and, instead, explains the process of creation as a process of 'depersonalization'. He focusses attention on the given work as a finely-organized-structure and on its relationship with the system of literature rather than on its genesis or the subjective intentions of its author. He establishes an analogy between the poetic process and a chemical process in which oxygen and sulphur dioxide are brought together to form sulphuric acid in the presence of a piece of platinum which works as the catalyst. The piece of platinum remains inert, undergoing no change whatsoever and leaving no trace of it on the new creation which would have been impossible without its presence. The poet's mind, too, is like a catalyst which brings into existence new combinations of emotions and does not leave any trace on the combination thus wrought. Eliot discredits the relevance of the author's self-dramatization and plead, in his own terms, for a 'continual self-surrender', sounding a direct continuity with Keats's aesthetic of objectivity which Men of Genius so ably exemplify.
"Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect — for they have not any individuality, any determined character." 29

Eliot's misgivings about the Romantic poetic vocation led him to disinter the poetry of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries and state that Metaphysical poetry was not a digression in the European literary tradition but maintained a continuity with the tradition of the past. For Eliot the poem is neither an utterance of the personal feelings and circumstances of the individual poet nor is it to be judged for its moral instruction or for the degree of pleasure it gives. It is a unique, self-sufficient and finely-organized-structure and is to be judged by its ability to impose order on the chaotic experience of life. Eliot attributed this feature to the minds of the seventeenth century poets who never lost hold of this gift of constantly amalgamating disparate and chaotic experiences:

"When the poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls

29 *Letters of John Keats*, p. 36.
in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking: in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes."

It is not the intensity of personal emotions that determines the greatness of a work of art but the intensity of the process of unifying and amalgamating these disparate and chaotic experiences. This concept of Eliot, that the process of creation involves assimilation and transmutation of disparate elements into a poetic whole, is but a development of that attitude which found expression in Keats's letters in such words as follows:

"... the excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth -- Examine King Lear and you will find this exemplified throughout."

Eliot's concept of 'unified sensibility' is a response to the sense of irreparable loss of emotion in the poetry of Milton.

30 Selected Essays, p. 237.
31 Letters of John Keats, p. 42.
and Dryden who initiated the process of the 'dissociation of sensibility' by emphasizing reason to the exclusion of emotion. The Romantics, however, went to the other extreme and swung the balance in favour of emotion. According to Eliot these two aspects of poetic sensibility should work simultaneously in a new inclusive whole. However, Eliot's theoretical views are expressed in terms which recall Keats's strictures on neo-classical poetry:

"... Yes, a Schism
Nurtured by popery and barbarism,
Made great Apollo blush for this his land.
Men were thought wise who would not understand
His glories: with a pulino infant's force
They sway'd about upon a rocking horse,
And thought it Pegasus .... Easy was the task:
A thousand handicraftsman wore the mask
Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
That blasphemed the bright lyrist to his face,
And did not know it, -- no, they went about,
Holding a poor, descrip standard out
Mark'd with most flimsy mottos, and in large
The name of one Boileau." 32

Although Eliot does not acknowledge his indebtedness to Keats yet he accepts Keats's difference from his contemporary literary milieu. By comparing Keats's early stance with his later formulations, Eliot tries to define the nature of his greatness:

"Keats seems to me also a great poet ... But I am not so much concerned with the degree of his greatness as with its kind; and its kind is manifested more clearly in his letters than in his poems; and in contrast with the kinds we have been reviewing, it seems to me to be much more the kind of Shakespeare."

The broad drift of Keats's argument bodied forth in his letters was to lose the sense of one's self and this attitude appealed greatly to the twentieth century mind. In fact, it was this ability to see into the selves of others that made him come down harshly upon the 'pantomimical inventiveness' of his Romantic contemporaries. Keats's claims that poetry should be approached as poetry and not as another thing were widely accepted by other prominent figures associated with Eliot in the movement for the revival of classicism in the twentieth century.

In fact, Keats has, in his letters, said much about the art of writing poetry that is pertinent to the needs of the twentieth century artists:

"... let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey -- bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at:

33 The Use of Poetry And the Use of Criticism, p. 100.
but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive — buddino patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favours us with an visit."34

This sensuous empathy is a striking characteristic of Croce, Collingwood, Ransom and James Joyce. The broad drift of their argument is to defend poetry by establishing its distinct identity through an absolute identification between the self and object "as a feeling of communion or rapport with the environment."35 Joyce presented such aesthetic theories through Stephen in his three works — Stephen Hero, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and Ulysses. His theory seems to be an extended treatment of Keats's sensuous empathy. It rejects as improper for art the Kinetic feeling which leads to didactic, improper and pronographic art. Instead of the Kinetic feeling, he recommends the static feeling as the proper feeling for art. Static — the feeling proper to art leads us to a contemplative poise and equilibrium of the mind whether in pleasure or pain. With all dramatic interests eschewed the artist is motivated simply by the desire to celebrate the world's beauty. Reflecting upon his own

34 Letters of John Keats, p. 56.

experience of writing poetry, Keats throws out similar guiding ideas upon which later criticism was to be largely based:

"... it struck me, what quality went to form a man of Achievement especially in literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously -- I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason -- ..."  

Keats's comprehension of the human world of time and chance led him away from subjectivism and didacticism and induced in him an attitude of complete openness to experience. His complete openness to the interplay of pleasure and pain directed his dramatic aspirations. His dramatic aspirations reflect a maturer attitude of mind which responds both to joyful and sorrowful experiences. He, once again, anticipated the unqualified praise by Joyce and Eliot of dramatic art in which the author has no identity of his own.

Ezra Pound, whose achievement among the twentieth century writers is outstanding, deviated from the norms of the Romantic expressionistic theory of art. His preoccupations

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36 Letters of John Keats, p. 43.
with the literariness of literary works as opposed to extrinsic considerations resemble to a remarkable degree with those of Keats. His objective standard seem to be a continuation of the literary standards set by Keats:

"Now art never asks anybody to do anything, or to think anything, or to be anything. It exists as the tree exists, you can admire, you can sit in the shade, you can pick bananas, you can cut firewood, you can do as you jolly well please." 37

Anticipating such future endeavours, Keats too, restricted himself to the work of art itself and proved the distance he had travelled from the Romantic world of treacle:

"How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, admire me I am a violet! dote upon me I am a primrose." 39

Pound enunciated the method of 'Chinese ideogram' in which the personal emotion is squeezed out and is transmuted into and evoked through an objective image. These poetic images have to be precise and accurate as they are to reconstitute the original experience of the poet. Also, because of their


38 Letters of John Keats,p.61.
quality of universality they place the reader in a similar emotional plane as the writer or the character of the work of art. Pound's classification of poetry into three kinds is determined by the same standard -- concentration of language. His unqualified praise for 'phanopoeia' -- use of words with precision and scientific accuracy -- is what lies behind his assessment of Shelley's language:

"Shelley's Sensitive Plant is one of the rottenest poems ever written, at least one of the worst ascribable to a recognized author." 39

Pound's 'Chinese ideogram' and Eliot's 'objective correlative' strengthen their view of art as autotelic. Both these concepts stand exemplified in Keats's To Autumn wherein the poet has succeeded to escape from his personal emotion into the objects organized in the art-work.

The parallels between Keats's poetic standards and those of the twentieth century Impersonal theorists are often so striking that one is tempted to assume a direct influence. However, his later poetic statements do not tread on the same ground and we perceive in them a tendency which he had earlier held to be detrimental to the establishment of a

genuine theory of literature. The Fall of Hyperion which was his attempt to emulate the Miltonic epic -- Paradise Lost -- shows him pleading for the subservience of the arts to a social purpose besides revealing his failure to solve the dichotomy between his objective ideal and his subjective impulse:

"The poet and the dreamer are distinct
The one pours out a balm upon the world
The other vexes it."

This change in his concept of poetry and standard of evaluation in this abortive epic was a natural concomitant to his poetic ideal as stated and elucidated in Chapter II. In fact, the dreamer in The Fall is elevated to the status of a poet because he perceives and experiences sorrow which he finds inevitable. It is the same determination to steer clear of the Shelleyan tendency to "pursue phantoms" that Byron set off to Greece to prove to be a man of action. Keats, with the tussle between the desire for objectivity leading to a disinterested kind of an art-object and the almost uncontrollable subjective impulse associating poetry with socio-political concerns, once again looks forward to future developments in critical thinking of an altogether different orientation.

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The objective philosophy of art suffered disfavour not only among its initiators but also among other critics who are seen turning back with a passionate nostalgia to the external references that inform Romantic and Impressionistic criticism. Accordingly, we find Eliot, the supreme exemplar of the objective trends in poetry, exploring the usefulness of the poem in terms of moral and social values. Having established that there is something specific about art that distinguishes it from other disciplines, the New Critics were led into the negligence of the poetic process. This focus on the complexity of the poetic medium only ensnared them in a mechanical kind of analysis, what Eliot termed as the 'lemon-squeezing method' or what Crane was later to assail as 'critical monism'. Many schools, in fact, recognized serious disadvantages in the New Critics insistence on a literary work as a self-contained entity and felt that by reverting to a completely Romantic manner they could dig out the humane concerns of a poem. The mythological approach used by Northrop Frye associates poetry with the whole universe as such. Sarah Lawrence's focus on the creative consciousness focusses less on the irrational sources of a work of art than on the author's active consciousness at the moment of creation. Similarly, phenomenology -- a branch of behavioural and experimental
psychology — is once again a reformulation of the Romantic aesthetic as it delineates the peculiar nature and presence of the poet from his poetry.

A comparison of Keats's earliest with his latest poetic statements should give ample evidence of how much he himself learnt from his own critical meditation. He continuously attends to the re-assessment of general principles vis-à-vis poetry and points to the limitations not only of the imitative rationalistic approach of the neo-classicists and the expressionistic approach of the Romantics but also to the objective approach which he had eulogised. It was, perhaps, an implicit awareness of the limitations of the objective aesthetic standards realized later by T.S. Eliot, F.R. Richards, Rye, the Chicago School, the genetic critics, Geoffrey Hartman and others that led Keats to a consideration of the extra-literary conditions of a literary production. The best results, according to Keats, would be achieved only when the poet completely annihilated himself and objectified his emotions. This conception was subsequently modified by his concept of 'Negative Capability' which is his comprehensive and all-inclusive presentation of the two kinds of processes of art. Rising to a new critical acumen, Keats was once again to set the tone of that critical thought represented by critics.
who went beyond the Impersonal theorists. Keats's critical insight shows an extra-ordinary maturity as is evident from his comprehensive and all-inclusive categorization of various artists. In fact, it is this critical consciousness which lies behind Keats's depreciation of Wordsworth for his overtly biographical and philosophical preoccupations and his applause for Wordsworth, towards the end, when he is seen to credit such extra-formal consideration above art. In his juxtaposition of Milton against Wordsworth, he finds that Wordsworth's was a more active concern for humanity as his work had the intensity of exploring the human situation:

"... the consideration of Wordsworth's genius and as a help, in the manner of old being the meridian line of worldly wealth -- how he differs from Milton. -- And here I have nothing but surmises, from an uncertainty whether Milton's apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or no than Wordsworth..."41

Keats, in his own words, 'straining after particles of light', represents a creative responsiveness and re-assessment of the basic assumptions of Literacy Criticism. He proposes 41Letters of John Keats, p.93.
seminal concepts of literary forms and views of literature's role in relation to society. A comparison between his earlier and later views is significant as it shows him re-writing his own aesthetic premises, defying any settled or definite conviction regarding art and emerging as the standard example of Eliot's poet-critic:

"The views of any writer, if his mind develops and matures, will change or will be modified by events, ... Much of the permanence of Mr. Pound's criticism is due simply to his having seen so clearly what needed to be said at a particular time; his occupation with his own moment and its needs has led him to say many things which are of permanent value,..." 42

42 *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p.xi.