Conclusion
In the foregoing chapters, the writings of Edmund Wilson have been analyzed to elucidate the significance of literature as an art and its significance as a cultural product of a given society. The emphasis in Wilson has always been on humanist criticism. Eugene Goodheart says, by “humanist” criticism:

“I mean something richer and more significant than fault finding literary journalism or the academic study of books, though it is possible for literary journalism and academic study to raise to the condition of humanistic criticism. Mathew Arnold, F.R. Leavis, Raymond Williams in the English tradition, Edmund Wilson and Lionell Trilling in the American, and Orteja Y. Gasset in the European are major instances; though they are by no means exhaustive, nor do they together express a single ideological point of view”.

The above critical opinion may be taken as a trend and a tone in which criticism after post structuralism is moving. Having highlighted the

significant phases of Wilson's literary criticism, it is now time to sum up his achievement. Any kind of inclusive assessment of a writer ought to be from a contemporary perspective. In the following paragraphs, I will try to present the critical and political perspective, from which it is fair to draw a few conclusions about Wilson as a critic.

When Wilson wrote *Axel's Castle*, utilizing the principle of "The historical interpretation of literature" the most dominant school of criticism in America was the New Criticism. The critical platform till the Fifties was also shared by the Chicago critics, The psychological critics, the phenomenological critics, the archetypal critics and the interpretative critics. Of these, the most popular was the New Criticism, very well represented by Cleanth Brooks's, *Modern Poetry and Tradition*.

The title of R.S.Crane's book, *The Language of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* suggests that the significant feature of modernist criticism is its plurality of critical idiom and language. Close reading of poems has become a paedagogical tool and led to a number of misinterpretations of the well known poems. In the sixties, the structuralist demonstrated that criticism should pre-occupy itself with the linguistic components that constitute the structure of a poem. In the later sixties and seventies, Structuralism was relegated into the junk by the post-structuralists, who questioned the structurality of the structure. Derrida and his followers have assumed that the meaning of a text is always indeterminate since, all discourse is one, the poetic discourse has no special linguistic or textual status. Post structuralism or the Derridian deconstruction is like cutting off the branch on which we stand. The indeterminancy of meaning and the instability of the text made the study of literature, a detached intellectual
pre-occupation, instead of being a socio-cultural analysis and evaluation of man and his institutions. It is at this juncture in the history of criticism, that a few open-minded students of literature like Eugene Goodheart, Mark Dukstein and creative writers like Saul Bellow have suggested, the benefit a student may derive from returning to the writings of the nineteenth century social critics and Men of letters like Arnold, Carlyle, Ruskin and Henry Adams.

The significance of Wilson's critical procedures and the practice may emerge if we compare his conclusions on the symbolist poetry of the nineteenth century and its impact on modern literature as a whole, say for example, with a formalist critic like Cleanth Brooks. In *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, Brooks maintains that, the poetry of Eliot, Yeats, Auden, Frost Maclash has its tradition in the seventeenth century poetry of Donne and his followers. The metaphysical principle of the fusion of the diverse and the discordant is also the structural principle of modern poetry. One may or may not agree with Brooks, but, sharp disagreements seem to arise when Brooks tries to bring under one rubric the metaphysical, the symbolist and the modern poetics. In his chapter "Symbolist Poetry and the Ivory Tower", Brooks argues that Wilson's historicism or "Historical Interpretation of Literature" is confusing because, he tries to keep ideas as current and relevant which are in fact have gone out of use. Classicism is associated with science, and is constantly kept in opposition to the "poetic - romantic". From the start to finish, the New Critics have obsessively clung to the idea that the norm of all successful poetry is represented by the image of twin compasses in Donne's "Valediction Forbidding Mourning". This reductive attitude is not only crude but suggests the anti-romantic bias of critics like Brooks. Donald Davy once said, "we are post-romantic".
Critics like Frank Kermode in the fifties have established that Yeat's "Dancer" and "Chestnut Tree" have emerged from the aesthetic that is a fusion of the Coleridgean and the symbolist principle of imagination plus image. Eliot's anti-romantic attitude made him drop the term "imagination" and employed the term "sensibility", which is definitelly not equivalent to "imagination". Leaving Mallarme and Verlaine, Eliot, focussed his attention on such poets as Laforgue and Corbiere in whom self-consciousness, social mockery have taken a sarcastic tone and ironic reflection. The conversational tone and the unheroic stance and style of these poets is not there in Yeats or in Hardy and Lawrence. Kermode seems to think that Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" inspite of its Dantesque theme is in the tradition of the Romantic Image. Here lies the significance of Wilson's "Historical Interpretation of Literature". Wilson compliments Eliot for discovering a parallel to the seventeenth century English poetry, in the poetry of self mocking ironies of the symbolist school. Moreover, Eliot's own statements on Donne, in his Lancelot Andrews, seem to justify Wilson's position and his historical interpretation, than Brooks anti-romantic intellectualist position.

Wilson was not a theorist. Wilson never thinks of discussing a poem or a novel in terms of its genre. But, he wrote very illuminating criticism on poets and novelists. In "Christian Gauss as Teacher of Literature", Wilson tells us about his initiation as critic. Of his early training and impressions and also his apprenticeship as a critic, Wilson writes:

"Though Christian's methods were non-dramatic, he had a knack of fixing in one's mind, key passages and key facts. His handling of Rousseau, for example, was most effective in building up the importance of the writer whom we might otherwise find boring".  

"Key passages" and "key facts" are the two points that directed and controlled Wilson's criticism. Wilson's sound knowledge of the European literature, especially, the French literature is the result of the Christian Gauss's influence. It is from this classroom and teacher oriented background, that Wilson developed the idea of making sense of literature to the reader. Making sense of literature doesn't mean a narrow kind of textual interpretation, but a recognition of the significance of the man and the milieu. Wilson seems to have modified Taine's formula and tried to make sense of periods as a whole as he did in *Axel's Castle*. He not only writes felicitously about modern poets like Yeats and Eliot but, writes about an Edwardian poet like Housman with equal ease and gusto. He takes into cognisance Housman's profession as a teacher of classical poetry and how it modified his sensibility. The surroundings and the way in which Housman was brought up are not conducive to the growth of strong feelings. This has its effects on his work and achievement. Let me quote a lengthy passage, a sort of summing up of Housman which illustrates Wilson's method:

"It would not be true to say of Housman, as it would be of Fitzgerald or Gray, that his achievement has been merely to state memorably certain melancholy commonplaces of human existence without any real presentation of that existence as we live it through. There is an immediate emotional experience in Housman of the same kind that there is in Heine, whom he imitated and to whom he has been compared. But Heine, for all his misfortunes, moves at ease in a larger world. There is in his work an exhilaration of adventure -- in travel, in love, in philosophy, in literature, in politics. Doleful though his accents may sometimes be, he always lets in air and light to the mind. But, Housman is closed from the beginning. His world has no opening horizons; it is a prison that one can only endure.

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One can only come the same painful cropper over and over again and draw from it the same bitter moral*.

"And Housman has managed to grow old without in a sense of ever knowing maturity. He has somehow never arrived at the age when the young man decides at last to summon all his resources and try to make something out of this world he has never made."3

The foregoing citation is a typical Wilsonian critical assessment. When we follow the New Critical method of close reading of a poem, say for example, for the classroom purposes, we focus exclusively on the cross fertilization of metaphors. Visual images, thematic words, juxtaposition of the diverse and the discordant and ironic short-circuits as Brooks does in The Well-Wrought Urn, we learn that, the speaker of "Canonization" says that "lovers and saints are one". We don't know from the critic's commentary, what made Donne to reach the preceding conclusion. We grant the argument that Donne uses religious imagery to dramatize an erotic context. The question whether there is any creative or critical practice which uses the sacred and the profane have any philosophical and spiritual implication during the time of Donne; is unanswered. But, the criticism of Wilson not only elucidates the poem but, also accounts for its quality in terms of a short sketch of the writer's personality. In the case of Housman, life and poetry do not go together. Although, we use the word 'maturity' often in making an assessment of a poem, we may not be in a position to explain what actually it is. But, we learn from Wilson that, "it is an attempt on the part of a young man to summon all his resources and try to make something out of this world" (TTT.P.71). Housman never made any attempt to come to terms with life.

The myth of Philoctetes made lasting impression on Wilson. Not only the title, but the meaning of *The Wound and the Bow*, Wilson owes to Sophocles. For him Philoctetes, seems to refigure a number of significant characters in literature and their creators. The Bow seems to stand for the creative imagination which is nourished by the wound. The character and the fable also represents an exile. A person suffering from physical and mental ailments but whose achievements and humanity depends on that which ails the body and the soul. Most of the novelists discussed in *The Wound the Bow*, and other novelists like Joyce, Proust, James, Flaubert, Harriet, Becher Stowe are subsumed under the interpretation which Wilson gave to the Greek parable. He says, "I should interpret the fable as follows: The victim of malodorous disease, which renders him abhorent to society and periodically degrades him and makes him helpless is also the master of a super-human art which everybody has to respect and which the normal man finds he needs" (TWB P.263).

Every man is in need of wisdom. But wisdom which makes sense of life emerges from suffering. In the concluding paragraph of his essay, Wilson makes use of a biographical detail to clarify the point:

"She had met, a short time before, at the house of her brother Edward, who now had a church in Boston, a Negro preacher who had once been a slave and both of whose arms had been crippled by flogging, but, who had succeeded in escaping to Canada and getting himself an education there; and one sunday, when she had just taken communion, the death of Uncle Tom was revealed to her "almost as a gibel vision"4

As Jannet Growth observes:

Wilson here is a critic who, having discovered "the secret line of pain" under the writer's brow, nevertheless strives to display the work of that writer in as full and sympathetic a light as possible and who thinks it worthwhile to value in its social dimension that which reveals "the traits of a whole society" and in its theological one that which promotes moral harmony and moral completeness.5

Wilson thinks that novels are social ethics. Apart from a vision or a view of life they communicate, they dramatize in terms of character, motive and milieu, the state of society which produced the novel. Any kind of interpretation should do justice to the claims of the work as art and its relevance to us, otherwise, literature as a meaningful human activity would impoverish itself.

Wilson's novel criticism makes use of the Marxist, the Freudian and the sociological insights that were developed in the early twentieth century because they provide meaningful insights into the nature of man and his functional role to the socio-cultural sphere. A formalist critic like Stanley Edgar Hyman may hastily characterize Wilson's criticism as 'translation criticism', which means that plot summaries and character sketches are the insignificant items, we find in Wilson. But, a study of the form by itself will not help us in making sense of a novel like War and Peace or Dickens's Oliver Twist. When Wilson discusses a writer like Dickens, he tries to make relevant the conflict between self and society, that runs through the major chunk of Dicken's fiction. Wilson does't stop his enquiry of Dickens's novel by talking about his plot and characters. He tries to place Dickens in the tradition of the English novel. The credit of

re-discovering the genre of detective fiction and giving it a new orientation goes to Dickens. But, novels like *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House* made a psychological perspective and we need to know some of the significant spots in Dickens’s life.

Thus, it is clear that Wilson does not ignore the formal aspects of a work. Since his criticism was largely directed to the reading public like the criticism of Jonson, a theoretical statement followed by a formal analysis of the work itself, instead of helping the reader may prevent him from reading the work with enthusiasm. This may be illustrated by a few remarks on "The Ambiguity of Henry James". Notwithstanding the refined sensibility of Henry James and his reputation among the academics as a novelist whose sense of form is inviolable, James was not one of the favorite novelists of the reading public, when Wilson wrote this essay. Reading James is a tough job and even to initiate *The Turn of the Screw", is a puzzle to the Jamesian Cannon. But, Wilson doesn’t say this, he gives a covent summary of the story, talks about the Jamesian themes in general and tries to locate the crucial difficulty in making a meaningful analysis of the Jamesian novel. In a note on the essay written in 1958. Wilson says that his comments on James are not totally different from those of the contemporary critics. Taking his start from the interpretative cruxes of *The Turn of the Screw*, Wilson explores the Jamesian corpus with a rare and refined sensibility. It is in the process of making an assessment of every significant work of James, Wilson rises the question, "who are these characters of James’s, about whom we come to be less certain as precisely what we are to think"? Wilson himself provides the answer :

"The type of Henry James’s observers and sometimes of his heroes is the cultivated American bourgeois, like Henry James himself, who lives on an
income derived from some form of business activity, usually left rather vague, but, who has rarely played any part in the efforts which have created the business. These men turn their backs on the commercial world: they disdain its vulgarity and dullness, and they attempt to enrich their experience through the society and art of Europe. But, they bring to these the bourgeois qualities of timidity, prudence, primeness, the habits of mind of a puritan morality, which, even when they wish to be men of the world, make it too easy for them to be disconcerted. They wince alike at the brutalities of the aristocracy and at the coarseness of the working class; they shrink most of all from the 'commonness' of the less polished bourgeois, who, having acquired their incomes more recently, are not so far advanced in self improvement. The women have the corresponding qualities: they are innocent, conventional and rather cold, sometimes, they suffer from Freudian complexes or a kind of arrested development, sometimes, they are neglected or cruelly cheated by the men to whom they have given their hearts. And even when James's central characters are English, they assimilate themselves to these types.

The seminal observation in the above citation is the attitude of the Jamesian characters: they shrink most of all from the 'commonness' of the less polished bourgeois. The women characters suffer from Freudian complexes, sometimes they suffer from arrested development, sometimes they are cheated by men whom they love. Although Wilson does'nt employ the Marxist or the Freudian critical idiom, he employs the ideas of Marx and without emphasizing the fanatical nature of a given ideology. His remarks on Joyce and Flaubert reinforce the point.

As his criticism on Joyce has been analysed in the earlier chapter, a brief summary of his views on Flaubert would be adequate at this point. "In the Politics of Flaubert", Wilson writes that. Flaubert's assumption about the supremacy of art is not approved of by his critics. Having said this, Wilson goes on to enumerate Flaubert's intellectual and aesthetic affiliations. He is very close to a literary historian like Taine, and a biographical critic like Saint Beauve. But, he deplores their pre-occupation with the social aspects of literature at the expense of all other values. By excavating the terrain further, Wilson seems to arrive at a more comprehensive view of the writer. From the start, Flaubert valued the freedom of the spirit. He was very much opposed to the revolutionary activity of the Commune. And in that context, he writes to George Sand:

"My opinion is that the whole Commune ought to have been sent to the galleys, that those sanguinary idiots ought to have been made to clean up the ruins of Paris, with chains around their necks like convicts. That would have wounded humanity, though they treat the mad dogs with tenderness, but not the people whom they have bitten."

Flaubert thinks that universal sufferage is a disgrace to the human spirit. He thinks that race, money, intelligence and education are important in any kind of political set up. From this, it is easy to see the significance of the sort of aesthetic, its refined distancing we notice in the books of the author. Flaubert and most of the moderns whom he inspired with his artistic discipline are anti-democratic. Academic critics often compare Flaubert and Joyce. Most academics subscribe to the view that Ulysses is a triumph of technique, which conforms to Mark Schorer's Technique as Discovery. Whether the reader goes to the novel just for technique or for something more is a highly debated

Wilson thinks that, the view of reality that emerges from the novel is rich and meaningful. The picture of life is more important than the aesthetic pattern. Robert Martin Adams seems to support Wilson's conclusion:

All is not lost when we cast off the formalist presumptions about *Ulysses*, which have tempted so many critics based on wire drawn images .... all is not lost, we surrender a type of pattern, often illusory and confusing, only to assert more strongly an energy which any reader must have sensed great and wonderful as the novel, is, one of the pre-conditions of its greatness is precisely its readiness to fracture and escape all close and formal patterns.\(^8\)

In a humorous tone Adams goes a step further and says:

I have spoken of *Ulysses* in the act of composition as a headlong plunge into the pit of self, and unraveling of private- association patterns, which were only gradually and partially sorted out to form a fictional structure; what kind of plunge would it be, which produced only a tidy package of allegorical messages for the edification of Ph.D Candidates.\(^9\)

Wilson’s criticism of novel has a wide range, he discusses not only American fiction but European and Russian fiction as well. Since novels are long and have a sprawling structure, any evaluation of the genre would require some kind of summary of the content of the novel under review. Although, Wilson performs the task of introducing the reader to a novel, he also performs the function of a critic in making sense of the novel as a whole and relates it to life.

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9. Ibid., P. 255.
As Spiller notes:

_The Wound and the Bow_ follows the pattern of _Axel's castle_, in that a series of studies of individual authors is concluded by an essay which provides a clue to their common meaning. In this case, the wound of Philoctetes provides Sophocles with a psychological reason for the myth of the unerring bow of Apollo. Again, the application of a Freudian formula is related to the larger mythical traditions of literature before being applied directly, as it was by Ludwig, Lewisohn, Waldo Frank, Wan Wyck Brooks, and many other lesser critics to the neurosis and psychosis of authors. And again, Wilson provided a historical dimension to modern American literary criticism, without himself writing literary history.¹⁰

A versatile scholar and a competent reader of books, Wilson extended his range of his intellectual enquiry into areas other than literature, literature in the academic sense. American political history, the significance of Freud, the influence of Marx and Engels, and the condition of Europe, always looked large in his intellectual horizon. In _The Patriotic Gore_, for example, he brings to light a number of points, that the critics of the South and the North have been ignored. He never thought that socio-political forces were more significant than individuals; who either made use of them, or submitted to them. He did not admire mere drifters. His discussion of _Uncle Tom's Cabin_, and its creator, Justice Homes, Souther Soldiers, Taylor, Jackson, Lee constitute a galaxy of portraits, but, they are not mere portraits; they are the instruments of social and historical forces of the time, which shaped the personalities, that played a crucial role in the events.

At a time when commercialism and exploitation are devitalizing the American dream, Wilson was focusing his mature mind on the civil war and produced one of his best books, *The Patriotic Gore*, which is a stimulating blend of political comment, historical interpretation of events and writings, and a revelation of the human and cultural stakes involved. The textual criticism or reading may best expose the gaps in a text or see a kind of organic coherence in terms of metaphor and myth in a text.

The limitations of Wilson's criticism are obvious in the sense, that he doesn't explain the obvious— the linguistic intricacies of a text. In the case of Wilson, this limitation is more than compensated by the broad socio-cultural framework, within which the significance of a given text is unravelled. Given the plurality, multiplicity and complexity of theories and critical methods, one is bewildered to exercise and stick to his critical options. But, by and large the journalistic origins of Wilson’s criticism provide a framework within which critical strategies may be operated when Eliot redesigned tradition and made it inclusive in order to incorporate all the European classics, the base for comparative criticism was firmly laid. Wilson in one sense is a good practitioner of comparative criticism. French writers like Flaubert, Proust, Symbolist poets like Mallarme and Russian writers like Pushkin, and intellectuals like Marx and Freud were introduced to the American reading public. These are the achievements of the plain style, lucid exposition and an earnest attempt to make what is discussed relevant to the concerns and bosoms of modern man and his monotonous routine. In a penetrating observation on Marxism and Literature, Frank Kermode says:

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In "Marxism and literature", for instance, is quite clear that Marxist critics though they might well have something useful to say, cannot dispense with a skill that has nothing to do with political philosophy, namely "literary competence". Literature is valuable in so far as it complies with any sect of beliefs, but insofar as it has in it the "principle of life". The essay ends with an expression of lingering Marxist utopianism, the hope that Communism might one day turn society itself into a work of art, but its deeper message is that, the true critic is a disinterested detector of value, and must honour the individual creator.11

When Wilson entitled one of his books *The Triple Thinkers* he is trying to preface the idea that artists have a sensibility and imagination which are unique and they. "In Honour of Pushkin" is an interesting example, the way in which Wilson's mind operates on the writer and the entire corpus of his work. The essay was written as an attempt to bring Pushkin's importance home to English speaking reader, making a reference to Arnold and Eliot, only to show that the value of a creative writer of his work does not depend on a single norm, Wilson does'nt reject the criticism of Arnold and Eliot on russian literature, Eliot thought that the value of Russian literature is rooted in a few great novels. Having made the preceeding observation, Wilson formulates the issue as follows, "Even today, we tend to say to ourselves, if Pushkin is really as good as the Russians think he is, why has never taken his place in world literature, as Dante and Goethe have, and as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky have?" (TTT. P.32).

Having formulated the question, Wilson answers it not from a purely literary point of view but from a cultural point of view. Wilson seems to agree with Rufus. W. Mathewson Jr. :

The Solemn Russian novel of character, with its rudimentary plot structure, was peculiarly well designed to focus attention on the moral responsibilities of individuals. Russian literature was hero-centered, if not heroic in the conventional sense, from the earliest moments of the realistic epoch. Pushkin's Onegin, and Lermentov's Pechorin, the central figure of his novel, A Hero of Our Time, established a pedigree for the literary protagonist in the early decades of the nineteenth century which persisted to the point of becoming a stereotype. Dostoevsky's Myshkin, Raskolnikov, the Karamazovs, Tolstory's Pierre, Prince Andrei, Levin, Turgenev's gallery of faltering heroes— to name only the most prominent—all demonstrate an intensive effort to center the novelists' moral quest in the figure of the protagonist. In his fate are contained the novelist's generalizations—hopeful or despairing—about human experience.13

The preceding citation very well illustrates the characteristics of a protagonist centered novel. The protagonist is not just the central character in a given plot but in a nineteenth century Russian fiction is also a moral agent. He is also a symbolic figure who seems to embody in himself the moral contradictions and perspectives of the generation. Wilson was attracted by Pushkin not because of an elevated sense of fictional representation but because of Pushkin's an elevated moral awareness. Moreover, Wilson often thinks of rescuing a compelling writer from a state of oblivion. The various ways in which Wilson is helpful to a student of literature, to a scholar and critic of literature, I have discussed in the foregoing pages with examples drawn from his criticism. Wilson did not take to teaching very seriously nor did he admire the "professoriat". This does not mean that he discourteously dismissed the

academy. What he did was that he emancipated himself from the constraints of former and academic criticism, and made us see some of the ways in which a serious study of literature can be pursued.

In arriving at a dispassionate summing up of Wilson's achievement as a critic, one has to face a few traditional issues like life versus literature, ideal versus reality and art versus of literary. At a time when the term humanism is itself largely suspect, a student of literary history and literary theory has to formulate his judgement under certain constraints. In the case of a intellectual and critic like Wilson, the term Humanism, has acquired meanings other than those given by victorians. One is reminded of Pope's line "The proper study of mankind is man" (The essay of Man, Pope). From this point of view, when one reads a text, the simple question he would ask himself is, that in what way this text is relevant to me and my concerns? It is to a student and a reader of this kind that Wilson's criticism is directed Because of his broad and simplistic concerns of the relavance of literature to the human concerns, that Wilson was made to evolve a strategy of critical interpretations that depends on the man, the moment and the milieu. Perhaps this over-emphasis on what is relevant to man, his concerns and his institutions, that prevented Wilson from drawing a theoretical framework. In the common critical parlance, criticism that is not theoretically oriented is often labelled journalistic criticism. In his preface to the 1948 edition of The Triple Thinkers, Wilson says, "there is really no way of considering a book independently of one's special sensations, in reading it on a particular occasion. In this as in everything else one must allow for a certain relativity. In a sense one can never read the book that the author originally wrote, and one can never read the same book twice (TTT.P.17).
From this, if the seeds of critical activity are sown in the mind of critic when he reads it for himself on a particular occasion and feels the sensations of reading experience. The experience of reading alters the meaning and relevance of the text, and on second reading one finds that he is not reading the same text. Although Wilson does not talk about the reader-response, as a theoretical proposition, he is very much aware of the dynamics of reading. When one writes about or tells about the relevance of the book to himself, he doesn't forget that he is a part of the society in which others exist. What actually is a personal experience is sometimes elevated to a level of generalization, a process which we note in Hazlitt, Lamb, Ruskin and Pater. Nobody calls them journalists, but their analyses of reading experience and the conclusions they arrived at are relevant to everybody, who is interested in the sort of experience they are analyzing and describing. *Patriotic Gore* and *To the Finland Station* are not pure literary criticism. While the *Patriotic Gore* analyses the history of the civil war and gives us the portraits of the principal participants, and *To The Finland Station* analyzes a political attitude and an emerging theory of power and politics.

The historical and the humanistic method that *Patriotic Gore* and *To The Finland Station* embody are visible in the major corpus of Wilson's criticism. When we turn to the contemporary reviewing and publishing activities, we notice that a comprehensive and a compact mind like Wilson's is an asset to the present day reading public. Apart from the severe academic constraints under which we labour and the powerful groups and movements that are always eager to hook us into one net or the other a competent reader of books like Wilson may encapsulate the gist of a book and pass it on to a reader as a compact and intelligent review. The journalistic method outlined in the preceding sentences operates in Wilson's books on criticism like *Axel's Castle*. 
The Wound and the Bow, The Triple Thinkers, at a time when the visual media is encroaching on the literary discourse, one feels the need for a critic like Wilson who can separate the various strands in a discourse and clarify their purpose and meaning. Slogans like "the death of the author" and "there is nothing outside the text" and "all meaning is indeterminate" make a student of literature lose his way in a maze. A critic like Wilson may help him to retrace his steps and seek a clarification of and the issues involved.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, we may safely assert that the most significant phase of the twentieth century literature is modern literature. The term modern has by now acquired historical, cultural, sociological and political overtones. Even a quick perusal of Malcolm Bradbury's Modernism gives one an idea that it is not just one thing or confined to the English speaking world. The multiplicity of modernisms and their geographical presentations appears to be sometimes bewildering. Moderns like Eliot, Joyce, Wolf have provided a bewildering variety of ideas which produced concepts like "impersonality", "Intention", "Authorless book", and "Self-referentiality of the poetic language" and the fusion of form and meaning—all these have become the basics of the critical theory that guided us in studying literature. More over modern writers have made man loose confidence in the autonomy of the self. It must be said to the credit of Wilson, in a book like Axel's Castle, that he tries to re-validate the autonomy of the self. By interpreting the literary discourse in terms of its roots in life and its nourishment from the author’s life and self. In all its fairness, it can be said this is no mean achievement.