One

Introduction
Any critique of the critical practices of an individual, a group, or a period necessarily involves a review of the critical options available in the academy. When Edmund Wilson published the *Axel’s Castle* (1931), the most dominant critical theory and principle was the emerging "intrinsic criticism". 'New Criticism', which was a part of the "intrinsic criticism", later acquired immense prestige and popularity among the critics and students. A philosopher - critic like I.A.Richards, re-reading Coleridge, took upon himself the task of making the study of literature more scientific and methodical; and at the same time, he was not prepared to forgo the Arnoldian idea, that literature spreads "sweetness and light". But, "sweetness and light", which the study of literature offers must be judged from the point of view of literature's specificities. In other words, the study of literature should proceed on the lines suggested by literature itself. Literature is a special kind of art, in the sense that it pleases like the art of painting or sculpture. The difference between an act of legislature or a political document and a poem consists in the power of the poem to please its reader. Hence, a poem is a special kind of writing and requires special tools to unravel its meaning, which is supposed to please the reader. In short, the difference
between the 'intrinsic criticism' and other kinds of criticism in reading a poem as poem, literature as literature, is as follows: it consists in focussing attention on the evaluative categories which the poem or literature gives. Insofar as a writer makes use of extraordinary linguistic tools to mould the language to his own purposes, he creates certain categories, which the reader has to take into account to enter the enclosed semantic space of literature.

In the early 60's, theories and procedures of the "intrinsic criticism" were put to a searching analysis. Many found them inadequate to encompass the meaning of the human condition which literature dramatizes. On the face of it, a student may find it difficult to swallow the statement, that all great poetry derives from the image of "the twin compasses" in Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning". Phrases like the "autonomy of literature", "intentional fallacy", "affective fallacy" and "poetics of tension" have lost much of their early connotation. Words like "form", "structure", "centre" and "centrality" have become slightly suspect. In many academic establishments there has been a feeling that close reading of poems is not the only way of arriving at the meaning. In the textual theory of the post-structuralists, no poem has a special status; even literature is not a special kind of writing; it is one of the several functions of language. No text has an imperial status, since the meaning of the text is always indeterminate. Since the names of the De-Constructionistic critics are familiar by now to any student of literary theory, I deliberately avoid mentioning their names and think it sufficient to summarize the argument. The bone of contention between the "Intrinsic Critics" and their opponents is whether a poem's meaning is determinate or indeterminate. It is determinate according to the Intrinsic Critics, because, it is a special category of writing with a special purpose. The opponents argue that, there is nothing special about literature and language; no
poem has a privileged status. In other words, all writing is inter-textual. If we stop here, it may not be easy for us to assess the significance of a critic like Arnold or Wilson. We have to go a bit further and raise a few simple questions. What is literature about? Why is it significant and important? Why mankind preserved Shakespeare and relegated *The Origin Of Species* to limbo? How does literature improve man? Answering some of these questions, we may find the value and wisdom of Wilson's criticism.

II

Before I proceed in the direction I have chosen and outlined in the preceeding paragraphs, I would like to clarify a few points about "Intrinsic Criticism" and its detractors. In 1963, Murray Krieger, called the most influential critics of literature, in his book, *The New Apologists for Poetry*, considers a poem as an evolving structure of meaning in which cross-fertilization of metaphors takes place in an organic way. In other words, a poem is a totality of meaning which accommodates several subsidiary strands which are organically related. The Post-structuralists find fault with the idea of structure itself. In what is supposed, a deconstructive manifesto, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"; Derrida argues that, the defect in the notion of structure is its lack of centre. Two thousand years of Western thought depends on the idea of a centre. Without a centre, thinking itself is impossible. The circularity of the image, centre, and structure allows the free play of elements within the form. But, at the same time, it closes off the free play, it makes possible. So, the centre is at the centre of totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality, the totality has its centre elsewhere. If this
is so, why do system builders talk of a centre? Derrida says that, since the idea of a centre gives assurance and certitude and removes anxiety about coherence, the centre of a structure is the product of a force of desire. Hence, there is a constant, in terms of different metaphors and metonymies of presence like essence, existence, substance, subject, transcendentality, consciousness, conscience, God, and man. From this, it follows that, poetic structure as an autonomous organic self-referential object would be a prison, out of which it is difficult to escape. The critical confusions we come across and the languages of criticism and the structure of poetry are the result of the use of the term, "structure". Towards the end of *The Well-Wrought Urn*, Brooks says, "Though it is in terms of structure that we must describe poetry, the term "structure" is certainly not altogether satisfactory as a term."

Brooks concludes by saying that, "The poem, if it is a true poem is simulacrum of reality -- in this sense, at least, it is an "imitation" -- by being an experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience."

From what Brooks says, we may infer that, the significance of a poem does not depend on critical idioms but on the poet's experience. We may add that, a critic like Wilson does not disagree on this point. The Derridian onslaught on the "intrinsic criticism" has opened the gates to accommodate various disciplines, like humanities and social sciences, in the main stream of criticism. When a poem loses its privileged status as an aesthetic artefact, terms

2. Ibid., P. 230.
like "literary work of art," "organic unity," and "structure" are replaced by "text" and "inter-textuality." Since reading is an activity of language production, the term text seems to be appropriate. As one theorist elaborately puts it:

Since language serves as a ground of existence, the world emerges as infinite text. Everything gets textualised. All contexts, whether political, economic, social, psychological, historical, or theological, become intertexts; that is, outside influences and forces undergo textualisation. Instead of literature we have textuality; in place of tradition, we have inter-textuality. Authors die so that readers may come out into prominence. In any case, all selves, whether of critics, poets, or readers, appear as language constructions - texts. What are texts? Strings of differential traces. Sequence of floating signifiers.³

When literary discourse is reduced to the level of a text, its meaning is always altered because of its inviolable links with the other texts. Inter-textuality in this sense makes interpretation a wild-goose chase, or to put it in the post-structuralist language, poetic discourse is not a special kind of discourse, it is a part of writing. Writing by itself is not meaningful, it is reading that tends meaning and all meaning is indeterminate. Relayed from signifier to signifier, the reading process cannot reach the final or the ultimate signified. Language is a complex web in which the signs move forward and sideways in the actual process of doing their work. One consequence of this view of discourse is that most of the Western classics are made to float in the infinity of inter-textuality. Whether we turn to Jonson or Frank Kermode the idea of a classic consists in its eternal appeal to the reader. When the classics float in the unchartered space of

inter-textuality, their use to mankind becomes a little suspect. Classics are not just imaginative or creative artefacts but also cultural signposts with perennial significance. In order to keep the classics alive, we often need a Johnson, an Arnold, a Leavis, a Wilson, and a Trilling. At a time when one hears the withdrawing roar of Deconstructive criticism, one thinks of the ways and means by which critics like Wilson have kept alive literature and its discussion as a source of emancipation of the self.

III

Ever since Emerson proclaimed the emancipation of "the American Scholar" in 1830's, there has been an enduring tradition in the American Scholarship and Criticism. The difference between the English Romantic Criticism and the American Transcendentalists is one of emphasis. Shelley's view of poetry has an ideological emphasis in the sense that, it is a product of the liberation of Europe. The critical writings of Poe, for example, brought into play the significance of short lyric and seemed to have influenced three symbolist poets of France. But, criticism as a discipline seems to have begun in the 90's of the last century. But, H.L.Mencken and Van Wyck Brooks are the two significant figures that gave direction to American reviewing and assessment of books. Van Wyck Brooks wrote in 1916, "how does it happen that we, whose minds are gradually opening to so many living influences of the past, feel as it were the chill of the grave as we look back over the spiritual history of the last fifty years?".4

This citation seems to look forward to what is likely to happen in the next fifty years. A critic during this period is not just an academician, a member

of the prestigious establishment, but a cultural tout and, at the same time, a man of letters.

Edmund Wilson's career is a very good example of the growth and development of the twentieth century American literary intellectual. He started his career as a reviewer of books and did not have a well planned programme of theory of criticism. In the following pages, I shall analyse some of the ways in which journalistic reviewing and literary criticism merge and, some times overlap, in his writings.

In the twenties, his review writing showed his enormous range and his special acquaintance with European literature. He discussed the enormous creative output of James Joyce, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Eliot, and Hemingway. Reviewing Brooks' *The Pilgrimage of Henry James*, Wilson hints at the future course of his own development. Although he recognized the significance of Brooks' socially oriented critique of literature, he is aware of pitfalls in this kind of criticism. He emphatically says:

Where the book is unsatisfactory is in its failure to recognize the real nature and development of James's art. Mr.Brooks has completely subordinated Henry James the artist to Henry James the social symbol, with the result that James's literary work, instead of being considered in its integrity on its own merits, has undergone a process of lopping and distortion to make it fit the Procrustes bed of a thesis.\

The above citation makes it clear that, before considering the sociological significance of a writer, one ought to appreciate him as an artist. The

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second sentence of the citation makes it clear that, art should not be completely subordinated to other utilitarian purposes. Admiring Fitzgerald’s vivid style, Wilson does not hesitate to point out his poor sense of form. Making a historical survey of the symbolist aesthetic in France and its Anglo-American manifestation, Wilson approves of Eliot’s discovery that there was a close resemblance and similarity between the later symbolists and the metaphysical poets. *Axel’s Castle* deals with modern Anglo-American poetry, and *The Wound and The Bow* deals with the English novel. Wilson seems to have taken hints from the English social critics of the Victorian and the Edwardian times, and views novel as a social epic.

Andrew Harvey in *Edmund Wilson and Poetry : A Disagreement* argues that, Wilson’s criticism of poetry does have distinct limitations. The most significant is that he did not discuss any great western classic like Goethe, or Dante. Moreover, he did not attempt a full length study on any great poet. The sort of analysis that comes from Lewis on *The Four Quartets* is missing in Wilson, who described the poem as, “the long muttering with a few flames of vivid speech”.6

Wilson’s historical view of poetry is a risky proposition, if not a crude deduction. Writing on W.B. Yeats, the lyric poet, Wilson feels that a modern lyricist is at a disadvantage when compared to his counterpart during the Elizabethan period. Being a courtier or maintaining some links with an intellectual community of his time, the poet could breathe the air of literary world and its proliferating images. The modern poet compensates his lack of acquaintance either with court or with the gentry by developing a personality of his own.

Against this attitude of Wilson, Harvey argues that this makes Wilson indulge in indifferent comments on poets. Yeats was not indifferent to the

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many aspects of the contemporary world, as Wilson thought, and, on the other hand, he was enraged or appalled by violence and crudity. Above all, without being aware of the variety and modifications that old metric can accommodate, Wilson in his "Is Verse a Dying Technique?", argued that, prose is likely to oust verse as literary medium. The limitations Harvey points out are limitations but not of the serious kind. Contemporary poets, lacking a common heritage or a shared community interests, have developed their own systems, mythologies, world views and personalities. A poet like Eliot developed a verse medium for his poetic plays which is similar to that of prose. Sometimes, a critic may not have a suitable opportunity or a compelling occasion to write extensively on a single poem. *Axel's Castle* even today is one of the best books on the symbolist poetry. We may safely assert that Wilson's criticism of poetry is not so defective as Harvey thinks it is, and this has been elaborately discussed in the Second Chapter, Edmund Wilson and the Symbolist poets.

IV

Wilson's *The Triple Thinkers*, suggests some of the ways in which he tried to come to terms with modern movements and literature. *The Wound And The Bow* deals with Dickens and the major modern writers. Apart from interpreting the myth of Philoctates, Wilson applied the Freudian psychoanalysis to extend the meaning of the Anglo-American narrative fiction. The one obvious point that his opponents mention in discussing his critical methods is his indifference to the fictional theory and criticism, set forth by Mark Shorer, in his celebrated essay, "Technique as Discovery". The proliferation of printing and the enormous increase in the production of books resulted in the disappearance of the author. The first moderns, Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Woolf have greatly
contributed to the 'impersonalization' of the literary art. This, in a way shifted the emphasis from a poem or a novel which is mimetic in character and which represented life and reality. When mimetic function ceased to operate, the genres lost their autonomous character and got reduced to the level of writing. The pressures of critical theory within the establishment itself have reduced all writing to texts, which sometimes break under the strain and stress of microscopic and pluralistic reading. Sensing the danger of this levelling process, critics began to think of ways and means of "saving the text" (Jeofrey Hartman). If the purpose of literary study is to make us technicians of reading within the orbit of contemporary literary theory, critics like Wilson, Lewis, Lawrence, and even Eliot are insignificant. Not only the material progress of man, but the cultural and spiritual progress and his moral elevation and his struggle to attain a refined and integrated selfhood are enshrined in what man wrote about himself, others and society. Through ages, we may say, literature reports and registers man's progress. Wilson's criticism of fiction is a kind of a balance sheet of human development at all levels. How he came to terms with the American Civil War, the Russian Revolution, the Depression, and the Second World War is lucidly expressed in his reviews and books on fiction.

V

Wilson's criticism of American literature, thought, and experience has made him a towering figure in the field of American studies. As a poet and a story teller, Wilson's chief source of creative sustenance is the American experience. Like his friend and contemporary, Scott Fitzgerald, Wilson did not participate in extending the "American dream" and its frustrating consequences. As an American intellectual, he tried to come to terms with the American past, which is graphically presented in the Patriotic Gore. The fictional source of the
Jamesian experience is the confrontation between the European experience and the American innocence. As a source of creative start, the old world is superior to what is American. But, most of Americans of James' time had a firm conviction that the democratic society of America was superior to the decadent European culture. The image of Europe was a tantalizing object of contemplation for the Americans of the early decades of the century. Van Wyck Brooks, Eliot Senior in Harvard, returned home from a frustrating tour of Europe and England, whereas Eliot made England his home, and admired the refinements of European art and culture. Unlike his two distinguished predecessors, Wilson realized the unity of American image and nationalism in spite of their diversity. He did not evince keen interest in the writers of the "American Renaissance". On the other hand, his critical bent of mind pre-occupied itself with the ramifications of the "American Renaissance". He seems to have discovered writers like John Jay Chapman, John W. De Forest, George Washington Cable, and Harold Frederick. As Larger Ziff observes:

These minor writers had in common a powerful and peculiarly American moral insistence. They had attacked the inequities and hypocracies of American life, precisely because they were at the heart of it, knew all the family's secrets, and wanted better from it.7

From this, it follows that Wilson's criticism of American literature is not a faultfinding exercise but an attempt to come to terms with the ailments of society.

Like most of the 18th Century writers, Wilson seems to have seriously assumed the existence of a common reader. This common reader was the product of British middle class society. Whether such an assumption was feasible in the America of the twenties is a debatable proposition. But,

critical orientation sometimes acquires certain basics and givens of life. Most modern American creative writers and critics have struggled to come to terms with the American past. The American Civil War seems to be the crux on which creative, historical, anthropological perspectives converge. In this endeavour, Wilson did not lag behind. He tried to make sense of the story of the Civil War and the South, which one can glimpse in the powerful imaginative reconstructions of Faulkner, Warren and others. Making a literary and critical analysis of the Civil War, and the leading personalities involved it, Wilson writes:

As for transforming human society, the old Justice -- having lost in the war the high hopes of Northern crusade and fallen back on Calvinist position which will not admit the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth--ust simply, as a jurist and jobbist, submit to the dominant will of the society he has sworn to serve.8

The proceeding estimate of Oliver Welder Holmes suggests the ideological case of the North and the situation of the South. In the Patriotic Gore, Wilson tries to work with the letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the journal of Marie Chestnut, and the personalities of eminent men like U.S.Grant and Oliver Wendel Holmes. To reach a conclusion that may be illuminating to the common readers like Warren, Wilson seems to be aware that “war grows in our consciousness”.9

Patriotic Gore is a historical reconstruction, remarkable for its lucid style and luminous portraits. But, as Wilson stepped out of the thirties and entered the forties, he pre-occupied himself with the Russian Revolution and

ideology of Marxism. There is a tendency in Wilson to rescue significant writers from academic neglect and non-recognition. His essay on Edith Wharton, included in *The Wound and Bow*, considers his essay on Wharton not a complete study, "but rather in the nature of an impression by the reader who was growing up at that time".10

The preceding statement implies two aspects: one is that of a reader and the other is that of a reader who is growing. While growth is a continuous process, the reader is the basic assumption. Whenever the reader appears in the discussion of a critical methodology or theory, he appears to be a person of competence who has an analytical mind. Apart from these Wharton's essay suggests that, the values about which a reader talks are not material or money values. Writing a postscript to the essay written in 1937, Wilson admits,

As the light of Edith Wharton's art grows dim and at last goes out, she leaves us, to linger on our retina, the large dark eyes of the clever spinster, the serious and attentive governess, who trades in worldly values but manages to rebuff these values; who, in following a destiny of solitude and discipline, contends for the rights of the heart; and who, child of a political movement played out, yet passes on something of its impetus to the emergence of the society of the future.11

Wilson's criticism of fiction, I discussed in my chapter. "Novel as a Social Epic".

In the twenties and thirties the general thinking in America was that the American literary genius is rooted in the New England culture or the

10. Ibid., P.190.
"American Renaissance." Although Wilson never abandoned the idea of healthy cross-fertilization of the European and the American literary culture, in The Shock of Recognition, he seems to have realized that most American writers had links with the European past. Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James, Edgar Allen Poe, Mark Twain, Howells, and Stephen Crane all show meticulous craftsmanship, which Wilson admired. He always cherished his friendship with his classmates and contemporaries and tried to help them in their creative endeavours. Himself a poet, Wilson could easily explore the elements of modernity in Yeats and Eliot. He repeatedly refers to Eliot's insight into the nature and function of the English metaphysical mode and the nineteenth century French Symbolist aesthetic. As a student in Princeton, he seems to have had sound knowledge and the exposure to the Western classics. His sense of soundness in form and depth in writing seem to be the result of his scholarly flair for reading the classics. The following long quotation would sum up the literary and cultural milieu in which Wilson matured:

The young men of our earlier classes saw in literature a sphere of activity in which they hoped themselves to play a part. You read Shakespeare, Shelley, George Meredith, Dostoevsky, Ibsen, and you wanted, however imperfectly and on however infinitesimal a scale, to learn their trade and have the freedom of their company. I remember Scott Fitzgerald's saying to me, not long after we had got out of college: "I want to be one of the greatest writers who have ever lived, don't you?". I had not myself quite entertained this fantasy because I had been reading Plato and Dante. Scott had been reading Booth Tarkington, Compton Mackenzie, H.G.Wells and Swinburne; but, when he later got to better writers, his standards and his achievements went sharply up, and he would always have pitted
himself against the best in his own line that he knew. I thought his remark rather foolish at the time, yet it was one of the things that made me respect him; and I am sure that his intoxicated ardour represented a healthy way for a young man of talent to feel.\textsuperscript{12}

VI

Metacriticism or criticism of the criticism has become a special branch of study in recent times. This development in literary studies does not leave any critic of any school unexplored. Wilson’s criticism has been the focus of serious literary study. In the process of reading Wilson, his critics have talked of his severe limitations as critic. The one glaring limitation is Wilson’s dependence on non-literary evidence to explain the meaning of a literary work. This we notice in first-rate critics of our time like Empson, Trilling, and Burke. This sort of interpretative strategy, provokes the anti-intentionalist critics, who say that it is a betrayal of the nature and function of a literary work or a poem. In order to clarify the point, one good example is Donne’s "The Valediction Forbidding Mourning". Many anti-intentionalist critics have interpreted this poem but it is the common knowledge of the editorial scholarship that the poem was written when Donne was leaving for France, leaving his wife who was then in the advanced months of her pregnancy. This detail, instead of betraying the purpose of the poem, adds significance to it. Most poems by Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, Auden, and Larkin appear more significant in terms of the non-literary or extra-textual sources.

In his introduction to *A Choice of Kipling’s Verse*, Eliot observes.

If we belong to the kind of critic who is accustomed to consider poems solely by the standards by the "work of art", we may tend to dismiss Kipling’s verse by standards which are not meant to apply. If, on the other hand, we are the biographical critic, interested primarily in the work as a revelation of a man, Kipling is the most elusive of the subjects: no writer has been more reticent about himself, or given fewer openings for curiosity, for personal acquisition or dislike.¹³

Eliot’s view of criticism is not dogmatic. One school of criticism is as good as the other, provided it can take us nearer to the meaning of the poem. Critics who began as formalists sometimes see that the dynamics of elucidation are such that one has to go beyond formalism. Geogfrey Hartman, trying to weigh the interpretation of Wordsworth’s "She Dweallh Among the Untrodden Ways", by Cleanth Brooks and F.W.Bateson, in a critical balance reaches the conclusion that, both the interpreters were ahistorical. He deplores this tendency among the formalistic critics. He argues:

The only kind of ideal or objective interpretation is that in which we can cross check our terms (rather than particular exercises or conclusions) by relating them to the poet’s own or those prevalent in the poet’s milieu. Interpretation is bringing the poem forward to the present, which is acknowledging its historicity, which is grounding out terms in history.

To this we must go beyond both Bateson and Brooks and describe as historically as possible the difference between the Wordsworthian "no style" and the stylish style it challenged.\footnote{Hartman, Geoffrey: \textit{Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1956-1970}. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970), P.45.}

As a formalist and later as a Deconstructive critic, Hartman may not endorse Wilson's critical methods. But, what Hartman wants a critic to achieve is practised by Wilson in his criticism of the modern Symbolist poets.

A more serious limitation in Wilson's criticism than we outlined in the foregoing pages is set forth by Stanley Edgar Hymann in \textit{The Armed Vision}. He is very unsympathetic towards critics like Van Wyck Brooks and Mark Van Doren. He seems to place immense faith in the scientific methods of modern literary theory and criticism; the rudiments of which were placed in I.A. Richards, \textit{Principles Of Literary Criticism}. Richards followers, both literary theorists and practical critics were aware of the difference between science and literature. But, they wanted the study of literature to be more scientific than it was in the beginning of the century. In other words, they wanted to see the study of literature as systematic as the study of Physics or Botany. Facile generalizations, sweeping statements, and unwarranted anticipations, have no place in the critical methodology. "There is nothing outside the poem," as the intrinsic critics say, or "There is nothing outside the text," as the post-structuralists assert. Although a poem may be taken as a literary artefact, it is not the product of the computer, it is the product of the human imagination, which is not terrifically vigorous at all times. The techniques of composition and the enunciative modalities greatly differ from person to person, and sometimes defy methodical deduction. Wilson was aware of this. In the entire corpus of his critical writing, we don't come
across an extensive and exhaustive theoretical discussion of literature and methodology. But, like his predecessors, in this sort of criticism he wrote, he was very much aware that there is the language of criticism. In "The Critic Who Does Not Exist", Wilson observes:

I do not of course mean to assert that, except on the lower levels, any criticism, however able, could make or unmake artists. A work of art is not a set of ideas or an exercise of technique, or even a combination of both. But I am strongly disposed to believe that our contemporary writing would benefit by a genuine literary criticism that should deal expertly with ideas and art, not merely tell us whether the reviewer "let out a whoop" for the book or threw it out the window. In a sense, it can probably be said that no such creature exists as a full-time literary critic—that is, a writer who is at once first-rate and nothing but a literary critic: there are writers of poetry, drama or fiction who also write criticism, like most of the French writers mentioned above and like Coleridge, Dryden, Poe and Henry James; and there are historians like Renan, Taine, Saint-Beuve, Leslie Stephen and Brandes whose literary criticism is a part of their history. In America, neither kind of criticism has been very highly developed; and I fear that we must take this as a sign of the rudimentary condition of our literature in general. The poets, the dramatists and the novelists too often lack the learning and the cultivated intelligence to give us in works of art the full benefit of the promising material supplied by experience and imagination; and it may in general be said that where our writers of biography and history fail is precisely in their inability to deal adequately with works of literature.15

A few significant critical assumptions of Wilson emerge from this passage. Criticism, as the citation implies, has a responsibility; it should make possible writing of significant literature, valuable and meaningful at all times and relevant to human conditions. It is always connected with the history of the writer himself. Any criticism is supposed to deal adequately with the aesthetic implications of the work under consideration and its significance in terms of the perennial human condition. This also suggests that, creative and critical abilities are not so different as we often assume. Wilson seems to believe that the historical milieu, the theme, and the enunciative modalities of a poem, if it is a successful poem, can be transformed into a succinct statement.

In the fewest, clearest words, he could tell you exactly how a book was put together, could compare it effortlessly to other books of its kind, to other things that weren't books. He practiced the New Criticism without taking any notice of it.16

In order to resist what they thought to be, the subversive practises of Deconstructionists, most critics in the academy, Wayne Booth, and M.H.Abrams in particular, favoured pluralism in criticism. This development together with the realization of social significance of literature and criticism, leads to a revaluation of the socio-cultural critics of literature. It is in this context, that the second generation of the Deconstructionists have tried to maintain a balance between the text and culture, of which the text is a product. Although E.D. Hirsch's *Validity In Interpretation* has made a strong and cogent argument for keeping apart the meaning of a text and its significance, the critical practice seems to be to talk about both in one and the same breath. Now, the academy

16. Duckstein, Mark : Critic as a Double Agent. P.123.
seems to recognize the plurality of the critical idiom and the interpretation. Within this context, it can be claimed that the value of literature and criticism inhere in the critics' scholarly interest and range. Instead of advancing a mild argument in favour of a critic like Wilson, let me quote a long paragraph from Eliot's *The Frontiers of Criticism*, which clarifies the point:

The difference, then, between the literary critic, and the critic who has passed beyond the frontier of literary criticism, is not that the literary critic is 'purely' literary, or that he has no other interests. A critic who was interested in nothing but 'literature' would have very little to say to us, for his literature would be a pure abstraction. Poets have other interests beside poetry—otherwise their poetry would be empty: they are poets because their dominant interests has been in turning their experience and their thought (and to experience and to think means to have interest beyond poetry) in turning their experience and their thinking into poetry. The critic accordingly is a literary critic if his primary interest, in writing criticism, is to help his readers to understand and enjoy. But he must have other interest, just as much as the poet himself; for the literary critic is not merely a technical expert, who has learned the rules to be observed by the writers he criticises: the critic must be the whole man, a man with convictions and principles, and of knowledge and experience of life.17

The concluding part of the preceding citation is so appropriate as to make us think of Edmund Wilson as the American intellectual and "man of letters". The major corpus of his writing deals with innumerable areas of knowledge and experience. The present thesis aims at attempting a critical analysis of his major works on literature, namely *Axel's Castle, The Wound And The Bow* and *The Triple Thinkers*. Which contain what he has to say on the two major genres of creative writing poetry and fiction.