

FREE SAMPLE SET | IGNOU GUESS PAPER | DECEMBER 2026 TEE

MEG-05 Literary Criticism and Theory

What four recent IGNOU papers asked, three repeat themes solved in full, and a plan for the rest

Course: MEG-05 Literary Criticism and Theory, 8 credits, compulsory in MAEG Year I (Common Prospectus July 2026)

Programme: MA English (MEG)

December 2026 paper: Saturday 12 December 2026, 2 PM to 5 PM (IGNOU tentative date sheet dated 21 September 2026)

Built from: IGNOU MEG-05 papers of June 2023, June 2024, June 2025 and December 2025, read on IGNOU's servers on 29 September 2026

STUDY REFERENCE

WRITE IN YOUR OWN WORDS

NOT AN IGNOU PUBLICATION

How IGNOU sets the MEG-05 paper

The four papers read for this set give 3 hours for 100 marks. Every question carries 20 marks and the answers are expected in approximately 500 words each, "in your own words as far as possible", which is the instruction printed on the December 2025 paper.

The instruction changes between sessions, so read it before you start. The December 2025 paper said "answer any five questions". The June 2024 paper made Question 1 compulsory, and that question asked for two short notes of about 200 words each. Every paper we read carried one question of short notes, where you pick two topics and write 10 marks on each.

Repeat map: what came back

A tick means the theme was asked in that paper, either as a full question or as a short note. We counted only what we could read. Question 5 of December 2025 was only partly visible to us, so it is not counted.

Theme	Jun 2023	Jun 2024	Jun 2025	Dec 2025	Papers
Plato and Aristotle: mimesis, poets in the ideal state, the social value of art, catharsis and hamartia	Q1, note	Q2, note	Q2	Q2	4 of 4
Wordsworth and Coleridge: poetic diction, emotion, imagination	Q2	Q3	Q3	Q3	4 of 4
Feminist criticism: The Second Sex, A Room of One's Own, Showalter, Kamala Das	Q5	Q6, Q7, note	Q6, note	Q6, 2 notes	4 of 4
Indian aesthetics: Aucitya, Sphota, Sruti, Rasa and Dhvani, Natyashastra	note	note	note	note	4 of 4
Marxism, ideology and the "purpose" of literature	Q4	Q5, note	Q5	not counted	3 of 4
What literature and theory do: literature as history, theory as help, "news which stays news"	none	note	Q1	Q1	3 of 4

Theme	Jun 2023	Jun 2024	Jun 2025	Dec 2025	Papers
Deconstruction (Derrida)	Q6	none	note	note	3 of 4
T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"	none	Q4	none	Q4	2 of 4
I. A. Richards, principles of criticism	Q3	none	Q4	none	2 of 4
Psychoanalysis and Freud	none	none	note	note	2 of 4
Orientalism; the Death of the Author	none	Q8 (Orientalism)	note (Barthes)	none	1 each

What the map says. Three themes appeared in all four papers as full questions: Plato and Aristotle, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and feminist criticism. They are solved in full below. Indian aesthetics appeared every time, but only as short notes, so learn four or five crisp notes rather than one essay.

The June 2026 MEG-05 paper is already listed on ignou.ac.in (it appears there as MEG-005). Add it to this map before your exam. It is the one paper this set could not read.

Three repeat themes, solved

1. Plato and Aristotle on poetry: why does Plato distrust the poet, and how does Aristotle answer him?

Covers June 2023 Q1, June 2024 Q2, June 2025 Q2 and December 2025 Q2. Adapt the opening to the exact wording you get.

Introduction. The quarrel between Plato and Aristotle is the starting point of Western criticism. Both describe poetry as mimesis, or imitation, yet they reach opposite conclusions about its value to the individual and to the state.

Plato's case against the poet. In the *Republic*, Plato measures poetry against his theory of Forms. The true reality is the Form, for example the idea of a bed. The carpenter's bed is a copy of that Form, and the painter's picture of the bed is a copy of the copy. Imitative art therefore stands "thrice removed" from truth, and the poet imitates appearances without knowledge.

The second charge is moral and psychological. Poetry, Plato argues, feeds the emotional and irrational part of the soul instead of the reasoning part. It shows gods behaving badly and heroes lamenting, and so it weakens the self-control that citizens and guardians need. His conclusion is political. Only hymns to the gods and praise of good men may be admitted to the ideal state, and the imitative poet is sent away with honour but sent away all the same.

Aristotle's answer in the *Poetics*.

- *Imitation is natural and instructive.* Human beings learn their first lessons by imitation and take pleasure in recognising what is imitated, so mimesis is a way of knowing, not a lie.
- *Poetry is more philosophical than history.* History tells what happened; poetry tells what may happen according to probability or necessity. It deals with the universal, and that is the very ground on which Plato had denied it truth.
- *Tragedy works on the emotions in a useful way.* It is the imitation of a serious and complete action that, through pity and fear, brings about catharsis of these emotions. Catharsis has been read as

purgation, purification or clarification. On any reading, the feelings Plato feared are ordered and released rather than inflamed.

- *Structure over spectacle.* Aristotle ranks plot as the soul of tragedy and places spectacle last, as the least artistic part. This is a useful point when a question, like June 2024 Q2, links instruction to spectacle.
- *The tragic hero and hamartia.* The hero falls through a hamartia, an error of judgement rather than simple wickedness. The audience therefore feels pity and fear instead of moral outrage.

The social relevance of art. For Plato, art is judged by its effect on the state, and censorship follows naturally. For Aristotle, art has its own principles of construction and a cognitive and emotional value, which is itself a social good. December 2025 asked exactly this, so end on this contrast.

Conclusion. Plato asks whether poetry is true and whether it is safe. Aristotle asks how poetry is made and what it does to its audience. Most later criticism, from Sidney's defence of poetry onwards, argues inside the space these two answers opened.

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2. Wordsworth and Coleridge: do they agree about poetic diction, emotion and imagination?

Covers June 2023 Q2, June 2024 Q3, June 2025 Q3 and December 2025 Q3.

Introduction. Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, enlarged in 1802) and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) are the two central documents of Romantic criticism. The two poets planned *Lyrical Ballads* together, yet Coleridge later questioned parts of Wordsworth's theory. Examiners keep returning to where they agree and where they part.

Wordsworth's position.

- *Emotion is the source of poetry.* Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, but it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. The feeling is real, yet it is shaped by reflection.
- *Subject and language.* He chose incidents from common, often rustic, life. He argued for a selection of the language really used by men, because such speakers express feelings in simple and forceful terms. He also claimed there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition.
- *The subjective element.* The poet is a man speaking to men, but one with greater sensibility and enthusiasm. This view of the poet's own mind is what June 2025 called the subjective element in poetry.

Coleridge's reply.

- *Rustic speech is not a special source.* Its best part comes from reflection and education, not from rustic life as such. What remains after purification is simply the common language of all good writers.
- *Metre and diction differ from prose.* Metre arises from the balance the mind strikes between passion and will. It creates expectation and excitement, so the language of a poem is not identical with the

language of prose.

- *Imagination above emotion alone.* In chapter 13 Coleridge separates fancy, which only rearranges fixed images from memory, from imagination. The primary imagination is the living power of all human perception. The secondary imagination dissolves and diffuses in order to recreate. For Coleridge the poet is known by this unifying power, which brings a more than usual state of emotion into more than usual order.

Do they differ on emotion? Not at the root. Both place feeling at the centre of poetry, against the neoclassical stress on reason and decorum. They differ on method. Wordsworth trusts feeling recollected and expressed in plain language. Coleridge insists that feeling becomes poetry only through the shaping imagination and the discipline of metre.

Conclusion. Wordsworth widened what poetry could be about and how simply it could speak. Coleridge supplied the theory of mind that explains why such poetry works. Read together, they turn the Romantic rejection of pure rationality into a theory of creative imagination.

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3. How did feminist criticism change the way literature is read? Refer to Beauvoir, Woolf and Showalter.

Covers June 2023 Q5, June 2024 Q6 and Q7, June 2025 Q6 and December 2025 Q6, plus four short notes.

Introduction. Feminist criticism asks how gender shapes the writing, reading and judging of literature. Three texts that recur in MEG-05 papers mark its main stages: *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf (1929), *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (1949), and the critical model of Elaine Showalter (1970s).

Woolf: the material conditions of writing. Woolf argues that a woman who wishes to write fiction needs financial independence and a private room. Genius does not flourish without money, time and education. Her imagined "Judith Shakespeare", as gifted as her brother but denied every opportunity, shows how talent is lost. Woolf also asks women writers to build a tradition of their own through earlier women writers, and she offers the ideal of an androgynous mind. This makes the book a founding text of literary theory, as December 2025 Q6 put it.

Beauvoir: woman as the Other. *The Second Sex* argues that a person is not born a woman but becomes one. Femininity is a social construction, not a fact of nature. Man is treated as the norm and woman as the Other, defined against him. For criticism this was a real shift. Myths, images and roles of women in literature could now be read as ideology rather than as truths about women, and that shift is the point June 2023 Q5 asked about.

Showalter: from critique to gynocriticism. Showalter separates two activities.

- *Feminist critique* reads male-authored texts to expose their images and stereotypes of women.
- *Gynocriticism* studies women as writers: their history, themes, genres and the tradition they form.

In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) she traces three phases in women's writing: a Feminine phase of imitation, a Feminist phase of protest and a Female phase of self-discovery. This is the "critical model"

June 2024 Q7 named. It also answers June 2025 Q6 on why women writers came to be studied as a separate category.

Applying it: Kamala Das, "An Introduction". The poem asserts a woman's right to her own language, body and identity against those who try to classify and silence her. Read through Beauvoir, it shows a self made to become a "woman". Read through Showalter, it belongs to the phase of self-discovery.

Conclusion. Feminist criticism moved from asking how women are represented, to why women were kept from writing, to how women's writing forms a tradition of its own. That movement changed the literary canon and the questions critics ask.

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Answer plans for the other repeat themes

Marxism and the "purpose" of literature (June 2023 Q4, June 2024 Q5, June 2025 Q5)

- Base and superstructure: literature belongs to the superstructure and carries ideology.
- A text can reveal the oppressive working of institutions such as religion, family and the state, as June 2024 put it.
- Distinguish the writer's stated ideology from the ideology the text reveals.
- Name the critics in your course material and end with the "purpose" versus "questioning" contrast of June 2025.

T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (June 2024 Q4, December 2025 Q4)

- Tradition cannot be inherited; it is obtained by great labour through the historical sense.
- The existing monuments form an ideal order, which every genuinely new work slightly alters.
- The theory of impersonality: poetry, Eliot writes, "is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion".
- The catalyst analogy.
- Close with why this separates literature from journalistic writing (December 2025).

I. A. Richards and his principles of criticism (June 2023 Q3, June 2025 Q4)

- *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924): a psychological theory of value, in which a good poem balances and organises impulses.
- *Practical Criticism* (1929): the reading experiment with Cambridge students; the four kinds of meaning (sense, feeling, tone and intention); the obstacles to good reading, such as stock responses.

Deconstruction (June 2023 Q6, and short notes in June 2025 and December 2025)

- Derrida's critique of logocentrism and of fixed binary oppositions.
- *Différance*: meaning is always deferred along a chain of differences.
- Reading a text against its own apparent centre.
- End with what the method allows, and its critics.

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Short notes worth preparing (10 marks each)

Rasa and Dhvani. Rasa theory comes from the *Natyashastra* attributed to Bharata. Determinants (vibhava), consequents (anubhava) and transitory feelings (vyabhicharibhava), combined with a stable emotion (sthayibhava), produce rasa, the relished aesthetic emotion. Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka* made dhvani, or suggestion, the soul of poetry. The suggestion of rasa (rasa-dhvani) is its highest form.

Aucitya. Propriety or appropriateness. Kshemendra treated it as the life of poetry, the fitness of every element to rasa and context.

Sphota. Bhartrhari's idea that meaning bursts forth as an indivisible whole when a word or sentence is heard, beyond its separate sounds.

Catharsis and hamartia. Aristotle's terms. Catharsis is the effect of pity and fear in tragedy, read as purgation, purification or clarification. Hamartia is the hero's error of judgement.

The Death of the Author. Roland Barthes's 1967 essay. It moves the source of meaning from the author to the reader and to language itself, and it treats a text as a weave of earlier writings.

Psychoanalysis. Freud's ideas of the unconscious, repression and the dream-work (condensation and displacement) let critics read texts, characters and even authors for what they reveal without saying.

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Practise these in your own words

These practice prompts are ours, written to match the repeat themes above. They are not IGNOU questions.

1. "Plato's objection to poetry is moral; Aristotle's reply is aesthetic." Discuss.
2. Compare Wordsworth's and Coleridge's views on metre and the language of poetry.
3. How did gynocriticism change the questions feminist critics ask?
4. Is Eliot's theory of impersonality a rejection of Romantic criticism?
5. What does it mean to deconstruct a text? Illustrate with one example.
6. Explain the relationship between rasa and dhvani.

Use this set in the last three weeks

- **Weeks 3 and 2:** write the three solved themes once each from memory, in about 500 words and within 35 minutes, then compare with this set.

- **Week 2:** turn each answer plan into a full answer.
- **Final week:** prepare six short notes.
- **Last two days:** read the June 2026 paper on ignou.ac.in and time one full paper.

What this free set is, and is not

This set covers three of the MEG-05 themes that repeated across the four papers above. The complete MEG-05 set, with every repeat theme and short note solved, costs ₹49 as a PDF or ₹100 as a printed copy, plus a one-time ₹100 courier charge per printed order. Order on WhatsApp +91 93546 37830.

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