

Oscar Wilde

# CRITIC AS AN ARTIST

In the form of a dialogue between Earnest and Gilbert.

Earnest I admit that Greek is a nation of art critics. and I feel sorry that creative faculty is higher than the critic. There is no comparison.

Gilbert Artistic faculty is worthless without the critical faculty. You speak of something a while ago and you consider it a spirit. It is nothing without a critic. People cannot create any thing at all in art without critics. Arnold's definition of literature as a criticism of life shows how keenly he recognized the importance of the critical element in all creative work.

Earnest Artists worked unconditionally and according to Emerson they were wiser than they knew.

Gilbert All imaginative work is self-conscious and deliberate. No poet sings because he must sing. He sings because he chooses to. It is so now, and it has always been so. Poets think that the world has some kind of potential quality of its own and it could be passed into song. We tend to look into the past what we desire

or think we desire for our own. Our historical sense is at fault. Every century that proceeds poetry is artificial century and is a result. The most natural and simple product is the most self-conscious effort. There is no fine art without self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness and critical spirit are one.

Earnest

I see what you mean but surely all great works are imagination of races rather than of the imagination of individuals.

Gilbert

Not in poetry. There is no art without style and no style without unity and unity is of individual. Homer and Shakespeare had rough material and he shaped them into song. They were built out of music.

And so not built at all

And therefore built for ever.

The longer one studies he feels that every wonderful thing stands the individual. Every legend or myth is the invention of one single mind. The age with no criticism is immobile and confined to formal types.

There are critical ages without creativity but no creative age without criticism.

When at Renaissance Greek literature dawned upon Europe it was

generally due to the critical spirit of greek. There are epic, lyric, drama, burlesque, idyll, essays, romantic novel, adventurous novel, oration literature and even epigram. We own everything except ~~no~~ sonnets. Each new school that appears carries out against criticism.

Earnest I accept that criticism is an essential part of creative spirit but what is criticism without creation. The modern criticism is perfectly valueless.

Gilbert So is most modern work of creativity. Mediocrity weighing mediocrity in the balance. I'm Surely I have been talking about higher class critics. They were more cultured than today's class. Criticism demands more cultivation than creation does.

Earnest Really?

Gilbert Certainly. Anyone can write a three-volumed novel but and it requires complete ignorance of life and literature. The critic finds it difficult to sustain a standard. No style equals no standard. The poor reviewers hardly read the complete text. They do not or they should not. If they did they would by according to Newman Women-Thropes. To know the quality of wine one does not need to drink the whole cask. One or two sips are enough. Similarly it takes half an hour to say whether a book is worth reading or not. These



Ernest are painters who object to criticism and they are ~~so~~ right. Their works stands in no intellectual relation to their age. It brings us no new element of pleasure. You are deviating from the topic. It is much difficult to do than to talk about.

Gilbert Not at all. It is much more difficult to talk about than to do it. Anybody can make history only great man can write it. We are similar to normal humans. It is language that makes us superior, not thought. Action is easy. It is a blind thing dependent on external influences. It is limited by accident and ignorant of its direction. Action is the last resource of those who know not how to dream.

Ernest You this treat the world as a crystal ball and rotate it in your hand. You do nothing but rewrite history.

Gilbert It is our duty to rewrite history. It is least we can do. One who has more illusions is a man of action not a dreamer.

Ernest You think a conscious aim is a delusion? (p. 9)

Gilbert Worst. If we live long enough to see the result of our action we would call ourselves evil. Every thing we do is passed into a great machine of life. Good turns bad and bad turns good.

Ernest The higher you place a critic artist

Gilbert  
Earnest

the lower must be the critic rank.

Why so?

Because the best he could give would be an echo of rich music. If a writer, artist wrote in a bad condition. The critic could enhance it. But if the art was written in a marvellous condition there would be nothing left to enhance. It will be so complete and perfect, that there will be nothing left for the critic to do. I understand that it is difficult to talk that to do. This motto should be applied between art and life not art and criticism.

Gilbert

Criticism is art itself. Art cannot exist without criticism. so it is higher sense and really creative. It is creative and independent.

Earnest

Independent?

Gilbert

Yes. A critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to world of form and colours. He does not even require for perfection of art. A ~~subject~~ subject matter does not signify to a critic and he finds his motives everywhere.

Earnest

Gilbert

Is criticism really a creative art?

Why should it not be? It works with material and puts them into delightful form. Same as poetry. It is a creation within a creation. Just like Homer to Keats, they did not go directly to their subject matter.

but to its legends and myth. critic deals with material that others have to which colors are already implied. Highest criticism being the purest form of personal impression is more creative than creation. as greeks put it as in itself to itself. One may say <sup>eg</sup> ~~app~~ it is fiction unto fact but not from the soul.

Ernest  
Gilbert

From the soul  
Yes it is the record of one's own soul. more fascinating than history its subject is concrete and not abstract real not vague. The old artists believed that the primary function of critic is to chatter about their second-rate work. But the modern creative art is less vulgar.

Ernest  
Gilbert

I have heard about ~~on~~ another theory of criticism. Yes that the proper aim of criticism is to see the ~~object~~ as in itself it really is but it is one serious error. Pure criticism reveals its own secret and not the secret of another. Highest criticism deals with art not ~~is~~ as expressive but impressive.

Ernest  
Gilbert

Best really?  
Of course. Highest criticism treats the work with of art as a starting point for a new creation. It does not confine itself. The meaning of a beautiful thing is in the soul of one who looks at it as it was in the one who wrought it. It is the beholder



who lends to beauty. I see that the beauty of art is impressive primarily but it may be marred (harmed) on the part of the artist. When the work is finished it delivers a message other than what the artist puts in it.

Ernest But is such work really criticism?

Gilbert It is highest criticism. It criticises not the individual work of art but beauty itself and fills with wonder.

Ernest You are saying the highest criticism is more creative than creation and its primary aim is to see the object as in itself it really is not?

Gilbert Yes that is my theory. To a critic a work of art is really a suggestion for a new work of his own. That needs no resemblance to the work he criticises. The characteristic of beautiful thing is that one can put it into any form one desires. Some say criticism likes to talk about anecdote of painting. Indeed these paintings are too intelligible but they do not stir imagination. And the domain of painter is different from the poet. Painter is limited to body and he can show soul only through conventional images. He deals with psychology. Most painters have spent their lives reaching over poets. They have degraded these visible art into obvious art. I will not say that poets and painters cannot treat the same subject. They have and they will. But for painter it is limited to what upon canvas can be seen.

The tragedy of an artist is said that he cannot realize his ideal but it is actually that he realizes it to absolutely and then the ideal is robbed of its mystery. This is the reason why music is the perfect type of art. It never reveals its ultimate secret. It is the value of limitation in art. It is through its very incompleteness that art becomes complete in beauty. Critics reject those art that have one obvious message to deliver and seek modes that suggest reveries by their imaginative beauty. They may have some resemblance in the critic's work. Like the resemblance between nature and artistic decorative artist.

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