

# Criticism and Theory I - 301

## Criticism:-

Criticism is the analysis, evaluation, judgement and interpretation of anything, including work of art, literature or human expression/behavior.

## Literary Criticism:-

Literary Criticism is a specific type of criticism that focuses on the analysis and interpretation of literary works, such as novels, poems, plays and essays. It involves examining the literary devices, themes, characters and style used in the



work, as well as its historical and cultural context.

## Aristotle's "The Poetics" ~

Aristotle's, "The Poetics" is a foundational work of literary theory and criticism, written around **335 BCE**, it explores the concept of imitation, nature of tragedy, epic poetry and comedy.

Key concepts in "The Poetics" include:

- Mimesis (imitation)
- Catharsis (purification)
- Tragedy (unhappy ending)
- Elements/Ingredients/Parts of tragedy:-

- 1) Plot: The soul of tragedy (arrangement of incidents)
- 2) Thought: The vision or the idea of the play/story.
- 3) Diction: choice of words (what type of language used)
- 4) Song: intensify the emotion



5) Character: with a specific role or function. The main character, typically a flawed but noble figure, is known as the **tragic hero**.

- Hamartia (tragic flaw): A hero's downfall is caused by a flaw/error of judgement.

- Peripeteia (reversal): A sudden change in fortune.

- Anagnorisis (recognition): A character's realization of their situation.

## Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry"

Philip Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" is a critical essay written in **1580**. In it, Sidney defends poetry against critics who argue that it is a frivolous and useless art form.

Sidney argues that poetry is a powerful tool for teaching moral lessons and inspiring virtuous



behavior. He also discusses the different types of poetry:

- Heroic Poetry: long narrative poem.
- Lyric Poetry: (short) subjective poem.
- Tragic Poetry: sad ending poem/story.
- Comic Poetry: to amuse & entertain the readers/audience.

- Satiric Poetry: to highlight the flaws of society.

- Iambic Poetry: follows the rhythm.

- Elegiac Poetry: a song that is written on the death of somebody.

Sidney defends poetry against criticism of its usefulness and moral values. He argues that poetry is a powerful tool for teaching, delighting and inspiring its readers.

### KEY POINTS:-

⇒ Poetry is a waste of time.

Reply: Poetry is a noble and ancient art form that has been celebrated throughout history.

⇒ Poetry is the mother of lies.

Reply: Poetry is not a waste of



Reply: Poetry may use fiction and imagination, but it is not inherently deceitful.

⇒ Poetry is the nurse of abuse

Reply: Poetry can be misused, but it is not inherently corrupt.

⇒ Plato had rightly banished poets from his ideal world (Republic)

Reply: Sidney acknowledges that Plato banished poets from his ideal world, Plato banishment of poets or poetry does not depend on the poetry itself, but on the writers/creators and the kind of material they produce.

## Sidney's Five Key Functions of Poetry:

- ① To teach    ② To delight
- ③ To move    ④ To persuade
- ⑤ To create (new)

★ The Role of the Poet:-

- i. The poet as a visionary.
- ii. The poet as a moral guide



# Dr. Johnson's "Preface to Shakespear"

Samuel Johnson's "Preface to Shakespear" is a critical essay written in 1765. In it, Johnson discusses the life and works of William Shakespear and argues that Shakespear's plays are remarkable for their insight into human nature and their ability to evoke powerful emotions in the audience/readers.

Johnson talks about Shakespear's plays (writing style) from both sides... firstly, he appreciated Shakespear and then discusses his flaws/demerits. Here are following merits given below:

## Shakespear's Genius:-

Johnson praises Shakespear as a genius who has stood the test of time and whose works continue to be widely admired and performed.

- Universal Appeal
- Realistic Characters
- Blending Tragedy and Comedy



## Demerits of Shakespearean Plays.

- No Poetic Justice
- Lack of Morality
- Use of Anachronism
- Loosely knit Structure
- Irregularities in Plot and Structure
- Violations of dramatic unities.

Shakespeare's plays have imperfections, such as obscure language, convoluted plots and inconsistent characters. In the Preface to Shakespeare, Dr. Johnson provides a thorough and balanced assessment of Shakespeare's work. While acknowledging Shakespeare's greatness and unmatched creativity, Johnson also critiques the playwright for his lack of consistency, disregard for classical unity and occasional moral ambiguity.

Johnson's approach is characterized by his beliefs in the importance of reason and order in literature, but he also recognizes that Shakespeare's work is valuable.



because of its depth of emotion, variety of character and ability to reflect the complexities of human nature.

The Preface remains one of the most influential pieces of literary criticism, shaping subsequent interpretations of Shakespeare and continuing to be studied by scholars today.

## Wordsworth's, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"

William Wordsworth's, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" is a critical essay written in 1800s.

In it, Wordsworth discusses the principles of poetry and argues that the poet's goal should be to express the beauty and wonder of the natural world.

### Definition of Poetry, According to W. Wordsworth:-

"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, it



takes its origin in emotions recollected in tranquility."

The Preface serves as both a defense and a justification of the romantic poetic style, which was a reaction against the formal, rational and classical styles of Poetry that dominated the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Key facts/ideas/themes in Preface:

⇒ Poetry as the Expression of Emotion: Wordsworth argues that poetry should be an expression of genuine emotions. He emphasizes the importance of spontaneity in Poetry, suggesting that true poetry arises from emotion recollected in tranquility, meaning that poet's feelings are first experienced, then reflect upon and finally expressed in verse.

⇒ The Language of Poetry: His argument that poets should use simple, everyday language. He criticizes the overly complex, ornate language



used by poets in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

⇒ The Role of the Poet: A man speaking to men, better imaginative power, comprehensive soul, he differs from others with respect to the degree of his sensibility. (Poetry is communication) poet one who communicate our thoughts, feelings, ideas to others. The poet is a sensitive and visionary individual who perceives the world in a way that others cannot, using simple Language to communicate truths. The poet's role is to express genuine emotion, connect with nature and teach through the power of poetry.

In the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", Wordsworth outlines the foundational principles of Romantic poetry. He advocates for a poetry that is simple, emotional and rooted in nature, one that speaks to the experiences of ordinary people.



Wordsworth's preface challenges the conventions of 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry and provides a new vision for how poetry should be written and appreciated. This manifesto helped define the Romantic movement in English Literature and influenced generations of poets, including John Keats, P. B. Shelley and Lord Byron.

Through the Preface, Wordsworth establishes poetry as a means of personal expression and universal connection, rooted in emotion, simplicity and nature.

**M**atthew Arnold's, "Culture and Anarchy" Chap 1.

**Title** : Sweetness and Light

In Chapter 1 of "Culture and Anarchy", Matthew Arnold argues that culture is the pursuit of sweetness and light, which is essential for the harmonious



⇒ William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Romantic poet → Keen observation in beauty of nature  
Poet of nature

Lyrical Ballads ⇒ Second Edition (1800)

Wordsworth + S.T. Coleridge

→ "The language of Poetry is the language of  
emotion and the language of emotion is Simple  
and concrete"

→ Straight forward  
(to the point)

Poet — best in imagination  
— visionary and Prophet  
— a man speaks to men



development of human faculties and the transformation of society.

Arnold defines culture as, "a pursuit of sweetness and light" which he believes is the ultimate goal of human endeavor.

Arnold critiques the state of English society, which he believes is characterized by chaos, disorder and a lack of cohesion. Arnold identifies two main enemies of culture:

1. **Philistinism** (the pursuit of material, wealth and comfort).
2. **Barbarism** (the pursuit of power and aggression).

According to Arnold, Culture is not that believes, norms etc....

something that make you civilized. He argues that culture is essential for creating a sense of community and shared values and for promoting social cohesion and stability.



## Key ideas in Chap 1:-

→ Culture is not just a matter of acquiring knowledge, but of forming a well-rounded, enlightened individual who is capable of understanding and appreciating the highest ideals of human civilization.

→ The "Two Classes"

1. Barbarians (represent the aristocracy)
2. Philistines (rising middle class, who are concerned with material success)

→ Culture as a Unifying force-

According to Arnold, culture has the power to bring about social cohesion.

→ Anarchy and its consequences-

Arnold criticizes the Anarchy in English society, which he sees as the result of both political unrest and a lack of intellectual unity.

He believes that anarchy, both in the intellectual and social spheres, is a threat to the stability and well-being of the nation.



# T.S Eliot's, "Religion and Literature"

Thomas Stearns Eliot's, "Religion and Literature" is a critical essay written in 1935. In it, Eliot discusses the relationship between religion and literature, and argues that the two are intimately connected.

~ Literature is not merely a matter of personal expression, but also of tradition and continuity. The decline of Religion in Modern Literature:-

Eliot expresses concern about the decline of religion in modern society, he observes that writers are increasingly detached from religious traditions and many works of literature reflect a secular worldview. He suggests that this shift has led to a crisis in modern literature, where works often lack the depth, meaning and ethical grounding provided by religious beliefs.



## Literature as a Moral force:-

According to Eliot, literature should not only entertain or inform but also guide and shape the moral consciousness of its readers. In this regard, he suggests that great literature has a moral responsibility to teach people. He believes that religion gives literature its power to convey deeper truths about the human condition and without it, literature is not comprehensive.

- The Role of Poetry in Religion:

(serves as a means of spiritual truths, writers/poets should produce divine or spiritual aspects of life).

- The Need for a Religion Revival in Literature: Eliot calls for a revival of religion in literature, he suggests that poets should re-engage poetry/literature with religious and moral dimensions of life.

This essay reflects Eliot's broader concerns with the decline of faith and the challenges

facing modern society and it serves as a call to action for both writers and readers to engage with the deeper, spiritual aspects of life and Literature.

Literature (writing)

fantasy beauty  
full of imagination nature

Not correct/right  
according to Eliot.

Literature

moral traditions  
values spiritual lessons

Correct  
According to  
Eliot.

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