

**B.A(H) -PART III
PAPER-V
HISTORY OF LITERARY CRITICISM-Philip Sydney
LECTURE-II**

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The major twentieth century and contemporary approaches to literature reified by certain trends include the formal approach to literature (Formalism, New Criticism and Structuralism), approach through reading (hermeneutics, phenomenology, and reader-oriented theories), the approach through socio-cultural context (Marxist theories, cultural materialism, and New Historicism), the feminist approach, the psychoanalytical approach, poststructuralism and deconstruction, reception theory, stylistics, semiotics, archetypal and myth criticism, cultural studies, ethnic and racial studies, postcolonial and transnational studies, environmentalism and ecocriticism, and others. Indeed an age of criticism, the twentieth century gave rise to a great number of critical schools and trends offering at the beginning of a new millennium a great number of approaches characterised by complexity of methods and objects of study, richness of their systems,

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scientific rigour of theory and its practical application to the elements of the literary system.

All the way throughout its history, literary criticism reveals a threefold perspective of development: first, for the periods before twentieth century, literary criticism is dependent on some dominant in those periods trends and movements of creative literature (for instance, classical or Neoclassical criticism, Romantic criticism, and others); second, especially in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, emerge trends in criticism which are also related to new developments in science, philosophy, and society (for instance, historical criticism, realistic criticism, Marxist criticism, psychoanalytical criticism, feminist criticism, and others); third, in twentieth century, some trends in literary criticism were developed from within the critical practice itself (for instance, narratology in the structuralist approach, or deconstruction in the poststructuralist approach to literature).

Starting from the hypothesis that from its beginnings

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*in Renaissance to the end of nineteenth century, British literary criticism is dependent on and closely connected to literary practice, or even considered as part of literary world, the main stages in the history of English criticism correspond actually to the main phases of the literary phenomenon represented by periods and movements. Until twentieth century, literary criticism is conceived as belonging to a literary movement or trend, as being determined by literary activity and in its turn determining the literary practice, and finally as representing a process of rise and development through certain stages which correspond to the major periods of English literature, where for the most of the periods, with some exceptions in Victorian Age, the major critics were also the major writers of those periods or movements. In this respect, one may start with Sir Philip Sidney and his *Defence of Poesie* to understand the condition of English criticism in its first phase, which is Renaissance. John Dryden and his *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* would better show the condition of English criticism*

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in Restoration. The eighteenth century criticism dependent on Neoclassical principles can be better seen in Alexander Pope's Essay on Criticism and Essay on Man, and the rise of the English novel in the same century receives a critical expression in Henry Fielding's Preface to Joseph Andrews. The Romantic period in the history of English literary criticism would be better revealed by focusing on William Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's A Defence of Poetry. The condition of literary criticism in the last before twentieth century stage in the development of English criticism, which is Victorian Age, might be better disclosed by the assessment of Matthew Arnold's The Study of Poetry, John Ruskin's Modern Painters, and Walter Pater's The Renaissance. The medieval period is rejected and replaced by the age of Renaissance, which is considered either as the first part of the modern period that lasted until the middle of the twentieth century, or as a period of transition from Middle Ages to modern period, now

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conceived as lasting from the seventeenth century Enlightenment to the middle of the twentieth century. The art and literature of Renaissance already reveal the two contradictory but co-existing aspects of 'innovation' (for instance, sonnet in poetry) and 'tradition' (the revival of ancient models, as, for example, in Renaissance tragedy).

The emergence of the innovative spirit in literature continues after Renaissance as Baroque art (metaphysical poetry in English literature, also considered by some critics as the last manifestation of British Renaissance), but this cultural extravaganza is rejected and suppressed by the much stronger and dominant traditional element that, based on the revival of ancient classical artistic doctrine and practice, becomes itself a period and dominates as Enlightenment and Classicism (or Neoclassicism in England) the entire social as well as cultural and literary background of Europe for more than one hundred years starting with the middle of the seventeenth century to the last decades of the eighteenth century that witnessed the

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*rise of a new, Romantic literary sensibility. Owing it to Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*, Renaissance marks the actual beginnings of literary criticism in Britain. Sidney's critical text is to be considered in relation to the co-existing in the period innovative element in literature, represented, among others, by Sidney himself as the writer of sonnets and pastoral poetry, and the traditional element in literature, standing for the revival of the ancient classical tradition. The text is also to be considered in relation to the fact that the poetry of the period, both pastoral and sonnet writing tradition, and the imaginative writing on the whole, were often attacked on moral grounds by the rising Puritanism.*

*Scholar, poet, courtier, and soldier, Sidney is the author of the most significant critical treatise of the period, the essay *Defence of Poesie* (also entitled *Apologie for Poetrie*), which was published in 1595, but was written much earlier as an answer to the Puritan minister Stephen Gosson's *The School of Abuse* (1579), a Puritan moralistic attack on imaginative writing of the period, dedicated to*

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Sidney himself.

*Philip Sidney was one of the most prominent authors of the Elizabethan Age as a part of English Renaissance, famous not only for his critical treatise but also for his pastoral poetry and sonnets. *Astrophel and Stella* (published in an authorised edition in 1598, but composed probably in the early 1580s and circulating in manuscript for many years) is the first important of English sonnet sequences, containing 108 sonnets and 11 songs. Attempted as English versions of the Italian model Petrarch, the poems deal with emotion and love, the relationship between lovers, some philosophical speculation and reflections on the act of poetic creation, while, on the structural level, succeeding in freeing the English sonnet from the strict rules of the Italian form. *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, or simply *Arcadia*, is Sidney's most ambitious work, representing a romance in which the Greek model of Heliodorus combined with pastoral elements support the Renaissance idealisation of a shepherd's life, to which*

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Sidney adds, following the Hellenistic model, narratives of kidnap, battle, rape, political treachery, and other stories which are interweaved in the whole of the narrative sequence. Like many Renaissance theorists, Sidney relies on the ideas of the ancients, appealing to Plato's metaphysics, Aristotle's mimesis - for instance, at the beginning, when defining poetry, Sidney calls it "an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word mimesis" - and Horace's aesthetic principles, for instance, Sidney concluding his essay with the famous Horatian statement on the purpose of poetry, which for Sidney is the same: "with this end, to teach and delight", or, rather, given the moralistic perspective, to delight in order to teach.

Sidney's critical treatise shows that the purpose of defending the value of poetry against the accusations made by a Puritan mind is remarkably completed by the expression of Sidney's own observations and ideas on poetry, thus developing a critical tradition based on the works of ancient as well as modern writers.

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Sidney's defence of poetry makes Renaissance the period of the rise of a critical tradition in English and Philip Sidney the first important English literary critic, acclaimed for his "intellectual energy and stylistic vitality", to use Harry Blamires' words, who continues:

Ideas flow from his pen. Apt illustrations, imaginative turns of thought and neat dialectical thrusts crowd his pages. And the prose, largely free of arid modish turgidities and superfluous contrivances, carries the reader eagerly forward.

*Philip Sidney's critical text clearly shows the influence of Horace's *The Art of Poetry*. The rise of the literary criticism in England reveals through Sidney's text obvious moral and defensive features, where, as an answer to Puritanism, Sidney defends poetry as a discourse that makes man a virtuous being, while giving a famous definition of poetry in clearly neo-Horatian terms as an art of imitation that*

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teaches and delights:

*Poesie therefore, is an Art of Imitation: for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak Metaphorically, a speaking Picture, with this end to teach and delight.*