

Practical Criticism According to I. A. Richards

Practical Criticism is a method of literary analysis developed and systematized by I. A. Richards in his influential book *Practical Criticism* (1929). It represents a decisive shift in twentieth-century literary studies from historical and biographical approaches toward a close, disciplined reading of the text itself. Richards sought to examine how readers interpret literature and to establish a more scientific and psychological basis for literary criticism.

Background and Aim of Practical Criticism

Before Richards, literary criticism often focused on:

- The author's life (biographical criticism),
- Historical background,
- Moral or philosophical judgments,
- Rhetorical ornamentation.

Richards believed that such approaches distracted readers from the **actual experience of the text**. He wanted to understand what happens in a reader's mind when encountering a poem or prose passage. To test this, he conducted an experiment at the University of Cambridge: he gave students poems without titles, authors' names, or dates, and asked them to write their responses. The results revealed frequent misunderstandings, emotional overreactions, stock responses, and confusion about tone.

Thus, *Practical Criticism* was designed to:

- Encourage close attention to language,
- Analyze meaning carefully,
- Eliminate irrelevant external information,
- Develop disciplined and sensitive reading habits.

Conclusion

Practical Criticism, as developed by I. A. Richards, is a method of close textual analysis that seeks to understand how meaning is constructed through language. By focusing on sense, feeling, tone, and intention, it trains readers to approach literature with discipline and sensitivity.

Through examples like *The Solitary Reaper* and *Of Studies*, we see how both poetry and prose can be examined without reliance on external information. Practical Criticism remains a foundational method in modern literary studies, emphasizing the autonomy of the text and the responsibility of the reader.

In essence, Richards transformed literary criticism into a more systematic and analytical discipline, encouraging readers not merely to admire literature but to understand how it works.