

Literary Criticism

Early Modern Period Overview

Contents

- Historical background
- Intellectual background
- Writers who shaped the era
- Neo-Classical literary criticism
- Enlightenment

Historical Background

- The period between 14th and 17th century is known as Renaissance.
- Renaissance period marked the rediscovery of values, ethics, and styles associated with classical Greece and Rome.
- Shift from theological worldview to humanist and secular vision.
- Early Modern period is denoted as the Golden Age of English Literature.
- Humanism is one of the major trait of this period.
- Development of powerful and educated middle class and increased importance of vernacular languages.

Intellectual Background

- Growth of secular educated population.
- Humanists developed techniques and frameworks to learn and interpret ancient texts.
- They adapted styles from classical literature to cultivate literature in vernacular languages.
- Sir Thomas More was one of the prominent humanist of England. His *Utopia* critiqued the social and economical defects of the time.
- Humanist vernacular texts were developed with Chaucer and attained the peak level with the works of Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare.

Major changes during Early Modern Period

PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

- Turned away from theological philosophies of classical era.
- Sir Francis Bacon promoted empirical learning.
- Printing press was invented which elevated the boundaries of education within common people.

RELIGION

- Protestant Reformation and Counter Catholic Reformation.
- growth of national consciousness led to the rupturing of Catholic Church.
- Development of a new group of thinkers known as Christian Humanists.
- Redefined catholic church and reaffirmed the necessity of good deeds.

LITERARY CRITICISM

- The rise of Literary Criticism as a relatively autonomous domain.
- Reflected civic values, national sentiment, and sense of history in relation to classics.
- Developed new approaches to reading and interpretation.
- Printing Bible in vernacular languages shifted authority from clergy to layman.
- Artists exercised greater autonomy.
- Renaissance criticism included humanist commentary on classical texts.
- Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars Poetica* influenced the literary criticism of this era.

Major Writers of Literary Criticism in the Early Modern Period

- Concerned with associating themselves with the classical writers
- Defend poetry and the use of the vernacular
- Define the art of poetry

Giambattista Giraldi 1504-1573

- Italian dramatist, poet and literary critic
- Favoured a new genre, romance.
- According to Giraldi, romances deal with many characters and actions, building “the whole fabric of their work upon eight or ten persons.”
- *Discourse on the Composition of Romances*
- Giraldi promotes an ideal of organic unity, suggesting that the parts of a poem must “fit together as do the parts of the body”

Lodovico Castelvetro (1505–1571)

- Castelvetro is best known for his rigid reformulation of Aristotle's unities of time and place in drama
- The action "must be set in a place no larger than the stage on which the actors perform and in a period of time no longer than that which is filled by their performance"
- Castelvetro took a modern view, that the sole purpose of poetry was to bring pleasure, particularly for the common people.

Giacopo Mazzoni (1548–1598)

- *On the Defense of the Comedy of Dante*
- He formulated a systematic and comprehensive aesthetics of poetic imitation
- Poetry can be seen as having three different ends or purposes-
 - Provide correct imitation or representation
 - Produce delight
 - Moral betterment
- ·The kind of poetry Plato banished from his ideal republic are ones that left “free,” creates disordered appetite, with “complete rebellion against reason”

Torquato Tasso (1544–1595)

- Tasso is best known for his epic poem *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581)
- He also wrote *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* in which he takes up the question of the relative merits of epic and tragedy, and for him, epic trumps tragedy.

Joachim Du Bellay (1522–1560)

- Joachim Du Bellay is known for having written one of the first theoretical defences of a vernacular language
- *Defence and Illustration of the French Language* (1549), was entirely focused on justifying the French vernacular by establishing a new poetics to elevate the status of French, and, in turn, France itself.
- He believed that by returning to the archetypes of classical languages, the French language might supplant the Classics from their position of cultural sovereignty.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586)

- Embodiment of the perfect “Renaissance man.”
- *Apologie for Poetrie* also called *The Defence of Poesy*
- Sydney described poetry as a speaking picture with the aim to “teach and delight”
- Universality of poetry
- Poetry is widely respected
- Sydney compares poetry with history and philosophy.
- The three kind of poetic imitation- religious, philosophical and true poetry

Charges against poetry by Gosson in *The School of Abuse*

1. Poetry serves no useful purpose
2. Poetry is mother of lies
3. Plato has rightly banished poetry from the ideal world.



**Writers Who Influenced
Sydney**

**Boccaccio
Aristotle
Horace**

**Writers Who were
Influenced *By* Sydney**

**John Dryden
Aphra Behn
Samuel Johnson**

George Gascoigne (1542–1577)

- *Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English* (1575)
- It offers advice to aspiring poets on the entire range of rhetorical issues
- The feature of poetic composition that Gascoigne most insists upon is “fine invention”
- Gascoigne insists on consistency in meter throughout the poem
- The poet must find a middle ground between “haughty obscure verse” and “verse that is too easy”
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The Arte of English Poesy 1589

It justifies the use of the vernacular language for poetry and also tries to establish English vernacular poetry as an art, requiring serious study and labour

This book was referred to by Ben Jonson and his copy of the heavily annotated book survives

It is divided into 3 books:

- Book I Of Poets and Poesie
- Book II Of Proportion
- Book III Of Ornament

Neo-classical Literary Criticism


Neoclassicism

- Return to the classical models, literary styles, and values of ancient Greek and Roman authors.
- It developed with the Enlightenment, a political and philosophical movement that primarily valued science, reason, and exploration.
- Neoclassical literature was written between 1660 and 1798. This time period is broken down into three parts: the Restoration period, the Augustan period, and the age of Johnson.

JOHN DRYDEN

- Samuel Johnson termed Dryden ' the father of English criticism ' and affirmed his '**Essay of Dramatic Poesy** ' that 'modern English prose begins here.
- English poet, dramatist and literary critic.
- First English critic to make use of historical criticism.





- He appreciated Shakespeare and Johnson in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and studies Chaucer in his *Preface to the Fables*.

- The *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* is developed in the form of dialogues amongst four interlocutors representing four different literatures or literary age.

ALEXANDER POPE

- A poet and satirist of the English Augustan period.
- He is one of the most epigrammatic of all English authors.
- His main critical works are *An Essay on Criticism*, *Preface to Shakespeare*, *Art of Sinking*, *Epistles to Augustus*, *Preface to the Translation of the Iliad* and his *Letters*.




The use of the term Wit

1. To refer to all the mental and intellectual faculties taken together.
2. To refer to the gift of the poet, the poet's genius.
3. To refer to the quality of ingenuity in a poet.
4. To refer to the poetic imagination.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

- An English critic, biographer, essayist, poet and lexicographer.
- According to George Watson, Johnson's critical phase can be divided into four stages.
 - 1. The periodical essays.
 - 2. The Dictionary
 - 3. His edition of Shakespeare.
 - 4. The *Lives*





- It was with the arrival of Dr. Johnson on the critical scene that English Criticism might be said to have attained some status.

- The most authoritative critic of Shakespeare.

- George Watson called Johnson 'the father of historical criticism in English.'

The Enlightenment

Historical and Intellectual Background

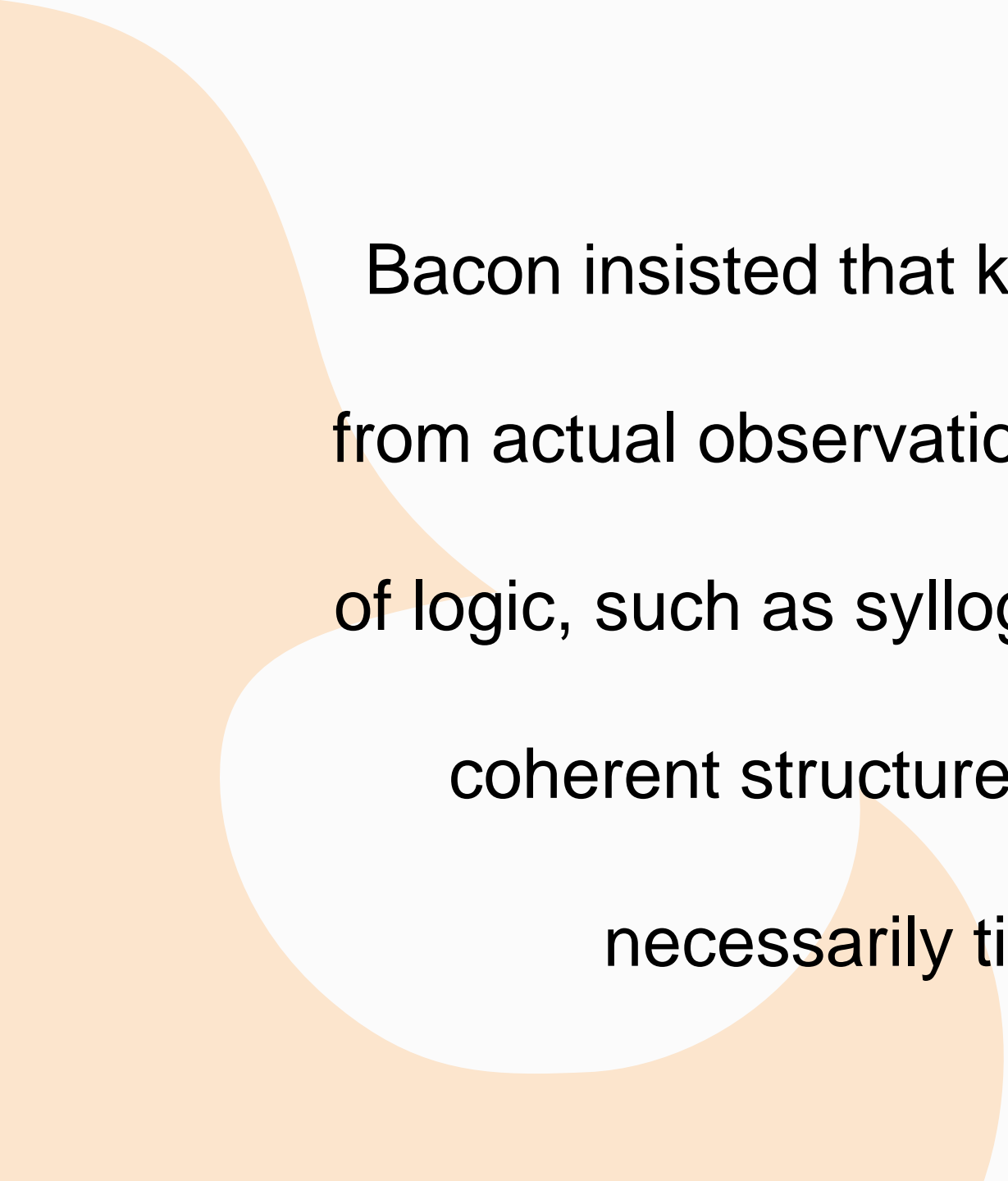
- Modern period is Mental in outlook.
- Broad intellectual tendency, spanning philosophy, literature, language, art, religion, and political theory which lasted from around 1680 until the end of 18th Century.

- Begun with Francis Bacon, English Thinker(1561-1626) in England & with Rene Descartes- French rationalist philosopher (1596-1650) in France.
- Three seminal precursors of Enlightenment thought were Francis Bacon, Descartes and Spinoza(Dutch rationalist thinker)
- They used vernacular languages.
- Initiated a new philosophical tradition which largely distinct from the medieval inheritance.

- Individualism as an important characteristics of modern period.
- Thinkers by no means uniform in their out looks, but in general they saw themselves as initiating an era of humanitarian, intellectual, and social progress, underlain by the increasing ability of human reason to subjugate analytically both the external world of nature and the human self.

Francis Bacon(1561-1626)

- English lawyer, essayist, historian, intellectual reformer, philosopher, Champion of modern science.
- Inductive Method
- Major Works- *Novum Organum*, *New Atlantis*, *The Advancement of Learning*.



Bacon insisted that knowledge can arise only from actual observation of nature; the elements of logic, such as syllogism he says, may form a coherent structure within itself but is not necessarily tied to actual fact.

Rene Descartes(1596-1650)

- Father of modern philosophy.
- French Philosopher.
- Challenged basic principles of medieval philosophy
- *Cogito ergo sum*(I think therefore I am)
- Works- Discourse on Method, meditations on Ist Philosophy.

- The historical and intellectual developments associated with the enlightenment had far reaching effects on literary criticism in terms of discussions of the language of poetry, notions of taste, and faculties such as wit, judgment and imagination.
- It has been observed that the reform of literature and criticism in the eighteenth century reflected the empirical thrust of broader scientific and philosophical developments.

John Locke(1632-1704)

- Laid foundations of classical British empiricism.
- Tabular rasa(empty or clean slate)
- Major work- Essay concerning Human understanding.
- Empiricism

Joseph Addison(1672-1719)

- Poet and dramatist, essayist
- His ambition was to bring philosophical, political and literary discussion within the reach of middle classes.
- Works- Tatler, Guardian

David Hume(1711-1776)

- Scottish philosopher
- He was an empiricist, believing that our knowledge derives from experience.
- Works- Treaties of Human Nature, An enquiry concerning human understanding.

The philosophical assumptions of the enlightenment can be examined in the literary and cultural criticism of certain major thinkers, as they inform various critical trends. We have the example of language formulated by Locke and Vico, works of Addison, the theories of taste and judgment offered by Hume and Burke and the analysis of women's social and educational status undertaken by Mary Wollstonecraft, who effectively extends enlightenment ideals to the notion of gender.



Thank you!