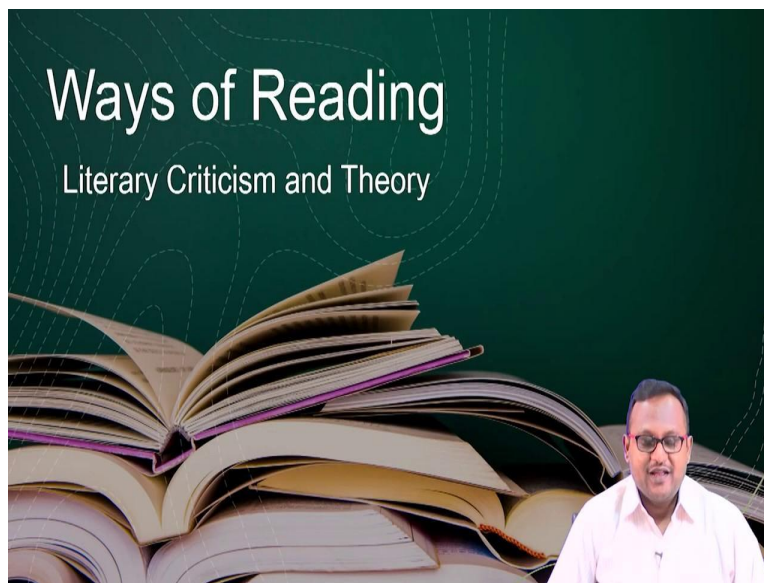


Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
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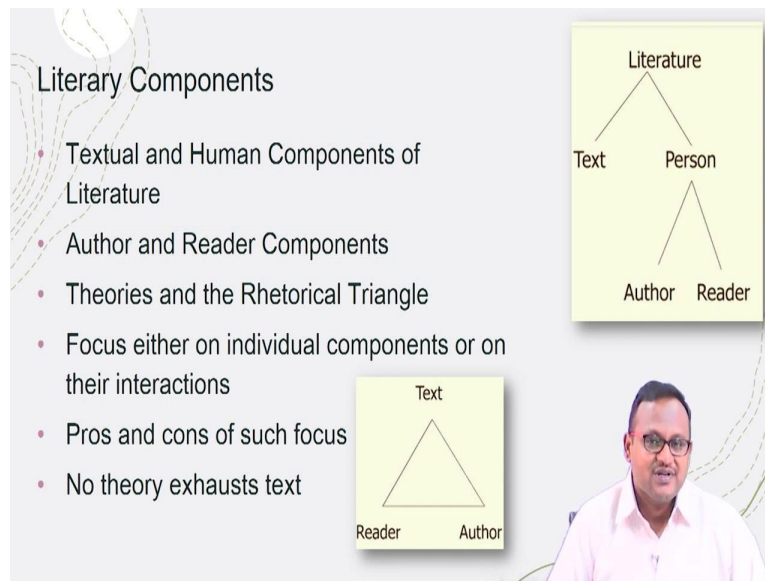
Lecture - 07
Forms and Genres of Literature

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Hello. Welcome to the second lecture of the second week. In the previous class, we were discussing different forms of literature, different genres of literature, the difference between prose and poetry, how there are nuances to the so-called ossified classification of literature into prose and poetry, and how there are exceptions to that. In this class, we are going to take up a discussion on ways of reading literature. So, this is where we come to face literary criticism and literary theory. How are they related to literature, how are they related to language society and culture, we are going to find out in a very short while.

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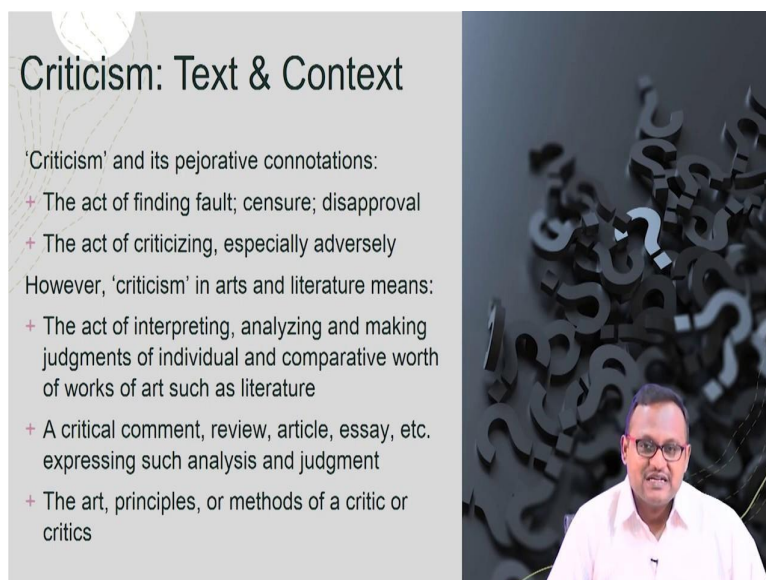


Before we understand literary theories and literary criticism, let us try to understand certain literary components. If you look at literature, or any literary work for that matter, broadly speaking, it deals with people on the one hand. How does it deal with people? Using language. So, when I say 'text' you can call it the world of language, when I say 'person', then the world of characters. So, it consists of two worlds, the world of people and the world of languages. So, when it comes to characters or when I say the human element in literature, again you have the author who composes it or even if it's more than one author, different authors, and then the readers who read and enjoy a work of art. So, that is as far as the human component of literature is concerned. So, various critical schools or schools of theories focus on this triad called text, reader, and author. When you are commenting on a literary piece, you comment either on the text which you call a literary piece, or the reader, you are a reader yourself, how do you respond to that as a reader, or how do fellow readers, like you, respond to that work of art. And the third is - what does the author mean? Interpreting the work of art from the authors perspective. So, the different schools of literary criticism and theories, either deal with each of them individually or the intersections between them. And when you do it, what are the pros and cons of such kind of a focus, if you want to focus only on the text.

What are the advantages of focusing on the text alone at the expense of a reader and the author? Or if you want to focus on the reader then, what happens to the text? You as a reader,

do you have total autonomy as far as interpreting a literary work is concerned? Do you think whatever is your understanding of the text is complete in itself, or do you need to also go behind the text go and find out a little more about the writer and work on that? Or if you want to focus solely on the author, is the author the sole creator of the text? Because remember text is something that gets constructed somewhere in between the author and the reader. There is a very important statement here, the text is something that gets constructed somewhere midway between the author and the reader, do you agree with that? What is your opinion on this? At the end of the day, we must know that no theory can exhaust a literary text, even if you combine all the 3, literature still defies our understanding. We must always be aware of this in-exhaustible source of meanings that a text always is.

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Criticism: Text & Context

'Criticism' and its pejorative connotations:

- + The act of finding fault; censure; disapproval
- + The act of criticizing, especially adversely

However, 'criticism' in arts and literature means:

- + The act of interpreting, analyzing and making judgments of individual and comparative worth of works of art such as literature
- + A critical comment, review, article, essay, etc. expressing such analysis and judgment
- + The art, principles, or methods of a critic or critics

The slide also features a video inset of a man with glasses and a pink shirt speaking, set against a background of large, dark, 3D question marks.

When it comes to criticism, we say literary criticism, there is a fine line between literary criticism and literary theory. We are going to discuss that in a very short while. Generally, when we say criticism, over time it has come to acquire a negative shade of meaning. It's highly pejorative in context, when we say do not criticize you criticize me too much.

We almost seem to use it in a negative way. Whereas in literary criticism, criticism in the context of literature is definitely not pejorative, it is definitely not negative in shade. Criticism refers to, or criticism is a broad umbrella term we use to refer to, various responses to literature. The entire gamut of our readings, our responses to literature that comes under

the term criticism here. Therefore, when you read a work of art - you interpret it, you analyze it, you summarize it, you make judgments out of it, and you arrive at conclusions, you compare it with different characters within the text or with some other text that you have read or with society outside. All these things are a part of literary criticism. When you read something, if you discuss that with your fellow friends, with your relatives, with your parents, with anybody, that is part of criticism, though it is informal it is still criticism. When you write about it, you must have seen it in newspapers, in magazines, in journals, reviews of books, they are also part of criticism. You will have seen an entire book on a particular literary piece, that too is criticism. In fact, if you have read Shakespeare, especially Hamlet, it is said that there are more than 200,000 pages of criticism on that play alone. So, that signifies the depth and diversity of an enterprise called literary criticism.

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Understanding Literary Criticism

		
Literary criticism is the interpretation, analysis, classification and ultimately the judgment of literary works.	It is usually in the form of a critical essay, but in-depth book reviews can sometimes be considered as literary criticism.	Criticism may examine a particular literary work, or may look at an author's writings as a whole.

To go a little deeper and understand and to fortify our understanding of literary criticism, it is an interpretation, analysis, classification, and judgment related to that literary work. It is usually in the form of a critical essay or it can even be longish, in the form of a book review or in the form of an entire book in itself that too is literary criticism.

And what does literary criticism do? As we have said earlier it examines a particular text from multiple perspectives. It compares it with the society around, with the different ideologies that exist in society, with the different time periods in which a particular is written.

There is a lot of variation, we have discussed in the earlier class how there is a kind of a difference as far as the subject of growing up is, growing up, growing old is concerned, how there is a difference in how these similar things are depicted in literature and its various forms. So, how do we formally and informally respond to a work of art? This question forms the crux of literary criticism in general.

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Root/Route of "Critic"



critic
/ˈkrɪtɪk/

Origin

GREEK	GREEK	GREEK	LATIN	
krinein	kritēs	kritikos	criticus	critic
judge, decide	a judge		late 16th century	

late 16th century: from Latin *criticus*, from Greek *kritikos*, from *kritēs* 'a judge' decide'.

- 17th & 18th Century: a connoisseur of arts and literature/one who judges the merits and shortcomings



Now, let us try to understand who a literary critic is. Well, commonsensical speaking, anybody who indulges in literary criticism is a literary critic, right. You and I are literary critics because we are responding to literature, of course, in a formal way now, and everybody responds to a work of art either formally or informally, either orally or in the writing form. If you look at the etymological origins of the word 'critic' - it has a Greek root word, and later it comes to Latin, and finally, when it comes to English, it started being used to mean somebody who judges, who decides. So, by the time you come to the 17th and 18th centuries, the term comes to signify an individual or a group of individuals who are connoisseurs of art and literature. Somebody who has acquired some kind of expertise when it comes to assessing the merits and shortcomings of a literary work is called a critic.

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Literary Critic

A literary critic:
someone who evaluates the worth or quality of a piece of literature;
someone who argues on behalf of an interpretation or understanding of the particular meaning(s) of literary texts.

The task of a literary critic is to explain and attempt to reach a critical understanding of what literary texts mean in terms of their aesthetic, as well as social, political, and cultural statements and suggestions.

Expanding the profile of a literary critic. What does a literary critic do? Who is a literary critic? A literary critic is somebody who evaluates the worth or quality of a piece of writing. A writer is somebody who writes. Broadly speaking every reader is a critic, because when you read that piece, you analyze it with your own understanding of the subject that is discussed in the text. Therefore, every reader is a literary critic. But to expand on the concept of literary critique is somebody who makes a value judgment too, somebody who argues on behalf of an interpretation and tries to understand the series of meanings or layers of meanings or palimpsestic layers that are inherent in a literary work is called a literary critic. Therefore, the task of the literary critic is to explain maybe to a layperson. When I say a layperson, I mean an uninitiated reader, a reader who has just begun his or her journey, who is not so much an experienced reader. So, to help them understand a work of art from different perspectives, and to assess it in terms of its aesthetic quality, in terms of its semiotic quality, and also to analyze the broad cultural spectrum against which this particular work is produced, these things are a part of the job profile of a literary critic.

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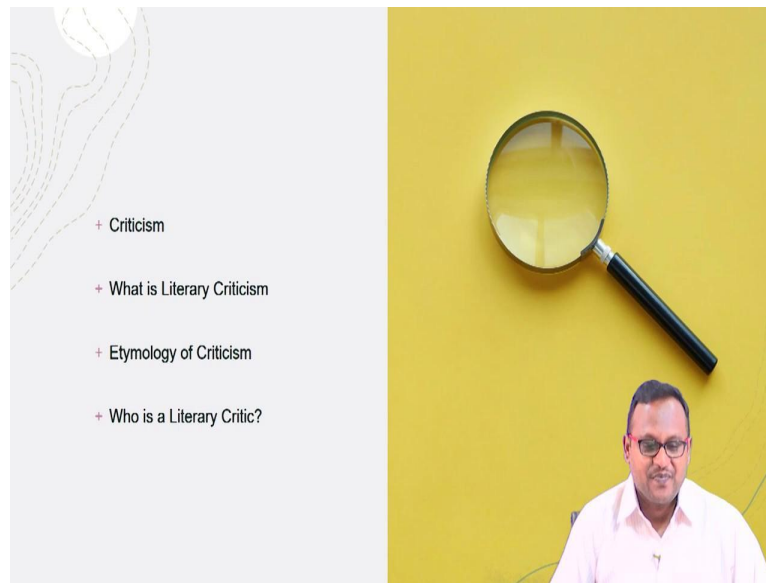
The slide has a light pink background. On the right side, the title 'Literary Critic' is written in a dark, sans-serif font. On the left side, there are two rounded rectangular boxes. The top box is a darker shade of pink and contains the text: 'A literary critic does more than simply discuss or evaluate the importance of a literary text'. The bottom box is a lighter shade of pink and contains the text: 'A literary critic seeks to reach a logical and reasonable understanding of not only what a text's author intends for it to mean but, also, what different cultures and ideologies render it capable of meaning'. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a man with glasses and a white shirt, who appears to be the presenter.

Literary Critic

- A literary critic does more than simply discuss or evaluate the importance of a literary text
- A literary critic seeks to reach a logical and reasonable understanding of not only what a text's author intends for it to mean but, also, what different cultures and ideologies render it capable of meaning

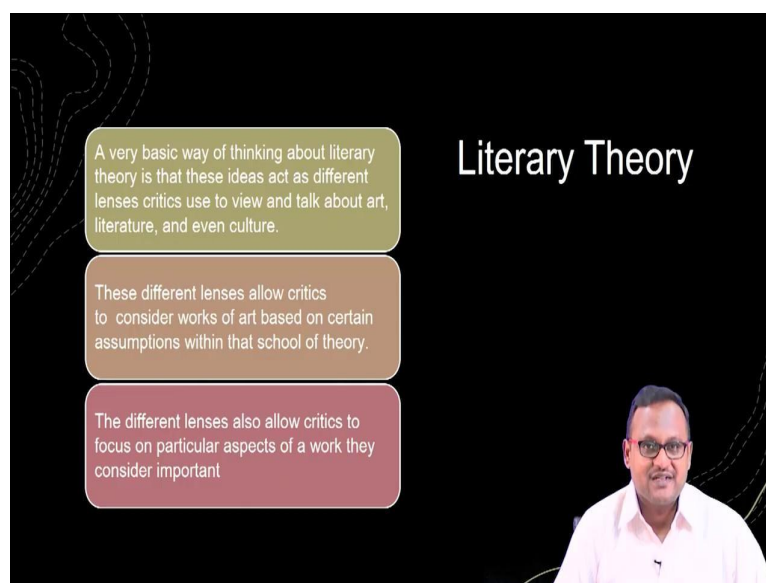
Continuing our discussion of a literary critic. We can even say that a literary critic seeks to reach a logical and reasonable understanding of a work of art and compares it across different cultures. Supposing there is a work written in a different culture about the same subject, how do different cultural productions produce that literature? What are the pros and cons of each text? How do you bring both of them together? These are the questions you raise while comparing it with different literary pieces written across time or written during the same period.

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So, to review our understanding of literary criticism and critics so far. We have understood what criticism is, and how in the context of literature literary criticism is not pejorative, but it's more about serving literature in a meaningful way. And we discussed who is a literary critic, the etymology of critic and criticism, and a kind of a broad profile of a literary critic we have done that, ok.

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Now, moving on to literary theory. In order to understand literary theory, we need to take the metaphor of a lens or a hole. So, a literary theory is like a lens. When you look at the world around you through the lens or let us say you have a lens that is slightly pink in shade, the entire world looks pinkish, right? Or if you look at a lens, if you take up a lens that magnifies things and shows you the world a little bigger than what they are, that is another kind of lens. So, here literary theory also tries to examine. Of course, literary theory is also a kind of criticism, but it is a specialized kind of literary criticism in that, it tries to scrutinize a work of art through a particular lens, through a particular perspective. Whether looking at a literary text through a particular lens or a perspective, is it something worthwhile or not is debatable because ultimately when we try to look at a diverse piece, such as literary text through a particular theory, then it is like reducing the diversity to some kind of singularity.

Nevertheless, literary theory has its own contributions to our understanding or enhancing our understanding of literature and society in different ways. They help you to look at society, they help you to look at that literature that is a part of that society because ultimately a literary piece is a cultural manifestation, a cultural production of a society.

So, when you try to analyze that literary piece vis-a-vis society through a particular lens, it reveals very many things about the text as well as the society. Therefore, it could be beneficial as well. So, these different lenses allow the reader to look at society from multiple perspectives and therefore, they may have their own advantages and disadvantages.

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Literary Theory

Modern literary criticism is often informed by literary theory, which is the philosophical discussion of its methods and goals.

E.g. if a critic is working with certain Marxist theories, s/he might focus on how the characters in a story interact based on their economic situation in an unequal society.

If a critic is working with post-colonial theories, s/he might consider the same story but look at how characters from colonial powers (Britain, France, and even America) treat characters from, say, Africa or the Caribbean.

(A small video inset shows a man with glasses and a white shirt speaking.)

We are going to take a closer look at literary theory in subsequent slides. Generally, speaking these days, until let us say the 1970s, literary criticism meant looking at a work of art in its entirety, but post 70s and 80s, literary theories have almost come to replace the place of literary criticism. And literary theory also is uniquely positioned to do it because if literary criticism is praxial in nature -it is about the practical aspect of responding to a literary piece; literary theory is also a response, but it's more self-reflexive in nature. It is more about the very philosophy concerning the criticism of literature. So, in that sense, it is more self-reflexive in nature. So, if it is a Marxian criticism or Marxian literary theory, then you look at a work of art and try to analyze it keeping the spirit of Marxian philosophy in mind. Similar to looking at the work of art and then identifying the characteristic features and the material conditions which produce it, the kind of characterization that has happened there, the kind of exploitation that takes place, all these things. If you look at a literary piece from a postcolonial perspective, then what you try to do is look at that work of art, look at the characters, look at the relationship between characters or across characters from the position of the dominant position, from the subaltern position, from the position of power. So, this is in a nutshell literary theory. For our general understanding, a cursory understanding of literary theory would do for time being.

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Literary theory proposes particular, systematic approach to literary texts that impose a particular line of intellectual reasoning to it.

For example, a psychoanalytic literary theorist might take the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jun, Lacan and seek to reach a critical understanding of a novel such as Ernest Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls.

Literary theory

A man with glasses and a pink shirt is speaking.

Continuing our discussion. Literary theory proposes a systematic approach to a literary text as a result of which you make the literary text reveal only certain or particular meanings because when you try to subject a work through a particular perspective you only get the perspective that you applied to it, right? So, that can be a limitation and that can also be a strength.

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Plethora of approaches to read a work

A critical analysis is an in-depth examination of some aspect of a literary work

One may examine any element of the text: character development, conflicts, narrative point of view etc.

Book Review / Literary review is also a form of critical analysis.

Approaches to Literature

A man with glasses and a pink shirt is speaking.

Whether it is literary theory or literary criticism, they deal with different approaches to literature. And as far as approaches are concerned there are a plethora of them. So, depending

on the approach you take, you define a work of art accordingly. You can examine a work of art in terms of its textual composition, in terms of how a character or the set of characters are developed through that. When it comes to storyline or plot what kind of conflicts are involved there, what is the narrative structure, in terms of narratology what is the structure of narration involved there, what is the point of view. All these things, depending on any one of them or taking up all of them, you can approach a literary work. Generally speaking, a book review or literature review is something that takes up all these things in a nutshell. When you look at a book review in a newspaper it tries to approach a literary work from all these perspectives, a kind of a short overall perspective that you get about reading a work of art.

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Types of Literary Criticism

- A broad division can be made between the types of literary criticism:
 1. Practical criticism
 2. Theoretical criticism
 3. Descriptive criticism
 4. Prescriptive criticism

These Four types can be grouped into two classes:



1. Practical and Theoretical criticism
2. Descriptive and Prescriptive criticism

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When it comes to literary criticism, there are different types of literary criticism, you have practical criticism, theoretical criticism, descriptive criticism, prescriptive criticism. So, these are more technical terms, I am not going to discuss in detail in this particular class. We will take it up in subsequent classes. But for our general understanding, we can simply say that considering all different approaches to understanding a literary work we can say there are two formal approaches, one is practical and theoretical criticism, it also includes theory, the other is descriptive and prescriptive criticism.

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Practical and Theoretical Criticism


-  Practical criticism focuses on the examination of individual text.
-  Theoretical criticism discusses the nature of literature, and the relation between literature, critics and society.

(A video feed of a man in a white shirt and glasses is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide.)

Practical and theoretical criticism is something that looks at an individual text from a holistic perspective. It tries to understand the nature of literature, the nature of the relationship between literature, society, character development, and things like that. We have already discussed this.

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Descriptive and Prescriptive Criticism

	
Descriptive criticism tends to explain the piece of literature as it is, in its original form	Prescriptive criticism argues on how it ought to be understood and analysed

And the other thing is descriptive and prescriptive criticism. Here what happens is you try to describe the process through which you criticize that work, ok. And also, you try to impose

your own line of arguments on a literary text and argue how a literary work should have been written or should not have been written. So, this is, in general, what descriptive and prescriptive criticism stand for.

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So, so far in this class, we have discussed literary criticism, critic, the origins of criticism, the profile of a critic, the difference between literary criticism and literary theory, and how they help enhance our understanding of the art and also how sometimes they can reduce the significance and diversity of a literary work, I mean significance and diversity that they contain within them, and all these things. In the next class, we are going to pick up some interesting literary theories that have helped not just literature, but also society and have corrected society and literature in some extraordinary ways. Until then, keep looking at these concepts, and will meet you in the next class.

Thank you.