
The Purpose Of Literary Critics

A literary critic is someone who evaluates literature to provide a comparison or analysis subjected to their own opinion. They provoke debate, discussion and evaluate works, contemporary or historical, and provide a judgment on various criteria as to which books have been most successful and therefore, are deserving of an accolade. Much debate has arisen around the role of a critic: Is it one who simply reviews and brings to light works or is it one who undertakes a detailed study in order to augment our understanding and promote a reconsideration of the writing to question society?

Literary critics consider the detrimental effects of the intended meanings in literature to evoke a valuable perspective on biases that may exist elsewhere. It is the primitive role of a critic to discover the authentic talent amongst writers to allow the public to acknowledge their credibility and their admirable excellence. Moreover, not only can literary criticism be perceived from an artistic point of view, but also from other aspects that can be relevant to students and others who decide to study literature in more depth. Reviewing and providing feedback on popular works determines the potential of whether a book should be sold and establishes its worth and significance. However, the intention of a critic is not to condemn or antagonize the writer, but to broaden one's initial perspective on a subject to incorporate values formed on the basis of critical analysis.

Critics re-interpret works and consider the historical and political contexts which spawned the writing and force us to cogitate their intrinsic value of art. Edward Said, for instance in his seminal work 'Orientalism', carefully reinterprets various works of fiction, nonfiction and art to show how society had created patronizing depictions of the culture of the Middle East which promoted a social, racial and political discrimination to non-Europeans. The "western gaze" viewed the East as backwards, uncivilized and at times dangerous which primarily highlights the critique of the western world's perception on the lifestyle of the Middle Eastern civilization. Said argues for post-colonial fiction by using the concept of the orient to demonstrate how nationalism arose by conveying the struggles of the people in the third world. He questions the negative effects of colonialization where the hidden feminist assumptions expanded throughout the centuries. Said critically analyses how religion, sex and culture has evolved over the centuries to demonstrate the consequences that result from control and exploitation of colonized powers. Despite the novel being published in 1978, one might argue that Said's implication of the orient can be seen as outdated. This backwards mindset subsequently results in dehumanization of inferior powers which continues to promote the 'colonial mentality'. The application of his argument encourages the need to learn more about other cultures by illuminating the attitudinal issues expressed in prestigious histories. He adamantly evokes the fact that we had to study and define other cultures according to our subjected opinion in order to remain the 'superior race'.

The ways novels are received overtime changes vastly depending on various factors, and thus it can be illuminating to examine texts through a variety of lenses. Not only do critics adjudicate the most relevant and successful work to illustrate the ongoing debates of cultural and political issues, but they too reflect upon authorial intention. Biographical criticism can essentially demonstrate how certain events in the author's life can influence their writing to evoke a deeper

and more empathetic response to their work. Deepening our understanding of the author's historical background uncovers the hidden implications of characters and how they are shaped to reflect and convey certain events of the writer's life. Immersing myself in the critical interpretation of Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar" heightened my understanding of how cynical and careless society can be towards those suffering from mental instability and depression. For example, the protagonist, a nineteen-year-old girl slowly sinking into depression, is prescribed electric shock therapy which prevailed her to question "what terrible thing she had done". She is treated carelessly, nonchalantly and with a lack of concern which excoriates the so-called medical professionals of the 1950's. This compelling novel represents an acidic satire on the absurdity of social, medical and abhorrent culture present during the 1950's and allows the reader to understand why women were unable to reconcile their ambitions with society's rules and expectations. The aesthetics of Plath's novel however do not actually establish any form of feminine context, but essentially do touch on various female issues. Stephanie Tsank stated that "Critics tend to argue that society is making Esther sick" (24-25) illuminating the mental suffocation induced by a high-pressure environment. The correlations between Plath's life and "The Bell Jar" significantly demonstrate the impact her illness had on her life and can further portray the importance to promote awareness. Plath sublimates her suicidal thoughts into artistic endeavors whilst pervading her cry for help. Valuing text's like these generate empathy and a greater appreciation towards literature. Further analysis and understanding of the novel allowed me to evaluate the struggle she experienced throughout her professional career and illuminated the inevitable failure of living up to the era's contradictory ideals of womanhood. Furthermore, reflecting on the novel provides a stronger path to understanding the reasons which drove Plath to her impending downfall.

Feministic critics believe that men have essentially 'dominated' literature and culture and so therefore are determined to eliminate these ideological assumptions. They use their criticism to correct and combat the stereotypical ideals created by a patriarchal society. Early stages of first wave feministic criticism such as the analysis of William Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shew" for Petruchio's abuse of Katherina, consider the marginalization and oppressive attitudes displayed towards female characters in order to be approved by men. Similarly, Darren Morton's criticism of "The Great Gatsby", illustrates the stereotypical affiliation between men and women during 1920's America. Morton describes the representation of the female characters being portrayed in the novel as a "blank canvas that men can project their desire onto". This critique has demonstrated the objectification of women and the sexism deeply embedded in particular histories. The author's intentions are only considered to an extent to which they implicate the discrimination of the subject. The epiphany about the conventional stereotype's traps the necessity to combat the prejudice and therefore emphasizes the need to challenge preconceived ideas. Considering these factors implicated by these critics encourages the attention women deserve and utilizes the possibility to improve relations between the two sexes in society.

In 2016, the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature received just short of \$1 million (USD) making literary criticism a lucrative business. In addition, the added media coverage and spotlight is likely to increase book sales by a considerable amount. However, there has long been questions raised over the process of selecting a winner and the perceived bias towards western men is still a criticism that is often leveled at Nobel. 'The Telegraph' states that despite modern improvements, equal gender representation is still severely and shockingly overlooked. "Since 1901, there have been 825 male winners of the Nobel Prize, but just 47 female winners" . This then elucidates to the idea that the contributions of non- males curtail the

possibility of achieving further appreciation and recognition for achieving their success. Furthermore, the panel in 2018 is made up of 3 white European males and a single woman. If literary criticism is to remain relevant and significant surely there must be a reformation in the ethnicity and gender of the critics who make up the panel in order to promote the selection of a diverse range of works better reflecting modern day society. This homogeneity suggests a shutting out of non-white, male authors and points to an elitism deep rooted in European intellectualism. The lack of recognition towards female and minority groups advocates the drive to value the upper echelon community which diminishes the significance of 'less important' members of society. In addition, the ongoing debate since the 1960's considering the significance of the "Western Canon" is rooted in feminism, critical race theory and Marxism. Postmodern studies have argued that the concept of this title is extremely biased due to the belief that the most important texts of literature have been written by white men. Therefore, there should be the inclusion for other writers from different backgrounds to express their work without having to be undermined by classic white English male writers.

Interpreting Literature nourishes us with the complexity of life's deepest mysteries. The act of understanding art brings us to have a greater tolerance and self-awareness towards conflict in political and social situations. With very little exposure to such texts, misconceptions and delusion cloud the authorial intention and paradoxically leads the reader into overlooking the initial significance of the text. Literary Critics embrace their knowledge and use their power as an advantage to broaden the horizon for our mind and understanding of the world. They encourage the public to expand their accustomed view on society and to develop their own standard of judgement. To study literature, is to study the human mind.