

**ELEMENTARY
GUIDE TO LITERARY
CRITICISM**

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Elementary Guide to Literary Criticism by F. V. N. Painter

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BY

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PREFACE

THE aim of the present work, as is indicated by its name, is to help the young student in literary criticism. It is a sort of laboratory manual, in which he will find specific direction for a comprehensive analysis of the principal kinds of literature. It is intended to show him the various points in relation to form, content, and spirit, to which in succession he is to devote his attention. It is hoped that the book will give definiteness and delight to literary study, which, for lack of such a guide, has so often been vague, unsatisfactory, and discouraging.

A glance at the table of contents will clearly reveal the plan. The work is divided into three parts, the first of which treats of fundamental principles. In three chapters the nature of criticism, the relation of the author to his work, and the æsthetic principles underlying literary art are briefly discussed. The facts and principles here presented are designed to give a clearer and deeper insight into the nature and processes of criticism.

Part Second is chiefly concerned with the external elements of literature. In three chapters it briefly discusses the diction, the various kinds of sentences, the use of figures of speech, and the different species of style as determined partly by the nature of the discourse

and partly by the mental endowments of the writer. It is intended to embrace the rhetorical elements of form.

In Part Third the leading kinds of literature are discussed, and the general principles governing each are presented. Special effort has been made to throw light upon the nature and structure of poetry, fiction, and the drama; and it is hoped that the chapters in which these subjects are treated will be found particularly interesting and helpful.

Each chapter is followed by a list of review questions and by illustrative and practical exercises. The aim has been to prepare not merely a theoretical but especially a practical text-book, for which, it is believed, there exists a felt and acknowledged need. It is hoped that this little work will contribute in some measure to make literature one of the most delightful, as it is surely one of the most important, of all branches of study.

F. V. N. PAINTER.

SALEM, VIRGINIA,
August 15, 1903.

CONTENTS

PART FIRST

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES	
CHAPTER	PAGE
I. NATURE AND OFFICE OF CRITICISM	1
II. THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK	19
III. SOME ÆSTHETIC PRINCIPLES	34

PART SECOND

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS	
IV. WORDS, SENTENCES, PARAGRAPHS	55
V. FIGURES OF SPEECH	68
VI. STYLE	84

PART THIRD

KINDS OF LITERATURE	
VII. NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF POETRY	103
VIII. KINDS OF POETRY	130
IX. EPIC AND DRAMATIC POETRY	145
X. NATURE AND FORMS OF PROSE	156
XI. ESSAYS AND ORATORY	167
XII. NATURE AND CLASSIFICATION OF FICTION	178

LITERARY CRITICISM

PART FIRST

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

CHAPTER I

NATURE AND OFFICE OF CRITICISM

1. Purpose of Literary Study. The study or reading of literature ordinarily has a threefold purpose, — knowledge, pleasure, and culture. This purpose shows us both the character of the literature which should be read and the manner in which it should be read. As a rule we should read only books of recognized excellence, and read them with sympathetic intelligence. Trashy books, whatever pleasure they may give, add but little to knowledge or culture; and immoral books often leave an ineradicable stain upon the soul. Fortunately there are good books enough to satisfy every taste and supply every need.

2. Necessity of Comprehending. A literary work cannot be of much use till it is understood. It is useless to read books entirely beyond our grasp. In the perusal of an author we should endeavor to enter as fully as possible into his thoughts and feelings. Our primary aim should be not to criticise but to comprehend. This is sometimes, especially for the young student, a

difficult task. It requires patient, painstaking labor; but in the end it brings a rich reward in profit, enjoyment, and power.

In the study of a literary classic we should aim at more than a mere intellectual apprehension of its technique and other external features. The soul should rise into sympathy with it, and feel its spiritual beauty. All literary study that falls short of this high end, however scholarly or laborious it may be, is essentially defective. The externalities of a piece of literature are comprehended in vain, unless they lead to a fuller understanding and appreciation of its spirit and life. Unfortunately, at the present time, philology and literary analysis frequently stop short of the realization of the supreme end of literary study. What should be only a means is sometimes exalted to an end.

3. Definition of Criticism. Criticism, as its etymology indicates, is the act of judging. Literary criticism endeavors to form a correct estimate of literary productions. Its endeavor is to see a piece of writing as it is. It brings literary productions into comparison with recognized principles and ideal standards; it investigates them in their matter, form, and spirit; and, as a result of this process, it determines their merits and their defects. The end of literary criticism is not fault-finding but truth. The critic should be more than a censor or caviler. He should discover and make known whatever is commendable or excellent. At its best, criticism is not a mere record of general impressions but the statement of an intelligent judgment. It is not biased or vitiated by prejudice, ignorance, or self-interest;