Practical Criticism

By

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To BEGIN WITH:

- A book is a machine to think with, but it need not, therefore, usurp the functions either of the bellows or the locomotives. Ivora A. Richards
- Criticism like rain should be gentle enough to nourish a man’s growth without destroying his roots. : Frank A. Clark
- When ambiguity in fact is a systematic, the separate scenes that a word may have are related to one another, if not as strictly as the various aspects of a building, at least to a remarkable extent”. Anonymous
What is Criticism?

- Dryden in his preface to *The State of Innocence* (1677) writes: “Criticism, as it was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant a standard of judging well.”
- Functions: To study merits and demerits of a piece of literature/art
- To evaluate ethical, moral, social, economical, psychological, literary and other values of the text
- Evaluative judicious “value judgment”
- An interpretation of interpretation
- Carlyle: “‘Criticism is the art of interpreting art.’”
- Matthew Arnold: “a disinterested Endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.” (Touch stone method of judging a literary text)
- Qualities of a good critic: objective, impersonal, superior sensibility, technical and aesthetic knowledge of poetry, sense of traditions etc.
Literary Criticism and Practical Criticism

- Literary criticism is based on a literary critic whereas practical criticism is based on the input and psychological assumptions of the common reader/receiver.
- Practical criticism does not intend to check cultural and historical context.
- Needs to decode the message at human level.
I. A. Richards: The Father of Practical/New Criticism


- English critic, poet, and teacher who was highly influential in developing a new way of reading poetry that led to the New Criticism and that also influenced some forms of reader-response criticism.

- **Publications:** *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923; with C. K. Ogden)
- *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924)
- *Practical Criticism* (1929),
- *Science and Poetry* (1926) etc.
- His notable followers: William Empson, F. R. Leavis, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, W. K. Wimsatt etc.
Practical Criticism

- I. A. Richards: *Practical Criticism* (1929)
- Related to the study of poetry that asks to
  - concentrate on ‘the words on the page’
  - without knowing the poet, historical age, traditions, contemporary poets etc.
- An organized response of the students to a piece of literature without knowing the poet and the background at the time of writing a poem
- In Chapter seven he stated two kinds of assumptions namely intellectual and emotional about the study of poetry
- He has expected “sincerity” of the readers and the critics while studying poetry.
Why practical criticism?

Problem of Valuation of a Poem

- Why to read someone else's opinion on a particular literary text?
- Why to read parasitic literature?
- Why to get second hand or third hand knowledge of a piece of art?
- Is not the critic a mere cumberer of the ground?
- Why not to rely on first hand experience without having any prejudice of the text?
Aspects of Practical Criticism

- **The Person who Wrote:** Poem is an act of personal communication/meaning intended by the poet

- **The thing that is written:** an artistic artifact that involves re-writing, deleting, inserting, changing the order of the words in order to attain final structure

- **The person who reads:** every reading is a unique experience/ various readers responses
Practical criticism Questions:

- Do poems look different if they are presented in isolation from the circumstances in which they were written or circulated?
- Do our critical responses to them change if we add in some contextual information after we have closely analyzed them?
- Do our views of a poem change if we hear it read, if we see the original manuscript, or if instead of simply seeing the words on a page, as I. A. Richards would have wished, we see words on a screen?
The Four Kinds of Meaning

Language used in literature (preeminently used in poetry) has four kinds of meanings or functions:

- **Sense:** Something said by the speaker
- **Feeling:** Speaker’s feelings or attitudes toward what he is talking about
- **Tone:** Speaker’s attitude to his listener
- **Intention:** Speaker’s aim or purpose, conscious or unconscious
Evaluating a Poem

- Who the speaker is, who he/she is talking to, when, why and where?
- The literal meaning and the meaning in general
- Refer to annotations (foot notes)
- Identify sound patterns employed to produce music e.g. alliteration, repetition, onomatopoeia etc.
- Close and Loud Reading of the poem
- Identify figures of speech e.g. simile, metaphor, personification etc.
- The choice of words, sentence structures, artistic purpose etc.
- Deeper meaning of the poem
- Compare and contrast with other similar poems if any
Critics on Practical Criticism

- S. M. Schreiber in *Literary Criticism* (1969)
  “This, the critical method of I. A. Richards, is a highly controversial subject. Carried to its logical conclusion and used to the exclusion of every other method-as it has been by some of the group who called themselves “The New Critics”- it is clearly indefensible. But *if we used with common sense*, not to the exclusion of, but as supplementary to, other approaches, it can provide an invaluable discipline in the reading of poetry.”
One Art

- The art of losing isn’t hard to master; so many things seem filled with the intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster,

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster of lost door keys, the hour badly spent. The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster: places, and names, and where it was you meant to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother’s watch. And look! my last, or next-to-last, of three loved houses went. The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster, some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent. I miss them, but it wasn’t a disaster.

- Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture I love) I shan’t have lied. It’s evident the art of losing’s not too hard to master though it may look like (Write it!) like a disaster.
Video Clip of Reading One Art
Questions

• What is the poem about? State it briefly.
• Show how the speaker’s tone grows gradually serious as the poem moves forward.
• How does the poem end? What does the last stanza suggest?
• Comment on the use of the rhyme and the rhyme-scheme.
• Explain the meaningful possibilities of the line repeated in the poem.
Barbara Roth

Elizabeth is talking about a friend in this poem. At first, she talks about the loss of real things, i.e. keys, a watch. She then talks about things that you can't get back, i.e., a continent, river. She tries to use the tone that she's detached, as if it doesn't matter, but in fact it does. It's the not the loss of a lover, but something more dear to her; it's the loss of a friend.
Frida Sloth

Every day you lose something, small things such as car keys, little things that doesn't make your day or life a total disaster, then one day it could happen to you that you would loose something valuable, something that will make you life a disaster, it might not take a day, day after day you will loose this thing bit after bit and suddenly it disappears. this thing is called love. it's not the love to a lover. it's the deepest love of all. it's the love to a friends. Think about how it would be to you, loosing your friends joking voice, or your friends smile, the little things there is with this person that makes you love that person even more, that would be a disaster, wouldn't it?
I'm doing a project for school about Elizabeth Bishop (specifically this poem) and I had to disagree with what most people have said. Has anyone actually researched her life? You might know that Bishop was a lesbian, and her partners could have been both friends and lovers. And why would you think a lover wouldn't have a lasting effect on her? This poem (actually the last stanza) lines up with her life and makes more sense if you look at it in that context.
This poem is so good with its somewhat ironic subject. Not many people consider losing an 'art' Elizabeth Bishop shows how she does not truly believe that losing 'isn't hard to master' with various gives, some of the more obvious ones including the '(Write it!)' and the slant rhymes at the end of lines 4 and 16. Also, the fact that there is one more disaster than master (if you count them) unbalances the structure, and shows that losing that someone, be it lover or friend, was truly a disaster that she has yet to master.
She was an American poet, short-story writer, and recipient of the 1976 Neustadt International Prize for Literature. She was the Poet Laureate of the United States from 1949 to 1950, the Pulitzer Prize winner for Poetry in 1956[1] and the National Book Award winner in 1970

Mother- in asylum due to mental illness

Father- diseased, inherited independent income

Denied her identity as a Lesbian poet or a female poet

 Writes in confessional style
Summary

The poem begins rather boldly with the curious claim that "the art of losing isn’t hard to master" (1.1). The speaker suggests that some things are basically made to be lost, and that losing them therefore isn’t a big deal. She suggests that we get used to loss by practicing with little things, like house keys or a little bit of wasted time here and there; the idea is that if you’re comfortable with the insignificant losses, you’ll be ready to cope when the big ones come along.

The losses mentioned in the poem grow more and more significant. First it’s the things we try to remember, like names and places, then more specific items, such as a mother’s watch or homes one has loved in the past. As these things begin to pile up, we wonder how much the speaker has actually mastered this so-called "art of losing." Is she really as glib (that is to say, smart-alecky) as she sounds, or does she still have deep feelings about all of these things? We’re not so sure.

However, the last stanza reveals a whole lot to us. We discover that the loss that really bothers her is that of a beloved person (friend, family, or lover, we don’t know). She attempts rather feebly to claim that even this loss isn’t a "disaster," though it appears to be one; at this point, though, we see that she really is still sad about the loss, and hasn’t truly gotten over it.
Poetic form: villanelle

- The villanelle has nineteen lines, divided up into six stanzas. The first five have three lines and last stanza has four.
- A very specific rhyme scheme
- Two refrains- which are lines that are repeated several times e.g. "the art of losing isn’t hard to master”
- Message: take life lightly and supportively ignoring one’s personal losses
- Irony-One can never be prepared for loses or it is really difficult to master this art