

CRITICAL AWARENESS

AN APPROACH TO LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

Critical Awareness: An Approach to Literary Criticism and Theory is a study guide to revisit the basic tenets of Literary Criticism and Theory. It is a re-studying and analysis of Classical Literary Criticism and Modern Literary Theories by some of our contemporary literary scholars, who have, through their understanding, redefined and simplified the basic elements of Criticism and Theory in Literature.

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ANTHOLOGY AND REFERENCE BOOK OF
RESEARCH ARTICLES ON LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM

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H.M. Arif, Arshi Khan, Mursalin Jahan, Zeba Rizvi



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Moral Purpose of Literature in Classical Thought

Dr. Eram Fatima

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this paper is to assess the moral value of literature from the perspective of classical thinkers, which demonstrates the persistent conviction that art may be used to foster ethical development. The fundamental theories—from Plato’s cautions to Aristotle’s catharsis to Horace’s harmony of delight and educate—continue to influence literature till present times. The study combines textual accuracy, philosophical interpretation, comparative analysis, and historical contextualization. Through close reading, the research uncovers how each thinker constructs his argument regarding mimesis, catharsis, poetic decorum, and ethical instruction. Since Plato and Aristotle write within philosophical frameworks, the research utilizes hermeneutics—the art of interpretation—to decode their views on truth, virtue, emotion, and the soul. Plato’s Theory of Forms and his concept of rational governance of the soul are considered essential to his suspicion of poetry. Aristotle’s concept of virtue ethics, emotional balance, and teleological reasoning is foundational in understanding Poetics and Ethics. Horace’s *Ars Poetica* employs a didactic and poetic mode, offering guidance to poets and dramatists. He draws on Roman rhetorical tradition, aiming to equip writers with tools to please audiences while shaping their moral sensibilities. Their legacy lives on in modern debates over the responsibility of the artist, the power of narrative, and the reader’s moral engagement with texts.

Keywords: Philosophical, Mimesis, Catharsis, Teleological, Ethics

The present paper aims to evaluate the moral purpose of literature, as seen through the lens of classical thinkers, reveals the enduring belief in art as a tool for ethical cultivation. From Plato’s warnings to Aristotle’s catharsis to Horace’s harmony of delight and instruction, the foundational theories continue to shape how we evaluate, teach, and experience literature.

In classical literary criticism, the question of whether literature should merely entertain or serve a higher moral purpose was a central debate. For ancient philosophers and critics like Plato, Aristotle, and Horace, literature was not just an art form but a powerful medium that influenced human behavior, ethics, and society. The moral function of literature refers to the