

# Lecture Series on Contemporary Theories: Introduction Lecture 3

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# English Critics

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English Criticism begins with Sir Philip Sidney.

Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (1580–1581) is in many ways a seminal text of literary criticism. It is not only a defense but also one of the most acclaimed treatises on poetics of its time. While its ideas are not original, it represents the first synthesis in the English language of the various strands and concerns of Renaissance literary criticism, drawing on Aristotle, Horace, and more recent writers such as Boccaccio and Julius Caesar Scaliger.

# Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586)

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It raises issues – such as the value and function of poetry, the nature of imitation, and the concept of nature – which were to concern literary critics in numerous languages until the late eighteenth century.

Sidney's writing of the *Apologie* as a defense of poetry was occasioned by an attack on poetry entitled *The School of Abuse* published in 1579 by a Puritan minister, Stephen Gosson.

# Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

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Ben Jonson is a poet and dramatist, and a critic.

There is plenty of criticism in his poems, plays, prefaces and in his dedications.

“Timber” or “Discoveries” is one of his famous critical works.

# Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

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In all his criticism, he wanted writers to write well not by chance but knowingly. All Ben Jonson's plays are modeled on the Latin drama. In his criticism, he follows Aristotle and Horace. "Discoveries" is a collection of notes that he made from time to time.

Jonson did not like the classic for their own sake but he wanted to raise the English standards on par with the Greek and Latin. English literature, according to Ben Jonson, had passion, imagination and expression in excess. Even Shakespeare had everything in excess. Jonson found well-tryed law in "Poetics".

# Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

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In his notes, he talks about the need of unity of action and unity of time. A story is an imitation of one action. A plot must have a beginning, middle and an end. Action in a comedy or tragedy should be fit; it should give rise to the conclusion of the play. Jonson says that a play can exceed the 24 hours of time because life has so many digressions, so art can also have digressions. Every part of a play should be one and whole.

(Some of the content has been taken from open sources on Internet)