

# Lecture Series on Contemporary Theories: Introduction Lecture 6

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# Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

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Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a great poet, but he is also a great critic.

In *Biographia Literaria* he wrote that activity of the ‘poet’s’ mind, and a ‘poem’ is merely one of the forms of us expression, a verbal expression of that activity, and poetic activity is basically an activity of the imagination. As David Daiches points out. ‘Poetry’ for Coleridge is a wider category than that of “poem”, that is poetry is a kind of activity which can be engaged in by painters or philosophers or scientists and is not confined to those who employ metrical language, or even to those who employ language of any kind.



# Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

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Poetry, in this larger sense brings, “the whole soul of man”, into activity, with each faculty playing its proper part according to its ‘relative worth and dignity’. This takes place whenever the “secondary imagination” comes into operation. Whenever the synthesizing the integrating, powers of the secondary imagination is at work, bringing all aspects of a subject into a completion unity, then poetry in this larger sense results.

# Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

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Matthew Arnold, the Victorian poet and critic, was “the first modern critic”, and could be called 'the critic's critic', being a champion not only of great poetry, but of literary criticism itself. The purpose of literary criticism, in his view, was 'to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas', and he has influenced a whole school of critics including new critics such as T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, and Allen Tate. He was the founder of the sociological school of criticism, and through his touchstone method introduced scientific objectivity to critical evaluation by providing comparison and analysis as the two primary tools of criticism.



# Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

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To Arnold a critic is a social benefactor. In his view the creative artist, no matter how much of a genius, would cut a sorry figure without the critic to come to his aid. Before Arnold a literary critic cared only for the beauties and defects of works of art, but Arnold the critic chose to be the educator and guardian of public opinion and propagator of the best ideas.

# Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

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To Arnold poetry itself was the criticism of life: “The criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty,” and in his seminal essay “The Study of Poetry” (1888) he says that poetry alone can be our sustenance and stay in an era where religious beliefs are fast losing their hold.



# Walter Pater (1839-1894)

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The concept that art needs no justification, that it need serve no purpose, and that the beauty of the fine arts is reason enough for pursuing them was adopted by many leading French authors and in England by Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Arthur Symons.

Walter Pater popularized the phrase in reaction to Arnold's "high seriousness," and "morality."

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