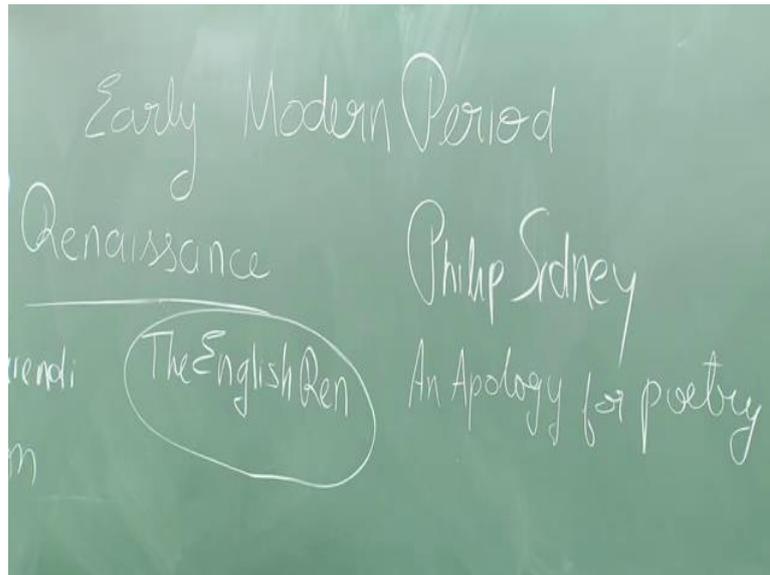


Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
Prof. Aysha Iqbal
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture - 06
Part - A
Early Modern Period

(Refer Slide Time: 00:24)



Hi, so from the classical period we move on to the Early Modern Period. The key terms here are humanism, renaissance period with particular reference to the English renaissance, and more specifically we will be looking at Sir Philip Sidney and his An Apology for Poetry. The spelling here is more contemporary for apology and poetry, the spelling for apology according to Sir Philip Sidney's times is a p o l o g i e and y in poetry is also replaced by an i and an e, so poetry, so An Apology for Poetry. So, we talk about the early modern period.

So, this is the period between 14 to mid 17 century, which has generally been regarded as the renaissance, renaissance as I am sure you know refers to a rebirth. The rebirth signifies rediscovery of the values, ethics and styles of classical Greece and Rome. The term was coined by Italian humanist, who tried to reaffirm their own continuity with the classical humanist heritage following the dark ages, for those of us who are not too familiar with the dark ages.

The dark ages refer to that particular period in civilization in our history, which is more or less synonymous with barbarism and lack of intellectual progress and enlightenment. The dark ages are the early mediaeval period of western European history, specifically the term refers to the time when there was no Roman or Holy Roman Empire in the west. So, this is generally regarded as the time period between 476 to 800 AD.

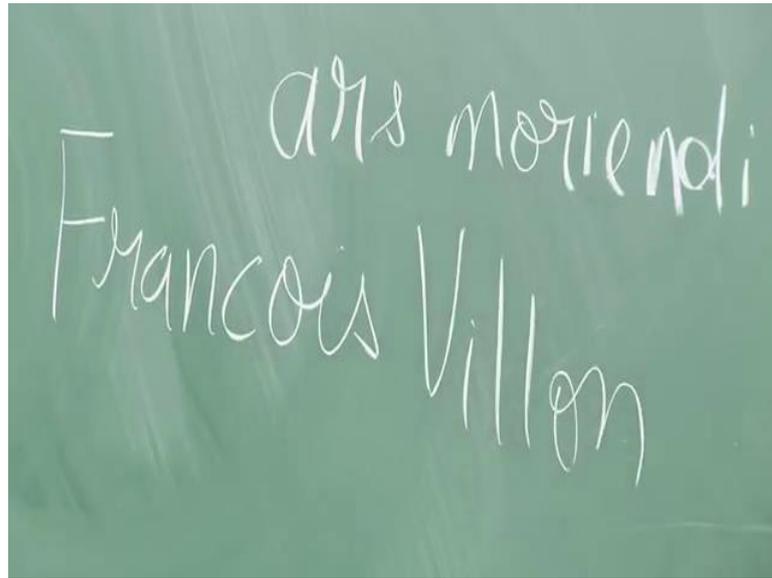
Though sometimes taken to derive its meaning from the fact that little was then known about the period. Therefore, the period is called the dark ages we do not know much about it therefore, the period is in the dark. However, the term is more pejorative, in the sense that it refers to an age of intellectual darkness and lack of enlightenment. So, what is humanism? Humanism refers to the learning or cultural impulse that is characterized by a revival of classical letters and also revival of an individualistic and critical spirit.

This also refers to a shift of emphasis from religious to secular and these are the concerns that flower during the renaissance. So, basically the take away is we are at a development or efflorescence of individualistic and critically spirit and also development of more secular way of looking at various issues. Renaissance humanism is traceable to the 14 century Italian poet Petrarch, whose enthusiasm for classic Latin writings or also referred as the humanities.

They gave great importance to the movement that eventually spread from Italy to all of Western Europe. The diffusion of humanism was facilitated by the universal use of Latin and also the invention of movable type; otherwise, known as the printing press. Humanism entails studies of the classics and also those attitudes that underpin man's relationship to God, freewill and most importantly human superiority over nature.

So, these are the basic tenets of humanism, man's relationship to God freewill and superiority over nature. So, with all these we see that we are gradually shifting towards a period, when people started questioning the kind of times they were living in and also the kinds of literature or studies they were made to do. Renaissance period was as we have been talking about is marked by revival of a interest in humanistic and the studies of humanities and also a revival of classical influence expressed in the growth, the sudden growth of the arts and literature and by the beginnings of modern science. In literature medieval forms continued to dominate the artistic imagination through or the 15th century.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:12)



So, you have a term called *ars moriendi* also known as the art of dying. *Ars moriendi* that is books of dying well and there was enormous literature on the lives of the saints and manuals of methodical prayer. So, we are talking about the mediaeval forms which continued to dominate the artistic imagination in the 15th century. And of course, one of the most popular reading of the time was a 13th century love allegory, which is known to us as *roma della rose*.

In England, literary creativity suffered due to the domination of Latin as the language of serious expression, as a result those writers who chose the vernacular to write in over loaded their works with Latinisms. A major work of the 15th century English literature was Thomas Malory's *le morte d Arthur*, that is a death of Arthur that a king Arthur. In France there was a tradition of chronicle writing, also 15th century France produced the great poet François Villon, we are talking about major concerns.

So, we are talking about the major concerns and the key people of the early modern period across Europe. The 16th century also saw a true renaissance of national literature, in protested countries the reformation had an enormous impact upon the quantity and quality of literary output. Now, the humanists believed in a thorough knowledge of the classical languages, including Greek and Latin. The humanists also insisted on the direct study without glossing, without providing a glossary of the in ancient text.

It was important to read the classics in their original form therefore, insistence on Greek and Latin. However, it was also a period when many humanists like Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch started to undermine the monopoly of Latin and theorized about vernacular languages. For instance, Boccaccio adapted classical forms to the vernacular and developed literary forms such as pastoral, ideal and romance. The development of prose in narratives, epistles and dialogues was an important achievement of the humanists.

Some of the great humanist's writers are Boccaccio, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto who wrote *Orlando Furioso*, Machiavelli who is famous for the prince and the Dutch thinker Erasmus also Rabelais from France. In England, the works of Chaucer Thomas More, Thomas More who wrote *Utopia*, and then Ben Jonson Christopher Marlowe and also Shakespeare, all these writers and playwrights expressed a humanistic vision.

This is also a period when the technologies such as the development of printing transform the conditions of reading. Much of the renaissance criticism was forged in the struggle to defend poetry and literature from charges of immorality and irrelevance to practical and political life. So, this is the time when we started witnessing a renewed, a greater interest in poetry and also not just interest in poetry, but also in defending poetry and the growth of literary criticism of this nature.

Several works of criticism of this period offered commentaries on classical text, the most influential classical text were poetics by Aristotle and Horace's, *Ars Poetica*. These works were mainly concerned with the notions of... So, the literary criticism of renaissance period was basically concerned with the notion of memes, imitation. The classical unit is, we have already referred to Aristotle and his poetics and talks about the concept of poem unities.

More significantly he insists on unity of action, that there should be a single coherent plot, rather than diverging or digressing into several other plots and subplots. So, he insists on having a unity of action, we also talk about the unities of time and place. Renaissance criticism also focused on the didactic role of literature, the use of vernacular, the in and also the invention of news on such as the tragedy comedy.

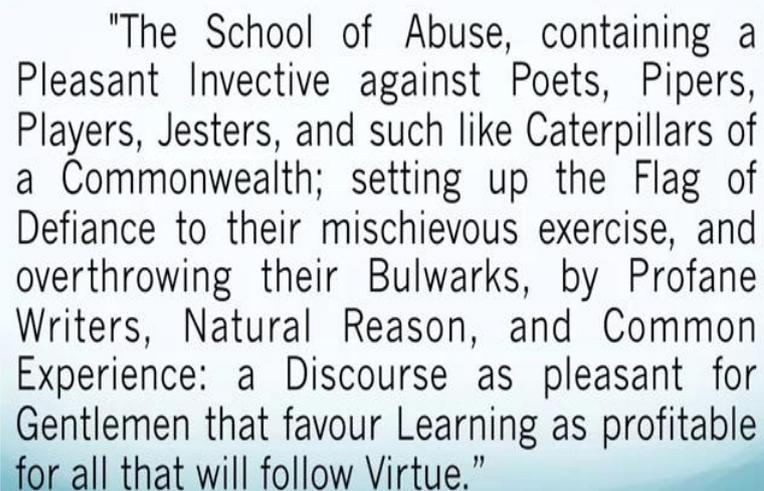
We move on to talk about Sir Philip Sidney, the great renaissance thinker, writer poet who is now remembered as a true renaissance man. He was a courtier, statesman, soldier poet and also a great patron of scholars and poets and he lived between 1554 and 1586

and he considered the ideal gentleman of his day. Sidney wrote *A Pastoral Romance*, *The Countess of Pembroke Arcadia* published in 1581, he also produces a sonnet cycle called *Astrophel and Stella* between 1581 and 1582.

Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* published between 1580 and 1581 is a seminal text of literary criticism. It is ideas, echo, the thoughts of the classical writers it illustrates, the first synthesis in the English language of the various strengths and concerns of renaissance literary criticism. Sidney's work which draws on the works of Aristotle, Horace and Boccaccio, raises issues such as the value of poetry, the nature of imitation and the concept of nature.

Let me now give you a background to apology to poetry. Now, the writing of this piece was probably suggested to him by the fact that a young student and also a young playwright Stephen Gosson, who came from his university about the time when the first theatres were build, he took to writing plays. However, soon turned biased against the theatre, in 1579 he attacked poets in a piece which he called and this is an interesting name.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:02)

A quote from Stephen Gosson's 'The School of Abuse' is displayed within a light blue rectangular box. The text is in a black, serif font and reads: "The School of Abuse, containing a Pleasant Invective against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, and such like Caterpillars of a Commonwealth; setting up the Flag of Defiance to their mischievous exercise, and overthrowing their Bulwarks, by Profane Writers, Natural Reason, and Common Experience: a Discourse as pleasant for Gentlemen that favour Learning as profitable for all that will follow Virtue."

The school of abuse, containing a pleasant invective against poets, pipers, players, jesters and such like caterpillars of a commonwealth; setting up the flag of defiance to their mischievous exercise and overthrowing their bulwarks by profane writers, natural reason and common experience. A discourse as pleasant for gentlemen that favour learning as

profitable for all that will follow virtue, this is the title. For practical purposes, we will call it the school of abuse by Steven Gosson.

This discourse was dedicated by Gosson to the right noble gentleman master Philip Sidney esquire. So, this particular indictment of poets was dedicated to a poet, which is quite ironical and the poet is Philip Sidney. Sidney himself wrote worse and he was companion with the poets and he also was great friends with Adamant Spencer, who is the poet of fairy queen. Now, Gosson pamphlet was only one expression of the narrow form of puritan opinion that had been misled into attacks on poetry and music.

Poets and players and musicians, artists in general were considered as a people with ideal aptitude and a people who were more or less worthless and shrugged from the life of duty. Now, at this point you can think of Plato's ideas, who even recommended that poets should be banished, because most of them are anyway useless to the cause and worthless to the cause of the republic. So, Philip Sidney's retort was apology for poetries, his retort to Steven Gosson's School of Abuse.

In 1581 he published this, he wrote rather this peace and which was first printed in 1595 that is 9 years after his death and it is called Apology for Poetry. Now, why the word apology, why should he use a word like that. So, we have to know that historically and according to the style of those times, apology is a Greek word, apologia it is derived from a Greek word apologia, which literally means speech in defence.

It is usually an autobiographical form, in which defence is the framework for a discussion by the author of his personal beliefs and viewpoints. Some of the early examples are Plato's apology, in which Socrates answers the charges of his accusers by giving a brief history of his life and his moral commitment. The French philosopher Montaigne, who wrote Apologie de Raimond Sebond which was published in 1580 and he uses a defence of the beliefs of a 15th century Spaniard as a pretext for presenting his own views on the fidelity of reason.

What I am trying to tell you is that this conceded, this style was used by poets and writers of that period to defend themselves or to refute certain kinds of attacks and charges, so therefore, the world apology. Another well known apology is an apology for the life of Mister Colley Cibber comedian published in 1740. Colley Cibber was the English actor

manager who responds to his critic, the great poet Alexander Pope the neo-classicists and here the actor presents Pope with the summary of the achievement of his long career.

Again, John Henry Newman in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* published in 1864, he examines the religious principles that led him to his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church. Now, Sidney's apology 3 years after it was written, it was added with other pieces to the 3rd edition of his *arcadia*, and then entitled the defence of poesy, in 16 subsequent editions it continued to appear as the defence of poesy.

The same title was used in the separate editions published between 1752 and 1810. Because, the word apology has a somewhat changed, its sense in a current English. So, this word is now better known as the defence of Poesy. Sidney's apology contains a range of arguments in defence of poetry based on the relation of poetry to nature. The function of poetry has imitation and the relationship of poetry to truth and morality.

Sidney establishes that poetry was the first form in which knowledge was expressed and calls it very famously, a light giver to ignorance. So, poets give light, they provide light, rather than just being frivolous creatures as they have often been called. So, in order to substantiate himself in order to defend poets, he gives examples from the works of Levies, Homer, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. Sidney defines poetry as an art of imitation and refers to Aristotle's famous word, by now we are very familiar with *mimesis*.

So, Sidney again reverts to this very famous word, he talks about three kinds of poetic imitation, religious imitation, philosophical imitation, and then there are third kinds of poets who indulge in teaching and delighting, so poets would teach and delight. Of this particular kind, that is poets would teach and delight, Sidney says right poets who having no law, but wit, bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see.

The ultimate aim of this kind of poetry is moral, the aim of teaching and delighting is goodness. So, you see he does not diverse between delighting and teaching and all this leads to one objective, one aim that is goodness. Sidney continues that since poetry leads us towards good, it is superior to history and moral philosophy, and then again he famously says it is poetry which provides a true lively knowledge.

Responding to the charge that poetry is the mother of lies, Sidney counters the poet nothing affirms and therefore, never lied. So, he does not give you a factual representation, he does not try to present facts. Therefore, there is no question of poet being a liar, a poet writes not affirmatively, but in terms of allegories and metaphors. So, poetry has to be taken that way and not as an affirmative.

Sidney also refers to Plato's contention that poets should be banished from the ideal republic, this we have already seen in one of our earlier classes and Sidney argues that Plato opposes the abuse of poetry rather than the art itself. So, it is how poetry or a work of art or how a poem should be written, which is important rather than very broadly condemning the entire form, that is the entire artistic form.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:29)

Apologie for Poetrie

poetry is of all human learnings the most ancient, and of most fatherly antiquity, as from whence other learnings have taken their beginnings; since it is so universal that no learned nation doth despise it, nor barbarous nation is without it; since both Roman and Greek gave such divine names unto it, the one of prophesying, the other of making, and that indeed that name of making is fit for him, considering, that where all other arts retain themselves within their subject, and receive, as it were, their being from it, the poet only, only bringeth his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter, but maketh matter for a conceit; since neither his description nor end containeth any evil, the thing described cannot be evil;

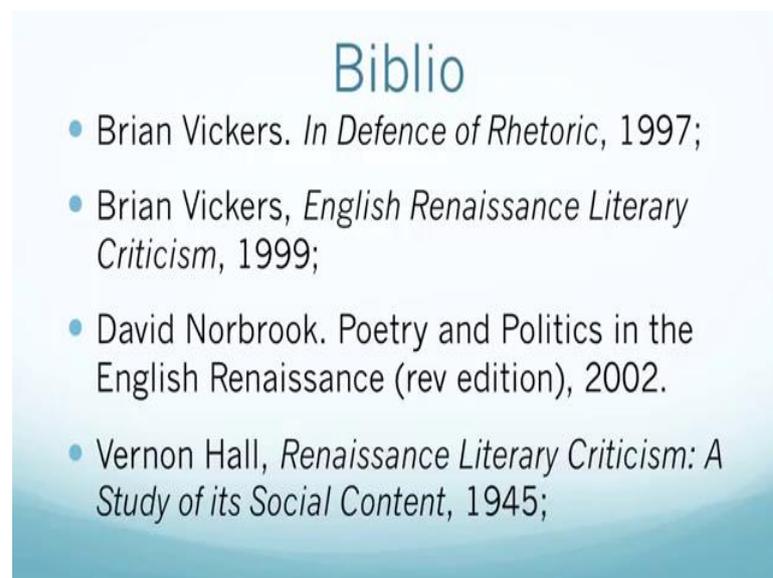
At this point, I would like to draw your attention to an excerpt from apologie for poetry by Philip Sidney, this is what it says and I quote in. Poetry is of all human learning's the most ancient and of most fatherly antiquity, as from whence other learning's have taken their beginnings. Since it is so universal that no learned nation doth despise it, nor barbarous nation is without it. Since, both Rome and Greek gave such divine names unto it, the one of prophesying, the other of making and that indeed that name of making is fit for him.

Considering that where all other arts retain themselves within their subject and receive as it were their being from it, the poet only, only bringeth his own stuff and doth not learn a

conceit out of matter, but make it matter for a conceit. Since neither his description nor end containeth any evil, the thing described cannot be evil. This is what I meant, when I said that according to Sidney, the poet does not affirm does not affirm anything and therefore, there is no question of his being a liar.

During the renaissance writers treated poetry as a higher form of rhetoric, while returning to their classical models, they rejected their stress based metre of mediaeval poets writers such as Sidney, were inspired by rhetoric to move their audience. So, this is what we have to remember from this particular class. So, this is what we have to remember that rhetoric combined with grammar was an important style and important form in the English

(Refer Slide Time: 25:23)



Biblio

- Brian Vickers. *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 1997;
- Brian Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 1999;
- David Norbrook. *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (rev edition), 2002.
- Vernon Hall, *Renaissance Literary Criticism: A Study of its Social Content*, 1945;

And here is the bibliography In Defence of Rhetoric by Brian Vickers again by the same author English Renaissance Literary Criticism. David Norbrooks, Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance and Vernon Hall's Renaissance Literary Criticism: A Study of its Social Content.

Thank you very much; we meet for the next class that is on neoclassicism.