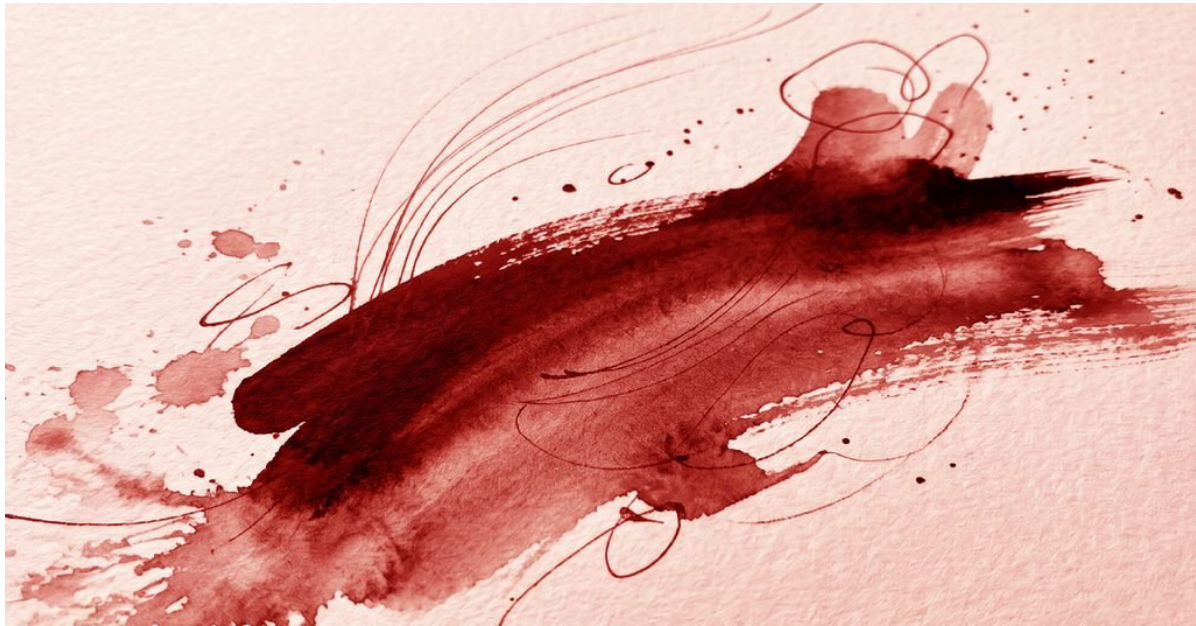


On Expressing an Opinion

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Anybody who creates a thing can also be critical of it. Critical perception and creative imagination are not contradictory. They help each other. A carpenter who makes a chair knows its strength. He can tell a buyer how long the chair will last. He knows the strength as well as the weakness of the chair and on the basis of his knowledge of the strength and weakness of the chair, he can also tell how it could have been made better. What is true of making a chair, is also true of writing a poem or a novel. Writing a novel is also like building a house. The builder of the house must know the strength of the material with which he builds. The builder of the house can also be a critic of the building.

Literary criticism is also literature and the critic is also a writer. Therefore, the critic's opinion or judgements are considered worthy of attention by others. The critic is not an expert who compels writers to write according to the rules he lays down. The fundamental assumptions that a literary theory lay's down for a critic to assess the value of a novel or a drama are derived from a close reading of novels and dramas. That started with Aristotle's *Poetics*, the source book of all western criticism. Before defining what plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song might be, he thoroughly

studied all existing Greek plays of his time. In a way, literature is about life and literary criticism is about those books written on life. But it is unsafe to conclude that literary criticism is book on books and a secondary activity. In this context, we may recall the debate between Plato and Aristotle over the principle of mimesis. Aristotle refuted the charge against poetry that it is twice removed from reality. He pointed out that a poet need not imitate what has already happened. He imitates what is probable, what may well happen.

R. J. Rees in an essay on criticism says that one need not be a hen in order to be a critic on eggs. One can be a good critic without writing a novel or a poem. And there are also critics whose principal literary contribution is to literary criticism.

An important question raised by some contemporary thinkers is whether knowledge of theory is essential to judge the value of a work of art. A man has read a novel and expressed his opinion on the book. Is his opinion on the book useless because he has no knowledge of the theory of the novel? Does theory-knowledge help a reader to understand the novel better? Such questions, perhaps do not have correct definite answers but asking a correct question is important. Expressing an opinion of a book should not be the special privilege of literary experts alone. Anybody who has read a book has the right to express an opinion on it. It need not necessarily be based on literary theories.