

The Importance of the Third Stage–High Conception of Poetry This brief survey of the evolution of criticism during the Elizabethan age makes it clear that the most important stage in this evolution is the third one, when there was much thinking over the nature and function of poetry, and an English theory of poetry was formulated. Poets were regarded as spiritual legislators and reformers; the function of poetry was considered to be to delight as well as to instruct. It can attain perfection only by a divine instinct, or by a great excellence of nature or by vast observation and experience of the world. The conception of poetry, and the function of a poet, was high.