

CLASSICAL
AND MEDIEVAL
LITERATURE
CRITICISM



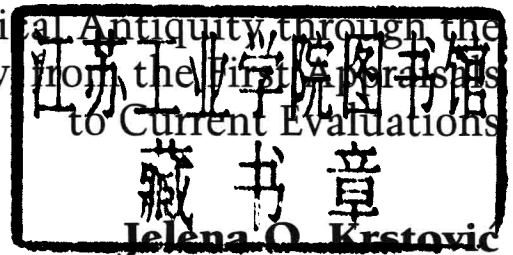
CMLC

4

Volume 4

CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL LITERATURE CRITICISM

Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of World
Authors from Classical Antiquity through the
Fourteenth Century from the first Appraisals
to Current Evaluations



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Preface

The literatures of the ancient and medieval world provide the foundation of all subsequent literatures. In fact, the philosophical, stylistic, and thematic elements of these literatures echo constantly throughout literary history to the present day. For that reason, the study of the literature and philosophy of ancient and medieval authors is important to the education of any individual. Through such study we achieve a greater understanding of ourselves and of the continuity of human experience.

Literary criticism provides an essential guide to the literature of the past, and so, by extension, to the nature of the human condition. Similarly, because the criteria by which a work is judged reflect the philosophical and social attitudes of an era, the study of criticism can also provide insight into the moral and intellectual climate of a society. The range of critical response to a work of literature thus helps us to understand the work, the author, the world of the author, and our own world.

The Scope of the Series

Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC) is designed to serve as an introduction to the authors and literary works of antiquity through the fourteenth century as well as to the most significant commentators on these authors and works. The great poets, prose writers, dramatists, and philosophers of these centuries form the basis of most literature, humanities, philosophy, and classics curriculums, so that virtually every student will encounter many of these works during the course of an advanced education. Since a vast amount of critical material confronts the student, *CMLC* presents significant passages from the most important criticism published in English to aid students in the location and selection of commentaries on the authors of this period.

The need for *CMLC* was suggested by the usefulness of the Gale series *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, and *Shakespearean Criticism*. With the appearance of *CMLC*, the Gale literary criticism series is now able to include criticism about every major author and literary work from the beginning of recorded history to the latest Nobel Prize winner. For further information about Gale's other criticism series, please consult the Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series preceding the title page of this volume.

Each volume of *CMLC* is carefully compiled to include major authors and works representing a variety of nationalities and time periods. For example, in the fourth volume of *CMLC* Aristophanes represents ancient Greece, while *Poem of the Cid* and the *Mystery of Adam* reflect the culture of medieval Europe. In addition to these widely recognized authors and works, *CMLC* also presents surveys of lesser-known authors and writings that are important to an understanding of the literature of their nation, to the development of philosophy or a literary genre, or to an appreciation of the shared and unique elements of cultures separated by time and distance. An example of such a work in the fourth volume of *CMLC* is *The Book of Psalms*, a major text of Hebrew culture that is well known but often overlooked as a work of literature.

Each entry in *CMLC* provides an overview of major criticism on an author or literary work. For that reason, the editors include only four to six authors in each 500 page volume so that the subject of each entry may be thoroughly discussed. Although the editors have attempted to include the most important criticism from all eras, they have emphasized nineteenth- and twentieth- century appraisals, which are more accessible to the student and which often summarize or subsume the work of critics from previous centuries. Each entry attempts to provide a historical survey of *critical* response to an author or work, presenting as many varied interpretations as possible; therefore, we have excluded philological, linguistic, and historical studies which, though of great importance, are of less immediate interest to our readers—secondary school students, undergraduates, and graduate students seeking general critical reaction. References to these studies may be found in the additional bibliography appended to each entry. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the subject has received from critics writing in English and from foreign criticism in translation. Critical articles and books that have not been translated into English are excluded. Every attempt has been made to identify and include excerpts from seminal essays on each author or work.

An author may appear more than once in the series because his or her writings have been the subject of such a vast amount of criticism that the editors have chosen to discuss specific works or groups of works in separate entries. For example, Homer will be represented by three entries, one devoted to the *Iliad*, one to the *Odyssey*, and one to the Homeric hymns.

Organization of the Book

Each entry in the series consists of the following elements: an author or title heading, historical and critical introduction, list of principal English translations, excerpts of criticism (each preceded by an explanatory note and followed by a bibliographical citation), illustrations, and an additional bibliography for further reading.

- The *author heading* consists of the author's full name, followed by birth and death dates, or the complete title of the literary work discussed in the entry, followed by the most common form of the title in English translation and the date of original composition. In entries devoted to a single author, the unbracketed portion of the name denotes the form under which the author is most commonly known. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the historical and critical introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use non-Roman alphabets. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date, or the date of composition of a literary work, is indicated by a question mark when the date is thought to be a specific year or by circa when more precise dating is not possible.
- The *historical and critical introduction* contains background information designed to introduce the reader to an author or literary work and to the critical debate represented in the entry. Problems in the dating of works or in assigning birth and death dates to authors will be explained in the introduction, and textual information will be provided when necessary to an understanding of the work or author in question.
- Most of the entries include *illustrations*, such as manuscript pages, historic artifacts, maps, charts, or representations of significant events or places.
- The *list of principal English translations* is chronological by date of first publication and is included as an aid to the student seeking translated versions or editions of these works for study. The list will focus primarily upon twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics.
- *Criticism* is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All titles featured in the critical entry are printed in boldface type to enable the user to ascertain without difficulty the subject of the criticism. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of each essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. When an anonymous essay is later attributed to a critic, the critic's name appears in brackets at the beginning of the excerpt and in the bibliographical citation. Many critical entries in *CMLC* also contain translated material to aid users. Unless otherwise noted, translations within brackets are by the editors; translations within parentheses are by the author of the excerpt. Publication information (such as publisher names and book prices) and parenthetical numerical references (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of a work) have been deleted at the editor's discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.
- Critical essays are prefaced by *explanatory notes* as an additional aid to students using *CMLC*. The explanatory notes provide several types of useful information, including: the reputation of a critic, the importance of a work of criticism, the specific type of criticism (biographical, psychoanalytic, structuralist, etc.), a synopsis of the criticism, and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author's work. Dates in parentheses within the explanatory notes refer to a book publication date when they follow a book title and to an essay date when they follow a critic's name.
- A complete *bibliographical citation* designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book by the interested reader follows each piece of criticism.
- The *further reading* appearing at the end of each author entry suggests further reading on the author or work. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

Cumulative Indexes

Each volume of *CMLC* includes a cumulative index to authors listing all the authors who have appeared in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Short Story Criticism*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (as well as individual works when the authors of those works are unknown), along with cross-references to the Gale series *Children's Literature Review*, *Authors in the News*, *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography*, *Something about the Author*, *Something about the Author Autobiography Series*, and *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children*. Readers will welcome this cumulated author index as a useful tool for locating an author within the various series.

The index, which lists birth and death dates when available, will be particularly valuable for those authors who are identified with a certain period but whose death date causes them to be placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is found in *TCLC*, yet a writer often associated with him, Ernest Hemingway, is found in *CLC*.

Beginning with the second volume, *CMLC* will also include a cumulative nationality index. Authors and/or works are grouped by nationality, and the volume in which criticism on them may be found is indicated.

Each volume of *CMLC* will also contain a title index, which cumulates with the second volume. Primary works under critical consideration are listed, followed by the corresponding volume and page numbers where criticism may be located. Foreign language titles that have been translated are followed by the titles of the translation, for example: *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (*The Song of Igor's Campaign*). Page numbers following these translated titles refer to all pages on which any form of the title, either foreign language or translated, appear. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, as well as poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while all individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks. In cases where the same title is used by different authors, the author's surname is given in parentheses after the title, e.g., *Collected Poems* (Horace) and *Collected Poems* (Sappho).

An index to critics, which cumulates with the second volume, is another useful feature of *CMLC*. Under each critic's name are listed the authors and/or works on whom the critic has written and the volume and page number where the criticism may be found.

Suggestions Are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest authors or works to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to write the editor or call 1-800-347-GALE.

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Authors and Works to Be Featured in Forthcoming Volumes

Bertran de Born (French poet)—A warrior-troubadour, de Born is among the greatest representatives of medieval Provençal poetry. His works, which include love songs and fierce *sirventes* in praise of war, were admired by Dante, who nevertheless condemned the poet as a sower of discord in the *Inferno*.

Hesiod (Greek poet)—An important early Greek poet, Hesiod is believed to have been the author of the *Works and Days* and the *Theogony*, a verse account of the origins of the world that provided a basis for later Greek mythology. Praised for his realistic tone as much as for his skillful weaving of myth—including, for example, the story of Pandora's box—Hesiod remains a highly influential figure in world literature.

Mahabharata—One of the two great epics of ancient India, the *Mahabharata* is known as the longest epic poem in world literature. A labyrinthine chronicle of a cataclysmic dynastic war, it is also—particularly in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the profound religious poem which is inserted in the text—a complex meditation on human fate.

Wolfram von Eschenbach (German poet)—Widely regarded as the foremost German epic poet of the Middle Ages, Wolfram is best known as the author of *Parzival*, often considered the finest German romance. His works, exceedingly popular in the Middle Ages, continue to be esteemed for their humor, believable characters, highly developed religious values, and their blending of the real and the fantastic.

Authors and Works to Appear in Future Volumes

- Abelard, Peter 1079-1142
 Abu Nuwas, Hasan ibn Hanai 762-c.815
 Aelfric c.955-c.1020
 Aeschylus c.525-456 B.C.
 Aesop 6th century B.C.
 Agathon c.445-c.399 B.C.
 Albertus Magnus 1206-1280
 Alcaeus 7-6th century B.C.
 Alcman fl. 7th century B.C.
 Alcuin 735-804
Amadís de Gaula c. 14th century
 Ambrose, St. 339-397
 Anacreon c.570-c.485 B.C.
Ancrene Riwe c.1200?
 Anna Comnena 1083-c.1153
 Antiphon c.480-411 B.C.
 Apollodorus c. 180-c.120 B.C.
 Apollonius Rhodius c.295-? B.C.
 Aquinas, St. Thomas c.1225-1274
 Archilochus c.710-c.648 B.C.
 Aristarchus c.217-c.143 B.C.
 Aristides, Aelius c.117-189
 Aristotle 384-322 B.C.
 Aristoxenus c.370-?B.C.
 Arnaut, Daniel fl. c.1200
 Artemidorus 2nd century
Aucassin et Nicolette c.1200
 Augustine, St. 354-430
 Augustus 63 B.C.-A.D.14
 Aurelius, Marcus 121-180
 Averroes 1126-1198
 Avicenna 980-1037
 Bacon, Roger 1210/14-1292
Barlaam and Josaphat 13th century
 Basil, St. 329-379
Batrachomyomachia 5th century B.C.?
 Bede 673-735
 Benedict, St. c.480-c.543
 Bernard, St. (Bernard of Clairvaux) 1090-1153
 Bertran de Born fl. c.1140
Bhavagad gita c.200 B.C.
The Bible
 Bion c.325-c.255 B.C.
 Boccaccio, Giovanni 1313-1375
 Boethius, Anicius Manlius Severinus c.480-524
Bogurodzica c. late 13th century
Book of Odes c.1000-c.700 B.C.
Books of Chilam Balam
 Caedmon ?-c.670
 Caesar, Gaius Julius 100-44 B.C.
 Callimachus c.310-c.240 B.C.
Carmina Burana 13th century
 Cassiodorus, Flavius Magnus Aurelius c.487-583
 Cato, Marcus Porcius 234-149 B.C.
 Catullus, Gaius Valerius c.84-c.54 B.C.
 Chrétien de Troyes 12th century
 Chrysostom, John c.350-407
Ch'u Elegies 125
 Cinna, Gaius Helvius c.70-44 B.C.
 Claudian c.370-404
 Claudius 10 B.C.-A.D.54
 Clement of Alexandria c.150-214
 Columba, St. c.520-597
 Compagni, Dino c.1255-1324
 Confucius c.551-c.479 B.C.
 Conon of Béthune c.1150-c.1219
 Constantine Porphyrogenitus 905-959
 Corinna 6th century B.C.
 Cynewulf 8th-9th centuries
 Cyprian, St. c.200-258
 Cyril of Scythopolis c.524-c.560
 Dante Alighieri 1265-1321
 Democritus c.460 B.C.
 Demosthenes 384-322 B.C.
 Dio Chrysostom c.40-c.112
 Diodorus Siculus fl. 60-30 B.C.
 Diogenes Laertius early 3rd century
 Dionysius of Halicarnassus fl.80-30 B.C.
 Eckhart, Meister c.1260-1327
Eddas c.900-1200
Egils saga Skalla-Grímsonnar 13th century
 Egyptian mythology
 Einhard c.770-840
 Empedocles c.493-c.433 B.C.
 Ennius, Quintus 239-169 B.C.
 Epictetus c.55-135
 Epicurus 341-271 B.C.
 Euripides c.484-406? B.C.
 Eusebius c.260-c.340
 Eustathius of Thessalonica ?-c.1195
Fioretti di San Francesco 14th century
 Francis, St. c.1182-1226
Fredegar 7th or 8th century
 Galen c.129-199?
 "Gawain Poet" fl. 1370
 Gellius, Aulus c.130-c.180
 Geoffrey of Monmouth 1100?-1154
Gesta Francorum
Gesta Romanorum c.1300
Gisla saga Súrssonar c.1225
 Gorgias c.483-c.376 B.C.
 Gottfried von Strassburg fl. 1210
 Greek mythology
 Gregory the Great, St. c.540-604
 Gregory of Nyssa c.335-c.394
 Gregory of Tours c.540-594
Grettis saga c.1300
 Grosseteste, Robert c.1168-1253
 Gui, Chatelain de Coucy d.1203
Guy of Warwick
 Hadrian 76-138
 Han Yü 768-824
 Hartmann von Aue fl. 1190-1210
 Heliodorus 3rd century
 Heraclitus fl. c.500 B.C.
 Herodotus c.484-c.420 B.C.
 Hesiod 800-700 B.C.
 Hippocrates of Cos c.460-380 B.C.
Historia Augusta c.360
 Horace 65-8 B.C.
 Hugo von Trimberg c.1230-c.1313
 Ibibus fl. 6th century B.C.
 Imru'û'l-Qais ?-c.540
 Irenaeus, St. c.130-c.200
 Isidore of Seville, St. c.560-636
 Isocrates 436-338 B.C.
 Jacques de Vitry c.1160-1240
 Jalâl al-Dîn 1207-1273
 Jaufré Rudel 12th century
 Jean Bodel c.1165-c.1210
 Jean Renart fl. early 13th century
 Jerome, St. c.348-420
 John Chrysostom, St. c.350-407
 John of Salisbury c.1115-1180
 Josephus 37?-?
 Julian 331?-363
 Juvenal 60?-130?
 Kakinomoto Hitomaro c.700
Kalevala
 Kalidasa c.400
Kamasutra
Kojiki c.712
Konjaku monogatari c.1050
Koran c.632
 Lactantius, Lucius Caelius Firmianus c.250-c.320
 Lao Tzu 6th century B.C.
 Leo VI 866-912
 Livy 59 B.C.-A.D. 17
 Longinus 1st century
 Lucan 39-65
 Lucian c.120-c.180
 Lucretius c.95-c.55 B.C.
 Lully, Raymond c.1235-1315
Mabinogion early medieval period
 Machaut, Guillaume de 1300-1377
 Macrobius, Ambrosius Theodosius 4th-5th centuries
 Mahabharata c.400 B.C.-A.D. 200
 Maimonides 1135-1204
 "Mandeville, Sir John" fl. 1350
 Manuel, Don Juan 1282-1345
 Marie de France fl. late 12th century
 Martial c.40-c.104
 Martianus Capella fl. early 5th century

Meleager c.140-70 B.C.
 Menander 341-290 B.C.
Morte Arthure 14th century
 Nachmanides 1194-c.1270
 Native American legends and tales
Nibelungenlied c.1200
 Norse sagas
Novellino, Il late 13th century
Odyssey 8th century B.C.
 Omar Khayyâm ?-1122?
 Ono Komachi c.850
 Origen c.185-253
 Ovid 43 B.C.-A.D. 17?
The Owl and the Nightingale c.1200
 Parmenides c.515-?B.C.
 Pausanias fl. 2nd century
 Petrarch, Francesco 1304-1374
 Petronius Arbiter, Gaius c. 1st century
 Phaedrus c.15 B.C.-50A.D.
 Philemon c.361-262 B.C.
 Philo 30 B.C.-c.40A.D.
 Photius c.820-891
 Pindar 518-438 B.C.
 Plato c.429-347 B.C.
 Plautus, Titus Maccius c.254-184 B.C.
 Pliny the Elder 23-79
 Pliny the Younger c.61-c.114
 Plotinus 205-70
 Plutarch c.46-c.127
 Po Chü-i 772-846

Polo, Marco 1254?-1324
 Polybius c.200-c.118-B.C.
 Proclus c.410-485
 Propertius, Sextus c.54-c.16 B.C.
 Prudentius 348-c.405
 Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite c.500
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Ramayana
Razón de amor early 13th century
Rgveda c.1500-1000 B.C.
 Rolle, Richard c.1300-1349
Roman de la rose c.1225-1277
Roman de Renart c.1174-1205
Russian Primary Chronicle
 12th century
 Runsbroeck, Jan van 1293-1381
 Sa'dî c.1215-1292?
 Sallust c.86-c.35 B.C.
 Saxo Grammaticus c.1150-c.1206
 Sei Shonagon c.1000
 Seneca, Lucius Annaeus, the Younger
 4 B.C.-A.D.65
 Sextus Empiricus fl. 2nd century
 Simonides c.556-c.468 B.C.
 Snorri Sturulson 1179-1241
 Socrates 469?-399 B.C.
 Solon c.640-c.560 B.C.
 Sordello fl. mid 13th century
 Suetonius c.70-c.130

Sumerian mythology
 Su Shih 1036-1101
 Tacitus, Cornelius c.55-?
Talmud
 Tannhäuser fl. mid 13th century
 Terence 195?-159 B.C.
 Tertullianus, Quintus Septimus Florens
 c.160-c.225
 Theocritus c.310-250 B.C.
 Theophrastus c.370-c.285 B.C.
 Thucydides c.455-c.399 B.C.
 Tibullus, Albius c.50-19 B.C.
 Tu Fu 712-770
Upanishad c.800-500 B.C.
 Varro, Marcus Terentius 116-27 B.C.
Veda 1500-500 B.C.
 Ventadorn, Bernart de fl. c.1145-1180
 Vergil 70-19 B.C.
 Wace, Robert c.1100-1184
 Walther von der Vogelweide
 c.1170-c.1230
 William of Malmesbury c.1090-c.1143
 William of Ockham 1285-c.1349
 Wolfram von Eschenbach fl. early
 13th century
 Wyclif(fe), John c.1328-1384
 Xenophon c.430-c.354 B.C.
 Zeno of Elea fl. c.450 B.C.
 Zosimus 5th century

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Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

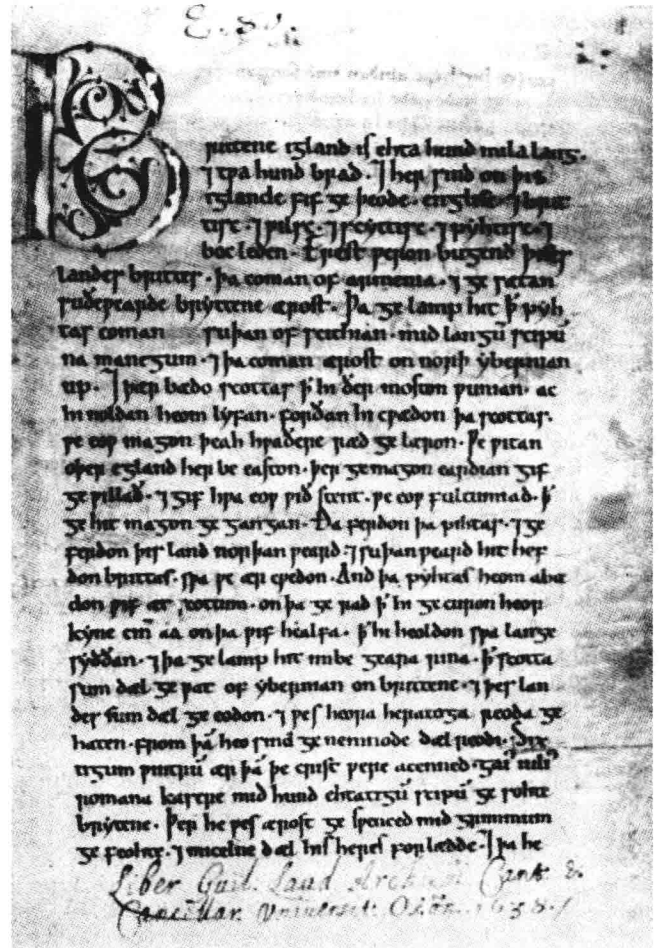
c. 890-1154

English history and poetry.

"Philosophically considered," wrote the English scholar James Ingram in the introduction to his translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "this ancient record is the *second* great phenomenon in the history of mankind. For, if we except the sacred annals of the Jews, contained in the several books of the *Old Testament*, there is no other work extant, ancient or modern, which exhibits at one view a regular and chronological panorama of a PEOPLE, described in rapid succession by different writers, through so many ages, in their own vernacular LANGUAGE." Critics, even those not inclined to examine this work from the perspective of world history, concur with Ingram's assessment of the *Chronicle's* importance as a national historical record. An invaluable source for historians of pre-Norman England, a narrative documenting the development of English prose, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is one of the great literary and historical monuments of medieval Europe, heralding the era of national consciousness and of vernacular literature. Since vernacular chronicles are extremely rare before the thirteenth century, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, believed to have been begun about 890, is also one of the oldest in Europe, other examples being Irish annals and the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the first version of which was compiled c. 1112. Finally, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is known for its remarkable prose and poetic fragments, including the "Battle of Maldon" and the "Battle of Brunanburh," which are regarded as literary accomplishments of the highest rank.

The compiling of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* began in Wessex during King Alfred's reign. In the ninth century, parts of England were under Danish rule, and Wessex, as well as other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, struggled to retain their sovereignty. However, after Alfred's crucial victory over the Danes at Edington in 878, Wessex emerged as the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and a force capable of thwarting the Danish invaders. Alfred proceeded to consolidate his rule by initiating military and political reform. Like Charlemagne, the Frankish king crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800, Alfred effected a revival of learning in an effort to forestall the decay of Latin scholarship. But Alfred also championed the vernacular, translating important Latin books into Anglo-Saxon and supporting education in the vernacular. Some researchers believe that Alfred's personal interest in Anglo-Saxon may have influenced the initial compilers of the *Chronicle* to write in their native tongue rather than in Latin.

The *Chronicle*, which starts with the Christian era, incorporates information from older sources such as Bede's *Latin Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (731). The earliest entries were inscribed in Easter tables, in the spaces left between the dates of future Easters; the manuscript of the first version, compiled in Wessex, probably in the capital city of Winchester, was copied and sent to monasteries in England, where compilation continued. This fact explains the existence of several versions of the *Chronicle* which, as scholars agree, fall into four basic recensions—the *Parker Chronicle*, the *Abingdon Chronicles*, the *Worcester Chronicle*, and the *Laud*



The first page of the Peterborough Chronicle, one of the four recensions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

Chronicle—and have survived in seven manuscripts. The *Parker Chronicle* and the *Laud Chronicle* are generally accepted as the most exhaustive and authoritative texts. Named after Archbishop Parker, who bequeathed it to the Corpus Christi College of Cambridge University in 1575, the *Parker Chronicle*, which records events from the beginning of the Christian era to 1070, was written by a succession of scribes, possibly at Winchester toward the end of the ninth century, and at Canterbury in the eleventh. An abbreviated version of the text made by William Lambard was printed in 1643 by A. Whelock. The *Laud Chronicle*, which is also known as the *Peterborough Chronicle*, covers the years 1121 to 1154, the final period of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

Although most entries of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are terse and not of a literary nature, focusing instead on historical events, scholars have noted its importance as a source for the

study of the development of English prose. William L. Renwick and Harold Orton assert, for example, that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provides a continuous history of English prose from the Alfredian era to the Norman Conquest by virtue of the fact that it is an original vernacular document, independent of Latin models. Critics have paid particular attention to the longer entries, such as the description of the murder of King Cynewulf of Wessex in 757, incorrectly recorded as occurring in 755, which generally show remarkable stylistic sophistication and aptitude for dramatic narration. The description of Cynewulf's death, as C. L. Wrenn observed, also betrays a significant feature of Anglo-Saxon prose—namely, the survival of the heroic narrative style of the Old Norse Sagas. Even more remarkable in this respect are the two famous poetic fragments of the *Chronicle*, the "Battle of Maldon" and the "Battle of Brunanburh." Written in a Christian spirit, the "Battle of Maldon," which describes an Anglo-Saxon defeat in battle against invading Norse warriors in 991, harks back to a semi-mythological time of pagan heroism, celebrating the quintessentially Germanic trait of absolute faithfulness to one's military leader. "What is especially astonishing about 'The Battle of Maldon,'" wrote Wrenn, "is its depth and the fidelity of its expression to the whole of the ancient Germanic spirit." Widely regarded as one of the great Anglo-Saxon poems, the "Battle of Maldon" combines technical inventiveness, a certain literary antiquarianism, and profound psychological insight, yielding a haunting depiction of courage in tragedy. Its epic tone has prompted the distinguished medievalist W. P. Ker to compare it to the *Iliad*; other critics have commented on the poet's descriptions of mental states, unusual in medieval literature. Initially regarded as a lesser work and more of a purely historical poem than the "Battle of Maldon," the "Battle of Brunanburh" has been praised—namely, by Dolores Warwick Freese—as a symbolic attempt to bridge the chasm between enemies in battle.

The purely annalistic segments of the *Chronicle*, though they may not be suitable for literary analysis, are nevertheless recognized as a crucial element of the historical narrative. In Audrey L. Meaney's opinion, the short passages are in fact the most successful, for "of no writer more than the Chronicler can it be said that his skill is to hide his skill." "A Historian," wrote Meaney, quoting John Tzetzes, the Byzantine historian and polymath, "ought to be grave and clear, persuasive and charming, fierce when necessary and sometimes expansive." Scholars agree that the scribes, annalists, historians, prose stylists, and poets who wrote the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* admirably fulfilled Tzetzes's requirements.

PRINCIPAL ENGLISH EDITIONS

- The Saxon Chronicle* (translated by James Ingram) 1823
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (translated by Benjamin Thorpe) 1861
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (translated by George Norman Garmonsway) 1953
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (translated by Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie Tucker) 1961
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (translated by Anne Savage) 1983

W. P. KER (essay date 1896)

[Ker was a noted English medievalist and an authority on comparative European literature and the history of literary forms. In the following excerpt from an essay written in 1896, he compares the "Battle of Maldon," the most famous poetic fragment of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, to Homer's *Iliad* and the Chanson de Roland, concluding that despite similarities with heroic poems in Western literature, the Anglo-Saxon poem primarily expresses the Northern heroic ethos.]

[There] is nothing in the whole range of English literature so like a scene from the *Iliad* as the narrative of Maldon. It is a battle in which the separate deeds of the fighters are described, with not quite so much anatomy as in Homer. The fighting about the body of Byrhtnoth is described as strongly, as "the Fighting at the Wall" in the twelfth book of the *Iliad*, and essentially in the same way, with the interchange of blows clearly noted, together with the speeches and thoughts of the combatants. Even the most heroic speech in Homer, even the power of Sarpedon's address to Glaucus in the twelfth book of the *Iliad*, cannot discredit, by comparison, the heroism and the sublimity of the speech of the "old companion" at the end of "Maldon." The language is simple, but it is not less adequate in its own way than the simplicity of Sarpedon's argument. It states, perhaps more clearly and absolutely than anything in Greek, the Northern principle of resistance to all odds, and defiance of ruin. In the North the individual spirit asserts itself more absolutely against the bodily enemies than in Greece; the defiance is made wholly independent of any vestige of prudent consideration; the contradiction, "Thought the harder, Heart the keener, Mood the more, as our Might lessens," is stated in the most extreme terms. This does not destroy the resemblance between the Greek and the Northern ideal, or between the respective forms of representation.

The creed of Maldon is that of Achilles: "Xanthus, what need is there to prophesy of death? Well do I know that it is my doom to perish here, far from my father and mother; but for all that I will not turn back, until I give the Trojans their fill of war." The difference is that in the English case the strain is greater, the irony deeper, the antithesis between the spirit and the body more paradoxical. (pp. 11-12)

The English poem of "Maldon" has some considerable likeness in the matter of its story, and not a little in its ideal of courage, with the *Song of Roland*. A comparison of the two poems, in those respects in which they are commensurable, will show the English poem to be wanting in certain elements of mystery that are potent in the other.

The "Song of Maldon" and the *Song of Roncesvalles* both narrate the history of a lost battle, of a realm defended against its enemies by a captain whose pride and self-reliance lead to disaster, by refusing to take fair advantage of the enemy and put forth all his available strength. Byrhtnoth, fighting the Northmen on the shore of the Essex river, allows them of his own free will to cross the ford and come to close quarters. "He gave ground too much to the adversary; he called across the cold river and the warriors listened: 'Now is space granted to you; come speedily hither and fight; God alone can tell who will hold the place of battle.' Then the wolves of blood, the rovers, waded west over Panta."

This unnecessary magnanimity has for the battle of Maldon the effect of Roland's refusal to sound the horn at the battle

of Roncesvalles; it is the tragic error or transgression of limit that brings down the crash and ruin at the end of the day.

In both poems there is a like spirit of indomitable resistance. The close of the battle of Maldon finds the loyal companions of Byrhtnoth fighting round his body, abandoned by the cowards who have run away, but themselves convinced of their absolute strength to resist to the end.

Byrhtwold spoke and grasped his shield—he was an old companion—he shook his ashen spear, and taught courage to them that fought:—

“Thought shall be the harder, heart the keener, mood shall be the more, as our might lessens. Here our prince lies low, they have hewn him to death! Grief and sorrow for ever on the man that leaves this war-play! I am old of years, but hence I will not go; I think to lay me down by the side of my lord, by the side of the man I cherished.”

The story of Roncesvalles tells of an agony equally hopeless and equally secure from every touch of fear.

The “Song of Maldon” is a strange poem to have been written in the reign of Ethelred the Unready. But for a few phrases it might, as far as the matter is concerned, have been written before the conversion of England, and although it is a battle in defence of the country, and not a mere incident of private war, the motive chiefly used is not patriotism, but private loyalty to the captain. Roland is full of spirit of militant Christendom, and there is no more constant thought in the poem than that of the glory of France. The virtue of the English heroes is the old Teutonic virtue. The events of the battle are told plainly and clearly; nothing adventitious is brought in to disturb the effect of the plain story; the poetical value lies in the contrast between the grey landscape (which is barely indicated), the severe and restrained description of the fighters, on the one hand, and on the other the sublimity of the spirit expressed in the last words of the “old companion.” In the narrative of events there are no extraneous beauties to break the overwhelming strength of the eloquence in which the meaning of the whole thing is concentrated. With Roland at Roncesvalles the case is different. He is not shown in the grey light of the Essex battlefield. The background is more majestic. There is a mysterious half-lyrical refrain throughout the tale of the battle: “high are the mountains and dark the valleys” about the combatants in the pass; they are not left to themselves like the warriors of the poem of “Maldon.” It is romance, rather than epic or tragedy, which in this way recognises the impersonal power of the scene; the strength of the hills under which the fight goes on. In the first part of the *Odyssey* the spell of the mystery of the sea is all about the story of Odysseus; in the later and more dramatic part the hero loses this, and all the strength is concentrated in his own character. In the story of Roland there is a vastness and vagueness throughout, coming partly from the numbers of the hosts engaged, partly from the author’s sense of the mystery of the Pyrenean valleys, and, in a very large measure, from the heavenly aid accorded to the champion of Christendom. (pp. 54-6)

There is nothing like this in the English poem. The battle is fought in the light of an ordinary day; there is nothing to greet the eyes of Byrhtnoth and his men except the faces of their enemies.

It is not hard to find in old English poetry descriptions less austere than that of “Maldon”; there may be found in the

French *Chansons de Geste* great spaces in which there is little of the majestic light and darkness of Roncesvalles. But it is hard to escape the conviction that the poem of “Maldon,” late as it is, has uttered the spirit and essence of the Northern heroic literature in its reserved and simple story, and its invincible profession of heroic faith. (pp. 56-7)

W. P. Ker, “The Heroic Age” and “The Three Schools—Teutonic Epic—French Epic—The Icelandic Histories,” in his *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature*, 1897. Reprint by Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1908, pp. 3-15, 50-64.

WALTER JOHN SEDGEFIELD (essay date 1904)

[In the following excerpt, Sedgefield discusses the poetical fragments in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the context of the decay of poetic technique during the late Anglo-Saxon period. He notes that despite technical and stylistic flaws, the “Battle of Maldon” and the “Battle of Brunanburh” are works of exceptional dramatic power.]

[With the gradual dying out of the traditional legend-poetry in pre-Norman England] went the awakening and development of a new form of epic narrative. At the close of the tenth century, when the final scenes were enacting before England fell entirely under Danish dominion, there was composed a short epic poem like and yet not like its predecessors; like in its forms, with the old alliterative metre, the old formulæ, but unlike in subject, tone and conception. The “Battle of Maldon” treats not of legendary heroes of the Germanic races but of an actual historical personage, an English hero and patriot, fallen in battle against the foreign invader a very short time before the poem was made. A single event in contemporary history is here described with hardly suppressed emotion by one who knew his hero and loved him. There is none of the allusiveness and excursiveness of the *Beowulf*; we have here not a member of an epic cycle but an independent song. Very striking is the absence of ornament from the “Battle of Maldon”; all is plain, blunt, stern. Yet this directness, this simplicity produce on the hearer or reader a deeper effect than mere verbosity would have done. Like *Beowulf* in the older poem, Byrhtnoth here fills the central position; his noble figure emerges from the general cowardice of England’s rulers with their tribute-paying to greedy Danes. The venerable leader rides up and down marshalling and encouraging his little force hastily summoned from plough and herd; then he dismounts among his own immediate retainers and the fight begins. When he falls his faithful henchmen vow to avenge his death. One after the other they appear before us, say their word, hurl their spear or deal their sword-stroke, and so perish. The cowardice of a few merely acts as a foil to the devotion of the majority. Loyalty to one’s friend and lord; in this consists the predominant “note” of the poem. We think of the faithful Wiglaf who stands by *Beowulf* when the other followers have deserted him, terrified by the fiery breath of the dragon. [According to U. Zernial’s *Das Lied von Byrhtnoth’s Fall*.] “Germanic poetry can show no fairer nor more powerful picture of true loyalty, and what Tacitus wrote (of the ancient Germans) is fully justified: ‘Base it is for a chief to be less brave than his followers; base too for these not to equal the valour of their leader. But it is a lifelong infamy, it is utterly shameful, when the followers leave their dead lord on the field of battle.’”

When we reach the end of the poem we are out of breath; there remains with us a vision of flying darts, of brandished

swords, sounds as of breastplates hacked, of cries and groans, while over all wheel the raven and the eagle. There remains too a feeling of pride in the old patriot and of admiration for the doomed bands of devoted men. And our pride and admiration are not wasted; for all we have read really happened. To the question Who was the author of the poem, no answer can be given, but we may venture a guess as to what manner of man he was. There is reason for believing that he was either himself an eyewitness of the fight or else had the details from eyewitnesses. He cannot have actually taken part in the fighting, or else he would not have reprobated the fugitives. His use of the words *gehyrde ic* seems to favour the supposition that he was not an eyewitness, which is further confirmed by the absence of any words implying his presence. More likely than not he may have been one of the Ely monks to whom Byrhtnoth had been so good a friend and patron. Perhaps too he may have been one of that sad band that went to the field of battle when the slaughter was over and the Northmen gone, and brought back for honourable burial in their monastery the headless body of their benefactor.

The poem is undoubtedly meant for oral delivery and presupposes in its hearers a knowledge of the events and persons it mentions, and this explains why only certain isolated moments in the action are brought into prominence. In its language the "Battle of Maldon" has much affinity with the *Song of Beowulf*, but more perhaps with the Old English sacred epic poetry. There are but few compound words, however, no similes, and only six *Kenningar*, but epic formulae are numerous. The versification exhibits not a few violations of the rules of alliterative verse, though the purity of the actual alliteration is preserved. Rhyme is employed to some extent.

Nowhere can the decay of the old poetry be better seen than in the songs scattered up and down the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Even the longest and best written of their number, the "Battle of Brunanburh," is but a simulacrum, a ghost of the older epos; the others are not even ghosts, they are caricatures. We may indeed admire the skill with which the traditional phraseology is used. In metrical technique these poems surpass the "Battle of Maldon"; in substance they are far beneath it. They are evidently mere products of monkish learning inserted in the annals instead of prose entries, and thus from the first were intended to be read. But in one respect they are nearer to the "Battle of Maldon" than to the older epic poetry; they deal with actual historical events and persons with which their authors were contemporary. To what slavish extent these topical songs, as they may be called, imitate the older poetry will be realized when we find that nearly fifty per cent. of the half-verses of the "Battle of Brunanburh" are to be found in earlier poems. There is only one perfect rhyme.

Very different from these songs, constructed on the traditional alliterative system of versification, are certain other metrical entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Here a new metre and a new style of writing emerge for the first time in the history of English literature. What separates these songs from those written in faultless alliterative verse is not so much the rudeness of their metre, which indeed is of a different type, as their popular tone. The monks who wrote them have clearly lost touch with the metrical tradition. Wishing to write annals in verse they use the metre most familiar to them, that of the people's song; the words used are still those of the classical tongue, mixed, however, with popular elements. We are thus at a point in our literature where new forces are begin-

ning to operate, new forms are beginning to clothe utterance. These songs of "irregular" metre mark the transition from the Old English or Anglo-Saxon into the earliest Middle English poetry such as we find it in the *Brut* of Layamon, and as it might have continued to be, had not the influence of Norman models overpowered these feeble native beginnings.

As all three classes of the later Anglo-Saxon poetry thus differ among themselves, we may infer that their respective authors belonged to different social classes. The poet of the "Battle of Maldon," for instance, shows a Christian spirit, but his poem is entirely secular and heroic. The authors of the imitative annal-poems were evidently monks learned in the older poetical lore, who were connected with the royal court, and they made it their business to sing the praises of the English Kings. Æthelstan, Edmund, Edgar, Edward the Confessor, and Harold; all these names appear. The poems of the third class were neither courtly nor learned, and at least two of them were written at periods subsequent to the dates under which they were entered. (pp. vi-x)

Walter John Sedgefield, in an introduction to *The Battle of Maldon and Short Poems from the Saxon Chronicle*, edited by Walter John Sedgefield, D. C. Heath and Co., Publishers, 1904, pp. v-xvii.

JOHN S. WESTLAKE (essay date 1907)

[In the following excerpt, Westlake comments on the literary and historical significance of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, providing an analysis of the poems, with particular emphasis on the "Battle of Maldon."]

It seems permissible to treat the year 901, when king Alfred died, as the dividing line between the earlier and later periods of Old English literature. According to this classification, nearly all the poetry composed in [England] before the Norman conquest would fall within the first period; while the bulk of the prose writings in the vernacular would be included in the second. It was, indeed, during the tenth and eleventh centuries that our language in its Old English stage attained its highest development as a prose medium. The circumstances of the time were unfavourable to the production of sustained poems. This may be owing to the gradual break-up of Old English tradition and to the influence of another Germanic literature, then at its height, in the English court. The chief poetical fragments that have survived from these years deal with contemporary events, and seem to be the outbreak of emotions too strong to be suppressed.

Like feelings find their expression also in the prose literature of these centuries, which saw not only the rise of the West Saxon kings to full mastery over England, but also the victories of Dane and Norman, and the quenching of all hope of English rule over England until the conquered should absorb the conquerors. There was scarcely a year during this period in which the harassed rulers of the kingdom could afford to lay aside their arms; though during the time of comparative quiet between the death of Aethelstan and the accession of Aethelred England took an active part in the monastic revival which was so marked a feature of contemporary European history. In these times of struggle, letters and learning found, for a time, their grave, and long years of patient struggle were needed to revive them.

The gloomy tale is nowhere better told than in the *Chronicle*,