

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF  
LITERARY CRITICISM

VOLUME I: CLASSICAL CRITICISM



# THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF LITERARY CRITICISM

VOLUME 1

*Classical Criticism*

EDITED BY  
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 **CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1989

First published 1989  
First paperback edition 1993

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

*British Library cataloguing in publication data*

The Cambridge history of literary criticism  
Vol. 1 Classical criticism  
1. Literature, Criticism, to 1988  
I. Kennedy, George A. (George Alexander), 1928-  
801 .95'09

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

The Cambridge history of literary criticism.  
Bibliography.  
Includes index.  
Contents: v. 1. Classical criticism.  
I. Criticism – History. I. Kennedy, George Alexander, 1928-  
PN86.C27 1989 801'.95'09 98-901

ISBN 0 521 30006 1 (hardback)  
ISBN 0 521 31717 7 (paperback)

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## PREFACE

But where's the man who counsel can bestow,  
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?  
Unbiass'd or by favour or by spite;  
Not dully prepossess'd nor blindly right;  
Tho' learn'd, well bred, and tho' well bred sincere;  
Modestly bold, and humanly severe;  
Who to a friend his faults can freely show,  
And gladly praise the merit of a foe;  
Bless'd with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd,  
A knowledge both of books and humankind;  
Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;  
And love to praise, with reason on his side?  
Such once were critics; such the happy few  
Athens and Rome in better ages knew.

Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism', 631–44.

Criticism as an instinctive audience reaction to the performance of poetry is as old as song. Literary theory begins to emerge in Archaic Greece in the self-reference of oral bards and early literate poets and as part of the conceptualisation of ideas which marked the birth of Greek philosophy. A sense of literary history developed in observation of the changing functions of poetry in the Greek states, in the realisation that the composition of heroic epic was becoming a thing of the past, and later in the perception that tragedy too had passed its acme. Aristophanes' *Frogs* in the fifth century and Plato's dialogues in the fourth show historical awareness of literary change, and in the *Poetics* Aristotle ventured a theory of the origins of tragedy and comedy. Some awareness that literary criticism too has had a history existed in later times: Horace, for example, in the first century BC looked back to his predecessors, including Aristophanes and Aristotle; but only in the case of grammar and rhetoric do we find systematic critical surveys of an historical sort in, for example, introductory chapters to separate books of Quintilian's *Institutio*. Suetonius' *Lives of the Grammarians* is perhaps the earliest work directly devoted to what might be called the history of criticism.

Italian critics of the Renaissance thought of criticism in historical terms, sharpened by the rediscovery of Greek texts and by the reawakened dispute between Platonists and Aristotelians. No systematic history of criticism seems to have appeared, but the ground was laid with increased knowledge of major critical texts in the sixteenth century. A new stage can be said to begin with Pope's 'Essay on Criticism' (published 1711), where Aristotle, Horace, Dionysius, Petronius, Quintilian, and Longinus are memorably characterised in chronological order. There followed, according to Pope, an age of superstition and dullness, until the appearance of Erasmus. Boswell reports<sup>1</sup> that Dr Johnson once projected 'A History of Criticism, as it Relates to Judging Authors', but it was never completed. Perhaps the earliest scholarly work on the subject was *L'histoire des opinions littéraires chez les anciens et chez les modernes* by A. F. Théry, of which the first edition appeared about 1844 and the second in 1848. Classical criticism was apparently first given a systematic treatment by Emile Egger in his *Essai sur l'histoire de la critique chez les grecs* of 1849. Other surveys followed with the growth of nineteenth-century philology, leading to *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism* by C. M. Gayley and F. N. Scott (1899), which includes an historical survey, and then *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* in three volumes (1900–1904) by George Saintsbury, Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh. This elegant, if largely non-theoretical, work confirmed the subject as an established part of philological and literary studies for the twentieth century.

Study of the history of criticism is thus a product of modern philological research. In the case of the great Classical critics its primary thrust has been classicising: to emphasise the timelessness and the continuing influence, though often with much misunderstanding or distortion, of the major texts – especially works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, and Longinus. This emphasis has, however, regularly been accompanied by historicism, the assumption that the ancient critics provide, or should provide, the best basis for the interpretation of the literature of their own time. Such a view led to a number of problems and in the twentieth century has been partially abandoned or at least practised with restraint. Aristotle's *Poetics* does indeed provide some insights into Greek epic and tragedy that we would otherwise lack, but a simplistic use of conceptions of a 'tragic flaw' or of 'catharsis' prevents an understanding of the Homeric poems or Attic tragedy in their own terms, for Aristotle was constructing a philosophical theory, not engaging in practical criticism, and he lived late in the history of Greek poetry. Similarly, the use of Horace's *Ars poetica* as the basis of criticism of his other poetry leaves much unaccounted for, though Horace's *Odes* and *Satires* can shed some light on the *Ars poetica*. The principal values of the study of the history

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1934–50), IV, p. 381.

of ancient criticism as a whole perhaps lie in parallels between its developments and the intellectual history of antiquity, seen for example in changing assumptions about the roles of poetry and rhetoric in society, and in a succession of reactions to critical stances, such as the reactions of Aristotle or the neo-Platonists to Plato, or of Augustan and imperial critics to Hellenistic criticism. For the general reader, the great value of ancient criticism will doubtless continue to be found in its major texts, but the student of Medieval or Renaissance criticism will also discover in lesser texts the beginnings of interpretative methods, as well as assumptions about genre and language, which long continued powerful in the West and which are a continuing part of its epistemic field.

Several sound histories of ancient literary criticism have been published. Two especially deserving mention as complementing this volume are *The Greek and Roman Critics* by G. M. A. Grube (1965), historical in orientation and providing summaries of the major critical works, and *Criticism in Antiquity* by D. A. Russell (1981), more thematic in organisation. Also noteworthy is *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations*, edited by D. A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom (1972). In attempting a new history we have sought to draw on the scholarship published since the appearance of these works, we have provided a more extended introduction to the formative stage of Greek literary genres, we have somewhat expanded the consideration of language theory and of later antiquity, and sought to provide a background for the history of criticism in later periods, not only the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but from time to time for critical interests of the twentieth century. It was our original hope to include a chapter on Byzantine criticism, but this has proved impractical and reference to that subject is thus left to contributors to later volumes in the series.

Readers who come to this volume from study of modern theory may be interested in the extent to which Classical criticism anticipated features of such twentieth-century developments as semiotics, hermeneutics, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and reader-response criticism. Some analogies to all these can be found, though expressed in different terms and often implicit rather than explicit. Two phenomena are especially striking. The first is the extent to which the earlier criticism, at least until Aristotle's *Poetics*, de-emphasises authorial intent and tends to interpret poetry as contained solely within the text. This is thought of as resulting from inspiration by a god or, in Aristotle's case, from a working out of the inherent logical structure of a *muthos*. In modern terminology, derived ultimately from Immanuel Kant, Greek criticism of the Classical period thus interests itself primarily in 'purposive' intent: that is, meaning as inherent in the text rather than as given it by a human author. The development of rhetoric, however, changed the emphasis to put priority on the 'purposeful' intent of the author as accomplished through control of the text and encouraged critics to identify their own interpretations,

however unhistorically, with the author's purpose. This humanistic bias is reflected in biographical criticism in the Hellenistic period and in the allegorical interpretation of the Empire, and is seen throughout antiquity in the common metonymy of substituting the name of the author for the text: 'Homer says', rather than 'in the *Iliad* it is written'. Though the Classical and later Greeks had no real awareness of the oral origins of their poetry, the metaphor of speaking, encouraged by the goals of the rhetorical schools, is often preferred to that of writing.

A second connection between ancient and modern criticism is the interest in signs and symbols, and thus in what has come to be known as semiotics, seen in Aristotle and the Stoic and sceptical philosophers, with which may be associated an interest in interpretation and thus in hermeneutics. Though often unsystematic, this is consistently present in writings of the imperial period, where it is applied to literature, to dreams, to religious and mystical texts, and even to Being as a whole. Study of the subject is not yet fully developed, but some introduction to it will be offered in later chapters.

With occasional exceptions, we have thought it best to expound the ancient critics in their own terms rather than to recast their thought in alien concepts. Modern critical writing, however, is replete with references to the Classical critics, and their ideas are often the starting point for new theories. Among the better known are *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950) and other works by Kenneth Burke, 'Plato's Pharmacy' (1968) by Jacques Derrida, *Figures I–III* (1966–72) by Gérard Genette, *Theories of the Symbol* (1982) by Tzvetan Todorov, *Muses of One Mind* (1983) by Wesley Trimpi, and *Time and Narrative* (1984) by Paul Ricoeur. Modern literary theorists often come to ancient criticism with an interest in the novel and have explored the understanding of fiction in Classical times; for others, the Classical material is used to understand the nature of language.

An article by the Dutch scholar W. J. Verdenius (see bibliography under General Works) suggested in 1983 that rather than approach Greek criticism historically, it would be more illuminating to examine it in terms of five principles which he called those of Form, Skill, Authority, Inspiration, and Contemplation. Some of these concepts are perceptively scrutinised over the whole range of criticism by K. K. Ruthven in *Critical Assumptions*. In a volume of this scale such an approach would have led to much repetition and would have been inconvenient for readers who wish to learn more about specific major works. All five of the principles Verdenius identified are, however, touched upon in their appropriate contexts, especially in chapter 1, where the reader will find a background for them and for such related matters as the origins of the term 'critic', the phenomenon of 'mimesis', and the view of poetry as oral production rather than written composition.

A special word of explanation should be said about chapter 1, which differs significantly from accounts of the early period in other histories and as a result

may prove difficult for some readers. No area of Greek studies is undergoing more radical change as a result of modern, comparative linguistic and anthropological investigations. We have thought it valuable to give an account of the ways in which oral and written literature may have developed in Archaic Greece. Criticism of poetry by poets and philosophers is a part of this process, but there are other features of the history which now seem important as creating the conditions under which criticism as we now know it emerged in the Classical period.

Although Verdenius' topics provide an interesting grouping of ideas about poetry and poets in Archaic and Classical Greece, there are other topics which emerge subsequently. One is Visualisation, which is connected with the analogy between literature and the arts, but also with the developing interest in epistemology from the fourth century BC onward. The most famous *dicta* are those of Simonides, 'Painting is silent poetry', and Horace, 'ut pictura poesis'. Early Greek writers certainly achieve vividness and realism, and there continues to be a strong realistic impulse in Greek and Latin literature, with the development of naturalistic detail. The critics take some account of this. Although Plato generally distrusted mimesis and image-making, the theory of memory in the *Philebus* (38e – 40a) assumes that it imprints words on the mind which are then, in recollection, illustrated by images (*eikones*). Aristotle in the *Poetics* (17.1455a22 – 6) urges the poet, in constructing plots, to keep the scene before his eyes; only the clearest (*enargestata*) visualisation will discover what is fitting (*to prepon*) and avoid contradictions or implausibilities, and in the *Rhetoric* (3.11) there is a discussion of expressions which 'set things before the eyes' and achieve actuality (*energeia*). In *De Anima* (3.427b29ff.) there is a discussion of imagination (*phantasia*) which provides a conceptual basis for this in a theory of perception. The Stoics were later much interested in *phantasia* and its validity, as we shall see in chapters 6 and 11 below, and their theories influenced both writers and critics. *Enargeia* and *energeia* are useful concepts in neoclassical and modern criticism. The former 'implies the achievement in verbal discourse of a natural quality or of a pictorial quality that is highly natural', the latter 'refers to the actualisation of potency, the realisation of capacity or capability, the achievement in art or rhetoric of the dynamic and purposive life of nature'.<sup>2</sup> It has been claimed that modern writers have 'exchanged the notion of *enargeia* for *energeia* in determining how art could be like reality'.<sup>3</sup> The ancient critics are the starting point both for the history of mimesis and for exploration of analogies and differences among the arts.

The Decline of Eloquence, and of literature generally, becomes another

<sup>2</sup> Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, 1958), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relations between Literature and Painting* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 10 – 11.



recurring topic in ancient criticism. Although the antecedents of it go back to a general sense of decline in society, voiced by Hesiod and other early poets, and to the perception by the fourth century that not only epic, but also tragedy had passed its peak, the gulf between the Classical past and present realities was first keenly felt in the Hellenistic period. Discussions of possible causes for decline are found in writers of the Augustan period and in the following centuries, especially in the writings of Philo, the two Senecas, Velleius Paterculus, Petronius, Quintilian, Tacitus, and Longinus. We will have occasion to examine their explanations in later chapters.

In the modern world criticism is found chiefly in three contexts: in schools and universities, where literature is taught and where at the more advanced levels critical theory is developed or tested; in literature itself, where creative writers comment on their own work or on that of others; and in journalism, especially in the writing of book reviews, addressed either to the general public or to specialised scholars. In antiquity this third medium did not exist, but both of the others are found. Schools of philosophers and sophists emerged in the Classical period and were the primary setting for the conceptualisation of criticism with a theoretical basis. The teaching of literature in schools of grammar and rhetoric beginning in the Hellenistic period extended some critical consciousness to the entire literate public. Criticism within literature itself is found in all periods from the earliest to the latest, from references to bards in the Homeric poems to the satire of Aristophanes, the self-conscious reflections of Hellenistic and Roman poets, and the theories of late Greek sophists; but the general decline of poetry under the Roman Empire brought with it a decline in the quality of criticism by poets. A new critical impulse was added, however, by the developing need of neo-Platonist and Christian theologians to interpret their sacred texts.

There is much that is interesting in Classical criticism, especially perhaps to a modern critic; there is much that is frustrating about it as well, especially perhaps to a Classical scholar. Taken as a whole, it provided the terminology and defined many of the critical issues of the Western tradition, but it is an inadequate critical response to the great achievements of Greek and Latin literature. It is at its best on such questions as the function of poetry in society and on details of grammar and rhetoric, such as the naming and defining of figures. It is at its weakest in describing the over-all structure of a specific work of literature, except in the case of an oration, and in dealing with imagery. Although Plato and others speak in general terms of a need for measure, organic unity, and proportion, no Classical critic articulates in detail features of Classical literary composition which have been stressed by twentieth-century scholars. One is the tendency, existing already in the Homeric poems and found in virtually every literary form throughout antiquity, to organise incidents, scenes, or speeches into antithetical or chiasmic patterns much like the arrangement of figures in pedimental sculpture. To us, symmetry and

proportion, in extreme cases perhaps even mathematical proportion in the number of lines used, seems central to Classical composition, and there is a corresponding tendency for the climax, or at least the most significant thought, to come near the centre of a work, with some fall-off of intensity thereafter. The *Odyssey*, Plato's *Phaedrus*, many Greek tragedies, Demosthenes' *On the Crown*, and Horatian odes all illustrate the principle. For centuries students have ended their reading of the *Aeneid* with the sixth of twelve books. In the case of imagery, Classical critics were well aware of the use of metaphor, simile, and other tropes and figures, and of instances of irony seen in the use of individual words. What they do not seem to have observed, although again everywhere present in the greatest works, are over-all patterns of the use of imagery, for example, the pervasive irony of blindness and insight in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, or the symbolic use of wounding, snakes, and fire in the *Aeneid*. All of this remained a secret of composition, surely perceived by poets, but unspoken by critics, who read their texts column by column or line by line.

In preparing this work the editor is deeply indebted to the patience and learning of authors of individual chapters. Among them, Professor Russell has also been a source of wise counsel in a more general way. In addition, the editor wishes to acknowledge the assistance, admonitions, or suggestions, in varied ways, of Dr Malcolm Schofield, Professor Peter Smith, Mr Andrew Becker, Ms Laurette DeVeau, Ms Susan Foutz, and Mr Mark Falcon. Mr Terence Moore of Cambridge University Press has had a major role in planning the series and in bringing this volume to the public. It has been a pleasure to work with him. For copy-editing we are indebted to the patient work of Dr Con Coroneos.

George A. Kennedy

## ABBREVIATIONS

### *Works in series*

<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i> (Baltimore)
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms in Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> (Berlin)
<i>CP</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i> (Chicago)
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i> (Oxford)
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i> (Durham, North Carolina)
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i> (Cambridge, Mass.)
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> (London)
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i> (London)
<i>LCL</i>	<i>The Loeb Classical Library</i> (Co-published by William Heinemann in London and the Harvard University Press in Cambridge, Mass.)
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i> (Paris)
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i> (Currently, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia)

### *Other abbreviations*

<i>ad loc.</i>	<i>ad locum</i> . Refer to commentary on passage indicated
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>The Aeneid</i> of Virgil
<i>AP</i>	<i>The Art of Poetry</i> ( <i>Ars poetica</i> ; <i>Epistles</i> 2.3) of Horace
<i>Cic.</i>	Cicero
<i>Comp.</i>	<i>De compositione verborum</i> ( <i>On Composition</i> ) of Dionysius
<i>Contr.</i>	<i>Controversiae</i> of Seneca the Elder
<i>De or.</i>	<i>De oratore</i> ( <i>On the Orator</i> ) of Cicero
<i>Diog. Laert.</i>	Diogenes Laertius
<i>Dion. Hal.</i>	Dionysius of Halicarnassus
<i>Ecl.</i>	<i>Eclogues</i> of Virgil
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistles</i> (of Horace or other authors)
<i>fl.</i>	<i>floruit</i> . Date of mature activity
<i>fr.</i>	fragment(s)

<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i> of Homer
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i> of Ovid
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i> of Homer
<i>Or. vet.</i>	<i>De veteribus oratoribus</i> ( <i>On the Ancient Orators</i> ) of Dionysius
<i>Ph.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i> of Plato
pr.	preface
<i>Po.</i>	<i>Poetics</i> of Aristotle
Quint.	Quintilian
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i> of Plato
<i>Rh.</i>	<i>Rhetoric</i> of Aristotle
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satires</i> of Horace
<i>Suas.</i>	<i>Suasoriae</i> of Seneca the Elder

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## EARLY GREEK VIEWS OF POETS AND POETRY

Histories of criticism in early Greece are usually based on surveys of those relatively few passages where the Greek poets speak about themselves and their poetry. Although this chapter will comment on many of these passages, the publication of a new history offers an opportunity to go beyond this fragmentary evidence by considering it in the wider framework of the society or societies for which this poetry existed. In what follows, the primary evidence is not restricted to whatever the poets say about themselves and their world: rather, it embraces the context in which they say what they say. The task will be to describe the social function of early Greek poetry and to present a picture of the traditional thought-patterns that shape the very concept of poet and poetry. It is through these thought-patterns that early Greek poetry defines itself and the poet as well, making it ultimately possible for critics of later times to talk about poetry.

The very notion of ‘critics’ and ‘criticism’ can best be seen in the post-Classical context of a great period of scholarship, in Hellenistic Alexandria. The Alexandrian concept of *krisis*, in the sense of ‘separating’, ‘discriminating’, ‘judging’ those works and those authors that are to be preserved and those that are not, is crucial to the concept of ‘canon’ in the Classical world. Literally, *kanōn* means ‘rod’, ‘straight-edge rule’, then by synecdoche a ‘standard’, ‘model’. The Alexandrian scholars who were in charge of this process of separation, discrimination, judgement, were the *kritikoi*, while the Classical authors who were ‘judged worthy of inclusion’ within the canon were called the *enkrihentes*, a term that corresponds to the Roman concept of the *classici*, who are authors of the ‘first class’, *primae classis*.<sup>1</sup> The *krisis* of the *enkrihentes*, however, starts not with the Alexandrian scholars, nor even with Aristotle. It is already under way in the Archaic period of Greece, the point of departure for this inquiry. As we shall see in more detail at a later point, songs and poetry were traditionally performed in a context of competition. A striking example is the tradition of dramatic festivals at Athens, with the *krisis*, ‘judgement’, of winners by *kritai*, ‘judges’ (cf. Plato, *Laws* 659a–b).

<sup>1</sup> Pfeiffer, *Classical Scholarship*, pp. 206–7.



But the criteria of the *krisis*, as we shall see, are different at different times. In the earlier periods of Greek literary development, what is at stake is the survival or non-survival not merely of specific works or specific authors but of tradition itself.

Of particular concern, then, for an understanding of early Greek views about poets and poetry, is the ongoing crisis in the formation of canons. In time, this crisis leads to an impulse that we know as classicism. Another area of major concern is the development of genres, a phenomenon that shapes much of subsequent Greek trends in literary criticism. Still another is the differentiation and individualisation of authorship. These concerns will be addressed in the context of early Greek views about myth, truth, and inspiration. Also pertinent are the Greek notions about *mimēsis*, ‘imitation, representation’, and about how poetry was taught, especially in the watershed of the fifth century BC.

### *1 Poetry, myth, and ritual*

It is important to begin with an examination of the very concept of ‘poetry’. A fundamental question is: how is the language of poetry distinct from everyday language?

The distinction can best be comprehended in terms of the qualifications ‘marked’ and ‘unmarked’ as formulated by Roman Jakobson.<sup>2</sup> These terms have been defined as follows: ‘The general meaning of a marked category states the presence of a certain (whether positive or negative) property A; the general meaning of the corresponding unmarked category states nothing about the presence of A, and is used chiefly, but not exclusively, to indicate the absence of A’.<sup>3</sup> The unmarked category is the general category, which can include the marked category, whereas the reverse situation cannot hold. For example, in an opposition of the English words ‘long’ and ‘short’, the unmarked member of the opposition is ‘long’ because the word can be used not only as the opposite of ‘short’ when we say ‘This is long, not short’, but also as a general category, when we say ‘How long is this?’ Such a question does not judge whether something is long or short, whereas ‘How short is this?’ does.

From a cross-cultural survey of a broad range of societies, we find a general pattern of opposition between marked and unmarked speech.<sup>4</sup> The function of marked speech is to convey meaning in the context of ritual and myth. Before we may proceed, it is important to stress that the words ‘ritual’ and ‘myth’ are used here not in terms of our own cultural preconceptions but in

<sup>2</sup> Discussion and bibliography in Waugh, ‘Marked and unmarked’.

<sup>3</sup> Jakobson, ‘Signe zéro’, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Ben-Amos, ‘Analytical categories’, p. 228.