

## CLASSICAL POETICS.

### I. DEFINITION II. PRE-PLATONIC POETICS AND CRITICISM III. PLATO IV. ARISTOTLE V. HELLENISTIC POETICS VI. HORACE VII. RHETORICAL CRITICISM, GREEK AND ROMAN VIII. SURVIVAL AND INFLUENCE

I. definition. Cl. p. can be defined in either of two ways: (1) as the aggregate of opinions and

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doctrines which were put forward concerning poetry during Cl. antiquity, i.e. roughly between 750B.C. and a.d. 200; or (2) as that more or less coherent body of critical doctrine which is represented chiefly by the *Poetics* of Aristotle and the so-called *Ars poetica* of Horace, and which gave rise, during the Ren., to the poetic creed called “Classicism” (q.v.). We shall take up the notion of Cl. p. here in the first and broader of the two senses, but with particular attention to the origin and devel. of Classicism.

II. PRE-PLATONIC POETICS AND CRITICISM. So far as the Western world is concerned, the very concept of poetics, in fact of literary crit. in general, is a Gr. invention. Although it is a commonplace that crit. follows rather than precedes the making of lit., in the case of the Greeks the striking thing is not how late the critical impulse was in making its appearance, but how early. Crit. followed close on the heels of poetry, and insisted from the beginning on raising fundamental questions and fundamental issues.

Before summarizing this earliest stage of Gr. crit., we must point to certain tacit presuppositions which it shared with Gr. poetry itself and which underlie the whole later devel. (1) The chief subjects of poetry are the actions and lives of mankind (indeed, the Homeric gods, with their advanced anthropomorphism and their consuming interest in human beings, confirm rather than belie this principle). (2) Poetry is a *serious, public concern*, the cornerstone of education and of civic life, and a source, for good or for evil, of insight and knowledge. (3) It is also a *delightful thing*, endowed with a fascination that borders on enchantment (Walsh). (4) It is not merely terrestrial and utilitarian, but somehow *divine*, being inspired by the gods or the Muses. (5) It is at the same time an *art (techne)*, a craft or profession, requiring native talent, training, and long practice. (6) The poet, though inspired from on high, is after all not a priest or a prophet but a *secular person*. His work is respected, even revered, but it can be criticized.

Some of these preconceptions can be detected in the Homeric poems themselves, esp. the *Odyssey*, in any case, the poems were later judged by the Greeks in terms of them. Gr. crit. was born and grew to maturity on Homer, assuming implicitly that he was—as indeed he had become—the teacher of his people. The earliest criticisms were not “literary” or aesthetic but moral and philosophical, and the issues they raised were fundamental ones, as to the truth and moral value of poetry. Hesiod (7th c. B.C.; *Theogony* 27-28) and Solon (early 6th c.; fr. 21 [Diels])

agree that, as the latter puts it, “the bards tell many a lie.” Xenophanes (ca. end of the 6th c.) objects to the immoral goings-on of Homer’s gods and casts ridicule on the whole concept of anthropomorphism (fr. 11-16 [Diehl]). These are, for us, the opening guns of what Plato (*Republic* 10) calls “the ancient feud between poetry and philosophy.” The objectors grant that poetry, esp. the epic, is a source of delight and the recognized custodian of truth and moral values, but insist that she is an unworthy custodian. This struggle between philosophy and poetry (q.v.) for the position of teacher to the Gr. people is of fundamental importance for the later hist. of Western critical theory.

One way of saving Homer’s gods was to take their quarrels as representing conflicts of natural elements (earth, air, fire, water) or of social and political principles. This “allegorical interp.,” which was to have a long hist. (see ALLEGORY), originally sprang from a scientific motive and went hand in hand with the rise of cosmology and the natural sciences. Appearing as early as the end of the 6th c. (Theagenes of Rhegium), it was adopted by some of the Sophists and later by the Stoics, though rejected by Plato (*Phaedrus*).

Pindar, the aristocratic Theban poet (518-ca. 445 B.C.), shows an interesting blend of trad. and personal attitudes toward poetry. For him poetry is both an exacting craft and a thing inspired (see particularly his *First Olympian* and *First Pythian*). The poet’s wisdom (*sophia*) embraces both technical proficiency and insight into truth; his mission is to glorify great prowess or achievement (“virtue,” *arete*) and guide his fellow men. Pindar was conscious of the dubious morality of some of the older tales; his solution was to leave them untold.

In the 5th c., poetry was still, as it had always been, the basis of primary education and an official repository of truth. But two potent new forces came into play at Athens which enhanced and at the same time undercut the honor traditionally paid to poetry. These were the drama and the Sophists. Tragedy and comedy (qq.v), with their vividness of presentation and their semi-official status, tended to bring every citizen into direct contact with lit., making each a potential critic. Moreover, the Old Comedy arrogated to itself the right to satirize anything, including poetry. The Sophists, in addition to their other activities, were characteristically grammarians, philologists, and expounders of lit., but they were also rationalists, skeptics, and positivists, and the effect of their teaching was to break down trad. standards, in lit. as in other fields. It has been suggested but not proven that Gorgias was the first promulgator of a poetic theory; in any case he had a shrewd and accurate idea of the *effect*, particularly the emotional effect, of poetry on its hearers.

We can gauge the impact of these new tendencies by the reaction they called forth in Aristophanes (ca. 445-ca. 385 B.C.). His brilliant gift for literary satire, esp. parody, was exercised above all on Euripides and other representatives of modernism (intellectualism, skepticism, preciousness) in poetry. His unremitting crusade against Euripides (see particularly the *Acharnians*) and the *Thesmophoriazusae* reaches its climax in the *Frogs* (405 B.C.), the most sparkling exhibit of judicial crit. in

antiquity. Aeschylus, champion of old-fashioned moral principles and lofty style, finally wins his bout against the challenger Euripides—logic-chopper, corrupter of morals, and writer of dull prologues—but not before the two combatants have agreed that the poet's duty is to instruct his fellow citizens. But beneath this momentary agreement on the purpose of poetry lies a powerful disagreement which has sparked from antiquity to the present controversy about the role of art in society. Euripides is the advocate of fully instructing mankind about the nature of historical reality, however savage, repellent, or obscene that reality may be. Aeschylus is the proponent of inspiring mankind with illustrious and ennobling ideals that lead to higher levels of achievement and existence.

III. PLATO (427-347 B.C.). With Plato, a born poet and lover of poetry who renounced it for the higher truth of philosophy, the “ancient feud” reaches a major climax and crisis. There is no room in Plato's thought for lit. crit. or theory as a separate intellectual pursuit. Truth is one, and Poetry must appear before that inflexible judge on the same terms as any other human activity. Nevertheless, the great issue of the justification of lit. haunted Plato all his life, and he grapples with it repeatedly in the dialogues—nowhere, however, in truly complete and systematic form. He tends to view poetry from two quite different, perhaps incommensurate, points of view; as “inspiration” (*enthousiasmos*) and as “imitation” (q.v.). Seen inwardly, in its native character as experience, poetry is inspiration (q.v.) or “possession,” a form of poetic madness (q.v.) quite beyond the poet's control. The reality of the experience is unquestionable; its source and value remain an enigma. Is it merely irrational, i.e. subrational (*Ion*; cf. the end of the *Meno*), or might there be a suprarational poetic inspiration, winged by Love (Eros), that could attain Truth (*Phaedrus*)? The question is left open. Meanwhile, viewed externally, in its procedures and its product, poetry appears as *mimesis* (see REPRESENTATION AND MIMESIS) or “imitation,” and as such falls under the ban of excommunication (*Republic* 3;10) or at least under rigid state control (*Laws* 2;7). Plato's utterances about poetry have a deep ambivalence which has aroused fascinated interest, but also fierce protest, ever since. On the one hand, he expresses deep distrust of that mimetic art which contradicts his conceptions of truth and morality, and he asserts the strong need to censor or ban it; on the other, he makes full use of the *mimesis* which harmonizes with those very principles of truth and morality. His own dialogues, as Aristotle points out in the *Poetics*, are themselves forms of *mimesis*; and it is also true, and of great importance, that myths (another powerful form of artistic *mimesis*) in all their imaginative and evocative splendor form the climax of a number of important arguments in the dialogues (including the *Republic*). This should alert us to the fact that Plato's concept of *mimesis* is a complex, varied, and profound one (see McKeon, Verdenius).

IV. ARISTOTLE (384-322 B.C.). Aristotle was no poet. His cooler spirit was devoted to poetry in quite another way: as an objective, uniquely valuable presentation of human life in a particular medium. The *Poetics* is not formally or in method a polemical work, but in effect it constitutes an answer to Plato's doubts and objections and thereby a resolution of the ancient feud. Here,

conducted in a dispassionate, scientific spirit, is an inquiry into the nature of poetry which restores it to an honorable—not a supreme—place in the scheme of things. The heart of Aristotle's achievement is a new theory of *poetic structure* based on a new concept of "imitation" not as copying of ordinary reality but as a generalized or idealized rendering of character and action (ch. 9). At the climax of this process of imitation arises the most important and serious of human pleasures, the pleasure of learning and making inferences (*manthanein kai syllogizesthai*) which accompanies the insight that is evoked into the nature of the action represented (ch. 4). Thus Aristotle answers some of Plato's deepest misgivings about poetry by asserting the intellectual, indeed philosophical (ch. 9) dimensions of imitative art. In Aristotle's eyes, that which constitutes poetry is not the writing of verses but the building of a poetic "structure of events." This structure is the plot (*mythos*) of the poem; it therefore is by far the most important part of the poet's task (chs. 6, 9). The other constituent elements of the poem, or rather of the art of making a poem (*poiesis*, "making"), viz. (1) character portrayal (*ethos*), (2) "thought" (*dianoia*), i.e. the presentation of ideas or arguments by the characters, (3) poetic language or expression (*lexis*), (4) song composition (*melopoeia*), and (5) spectacle (*opsis*), stand in decreasing order of importance (ch. 6); but none can vie with plot (q.v.). The making of plots is essentially a creative activity. But poetic creativity is not, for Aristotle, a subjective efflorescence. It goes to the bodying forth of reality, the essential truth about human beings and their actions, not the invention of fantasies or private worlds.

A poetic structure should be *beautiful*. This requires (a) unity (the famous "unity of action"; see UNITY), (b) symmetry of the parts with each other and with the whole, and (c) proper length, such that the poem can make a sizable aesthetic impression while yet not so great as to blur or dissipate it. The crux of the matter is the unity of action, and the corollary—duly emphasized by Aristotle himself—is that the events which constitute the action must succeed each other according to the law of necessity or probability, not mere contiguity (see HISTORY AND POETRY).

A tragedy (q.v.) ought to be not only serious and beautiful, but tragic as well; whether this requirement also applies to the epic is a question to which

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the *Poetics* gives no clear answer. Plato had said (*Republic* 10) that poetry threatens the moral equilibrium in states and individuals alike by "feeding" the appetitive and emotional side of human nature, esp. its tendencies to pity and fear. Aristotle implicitly sets aside this verdict. But he also calls for something to be done to or with or through pity and fear which he designates by the much debated term "catharsis" (q.v.). Whatever we decide catharsis means, it must stand as an answer to Plato's criticism of poetry. In any event, if pity and fear are desirable effects of tragedy, certain kinds of plot are better fitted to arouse them than others. All tragic actions involve a change or passage from one pole of human fortune—"happiness" or "unhappiness"—to the other (ch. 7, end). In a simple plot the change is direct and linear; in a complex plot it is brought about

by a sudden and unexpected reversal (*peripeteia*), or a recognition (*anagnorisis*), or both (ch. 11). Aristotle demands that the hero who undergoes the tragic vicissitude be a good man, but not a perfect one. The change to unhappiness, which is the tragic change par excellence, should not be caused by wickedness but by some *hamartia* (ch. 13). Here, as in the case of “catharsis,” battles of interpretation have raged (does *hamartia* mean “moral flaw” or “intellectual error”?) without a resolution of the question. It may well be that different nuances of the term are appropriate in different dramatic circumstances. Aristotle further prescribes (ch. 15) that the tragic characters be “appropriate,” i.e. true to type; “like,” i.e. true to life or human nature in general; and self-consistent.

Aristotle regarded the linguistic side of the poet’s activity as needful in order to please and impress the public, but ultimately less important than plot construction and character-drawing. The first virtue of poetic diction, as of language in general, is to be *clear* (ch. 22). But it also should not be “low”: that is, it should maintain a certain elevation above the level of ordinary life, through the use of archaic, foreign, or unfamiliar words, ornamental epithets, and figures, esp. metaphor. For further remarks on style, including poetic style, see Book 3 of the *Rhetoric*.

The discussion of the epic (chs. 23-25) forms a kind of appendix to Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy. The epic should have a central action, like tragedy, but may “dilute” it generously with episodes. It also has a special license to deal in marvels and the supernatural. In these, as indeed in all respects, Homer is the perfect exemplar. For Aristotle, tragedy is, however, superior to epic because it has everything which can be found in epic as well as attractive characteristics unique to itself, and, moreover, because it accomplishes its mimetic goal and produces its mimetic pleasure much more effectively than epic (ch. 26).

Considerable controversy surrounds the discussion of Aristotle’s theory of comedy. Some scholars believe that this discussion was contained in a lost second book of the *Poetics* (see Janko). Whether or not that is the case, Aristotle dealt in some detail with the nature of comedy in the *Poetics* as we now have it (see chs. 1-5). A document of obscure provenience and date known as the *Tractatus Coislinianus* purports to represent Aristotle’s theory of comedy, but disagreement has arisen about the validity of this claim because of the unusual, even eccentric assertions made in this work. Some scholars, however, have argued for its possible or probable authenticity as a witness to genuine Aristotelian doctrine (Cooper, Janko). On the other hand, Aristotle’s clear identification of comedy as a painless mimesis of the ridiculous (*Poetics* ch. 5) and his identification (*Rhetoric* 1386b8) of *nemesian* (“to feel indignation”) as the polar opposite of *eleos* (“pity”) have been cited as a fully adequate basis for establishing an Aristotelian theory of comedy (Golden).

The *Poetics* is a work of paramount importance not only historically, as the fountainhead of “Classicism” (q.v.), but in its own right. It does not deal as fully with epic as it does with tragedy, and it ignores lyric. Also, it is uncertain whether the *Poetics* was directly known to anybody in antiquity after Aristotle’s death, though many of his ideas were transmitted by his

pupils. In any case, the fully developed doctrine of Classicism embraces a number of interests and attitudes which are not Aristotelian, and which still remain to be accounted for.

V. HELLENISTIC POETICS (3d-1st c. B.C.). Both poetry and poetic crit. were carried on in a new environment in the Hellenistic age. The center of gravity in lit., as in other fields, shifted from old Greece, with its civic traditions, to Alexandria, Pergamum, and other royal courts. Alexandria in particular, with its Library and “Museum”—originally sprung from Aristotle’s Lyceum—was a hive of literary scholarship (philology, grammar, textual editing, *Literaturgeschichte*) with which crit. now came in close contact. Indeed we owe the terms “critic” and “criticism” to the Hellenistic grammarians, who regarded the judgment of poems, *krisis poiematon*, as the capstone of their art. The typical critic is now a scholar who dabbles in poetry and poetic theory. Unfortunately, of the lively critical squabbles of the time we have only *dissecta membra* such as Callimachus’ disparagements of long poems, “I loathe a cyclic poem” and “Big book, big nuisance” (it may be only a coincidence that he was the compiler of the catalogue of the Alexandrian library, in 120 vols.), or Eratosthenes’ dictum that “poetry is for delight.”

We can, however, discern that two ideas of basic importance for the devel. of Classicism were, if not invented, at least given canonical form in the Hellenistic period: (a) the concept of a “classic” (the word is Roman but the idea is Gr.), and (b) the concept of genre (q.v.). A belief which had been implicit in the *Poetics* was now proclaimed explicitly: the great age of poetry lay in the past

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(7th through 5th c.), and it contained all the models of poetic excellence. This backward-looking view was enshrined in official lists (*kanones*), e.g. the Nine Lyric Poets, the Three Tragedians. Further, each poetic “kind” was thought of as an entity more or less to itself, with its special laws of subject matter, arrangement, and style, and its particular supreme model, Homer for epic, Sappho or Alcaeus for love poetry, Archilochus for “iambic” poetry. These ideas needed only to be reinforced by the rhetorically inspired idea of imitation (see sect. VII below) to become the full-fledged doctrine of Classicism (q.v.). Since the genres were defined primarily by their versification and style, a further result was a tendency toward absorption in style at the expense of other interests.

The philosophical schools participated unevenly in the devel. of criticism. The Stoics officially approved of poetry, esp. the Homeric epic, but tended to judge it by moral and utilitarian standards and therefore indulged rather freely in the allegorizing of Homer. Orthodox Epicureanism frowned on poetry as “unnatural” and a bait for the passions, but the Epicurean Philodemus (1st c. B.C.), who was himself a poet and who had influence on Horace and other Roman poets, put forward a theory that recognized multiple forms and aims of poetry and granted wide autonomy to the poet. From polemical remarks of his we can reconstruct a Peripatetic doctrine put forward by one Neoptolemus of Parium in the 3dc. B.C. which some scholars believe

underlies Horace's *Ars poetica*. In it the subject was treated under the triple heading of *poiesis* (poetic composition), *poiema* (the poem), and *poietes* (the poet). Actually *poiesis* had to do chiefly with the selection or invention and the arrangement of subject matter (*hypothesis* or *pragmata, res*) and *poiema* chiefly with style (*lexis, elocutio*).

Others, such as the Platonizing Stoic Posidonius (1st c. B.C.), accepted at least parts of this scheme, and it provided a handy framework for discussion of the three cardinal issues that were much agitated in the Hellenistic period: (a) which is more important, subject matter or expression? (b) which is the purpose or function of poetry, instruction or delight? and (c) which is more essential for the poet, native genius (*physis, ingenium*) or art (*techne, ars*)<sup>1</sup> In these formulations we see Cl. p. taking on the physiognomy which it was to keep down through the Middle Ages to the Ren. The answers were various. We have already quoted Eratosthenes' dictum that the end of poetry is delight; others, esp. the Stoics, argued the claims of (moral) instruction; while the Peripatetic view called for both (Horace: "omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci"). Similarly with the debate over subject matter and style. It would seem, however, that a considerable amount of tacit agreement underlay the dispute, namely that poetry is a way of discoursing about "things," and that these things, whether matters of historical or scientific fact (*historia; fama*), myth (*mythos, fabula*), or pure invention (*plasma, res ficta*), were all equally admissible (hence, e.g., didactic poetry [q.v.], which Aristotle had excluded from the realm of poetry altogether) and had essentially the status of facts, i.e. were to be judged by reference to the ordinary laws of reality. Nowhere do we find a reaffirmation of Aristotle's principle that the objects of poetry are universals.

VI. HORACE (65-8 B.C.) We have devoted what may seem a disproportionate amount of space to the Hellenistic period because, although most of its critical production is lost, it played an even more important role than Plato or Aristotle in the rise of Classicism and exerted a decisive influence upon Roman and therefore Ren. thinking about poetry. The most significant transmitter of this influence is Horace. To be sure, neither Horace nor his literary milieu was Gr. He was a thorough Italian, blessed with a consuming interest in people, a sharp eye for their foibles—and his own—and sturdy independence of judgment. He came to lit. crit. by an indirect road, through satire, and to the end his treatment of it remained occasional and essentially unsystematic. Criticism of his own Satires led him to a spirited defense of the genre and of his right to pursue it in his own way (*Satires* 1.4 and 10). He admits that satire (q.v.) is not quite true poetry, because it lacks inspiration and sublimity of style (1.4.43); but it performs a useful and honorable social function by exposing vice and folly. Attacked for depreciating his predecessor Lucilius, Horace insists (1.10) on appropriateness of style and above all on elegance and polish, attained by hard work. Again and again (*Satires* 2.1.12 ff.; *Epistles* 2.1.208, 250 ff.; cf. *Odes* 1.6; 4.2) he resists the importunities of friends urging him to write epic or drama; it is essential that the poet choose and stick to the genres for which he is best fitted.

These themes recur in the three major critical letters in verse which constitute the second Book of the *Epistles*, but against a broader background. The *Epistle to Augustus* (2.1) surveys the

current literary scene, derides the blind worship of the poetry of the past (the *Roman* past), and deplores the vulgarity of popular taste. The essay, with its blend of urbanity and seriousness, reveals especially well two important aspects of Horace's Classicism: (1) he felt deeply that Rome deserved and was capable of a great lit., to set alongside that of Cl. Greece; but (2) he was convinced that the result could be achieved only by hard work and the emulation of that same Cl. Gr. lit. Thus Classicism was in Horace's eyes a progressive and patriotic creed, the means to a specifically Roman achievement. The paradox has significant parallels in the Ren. in both Italy and France.

*The Epistle to Floras* (2.2) returns to one of Horace's favorite themes, the haste and sleaziness of much of the current scribbling of poetry. But it

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is in the *Epistle to the Pisos* (2.3), the so-called *Ars poetica* (the name comes from Quintilian), that he gives fullest expression to his view of poetry. Based though it is on the Hellenistic poetics described in sect. V. above, it carefully maintains the easy, discursive air appropriate to its genre: it is after all a verse epistle, not a formal treatise. Still, the tone is a shade more systematic and apodictic than usual. *Poiesis* (sect. V. above) is dealt with summarily in the first 45 lines, with a plea for poetic unity. The rest of the first sect., down to line 294, really treats of Horace's main interests: style and matters connected therewith—i.e. originality and appropriateness (*decorum*; lines 46-98); emotional appeal (99-113); faithfulness either to poetic trad, or to type in character portrayal (114-78). As he progresses, it become clear that Horace, following the Peripatetic doctrine (not contemporary affairs of state in Rome), is assuming drama, and particularly tragedy, to be the major poetic genre. Hence we find a number of detailed prescriptions for the dramatist (179 ff.: no deed of violence on the stage; five acts, no more and no less; three actors; choral odes germane to the plot; etc.); a thumbnail history of the drama, interrupted by a long passage on the satyr-play; and finally (280 ff.), the adjuration—really the most important of all—to polish, polish, polish (“the labor of the file”) rather than publish, publish, publish. The last sect, of the poem (295-476) is devoted to the poet: his training (309-332), with emphasis on moral philosophy (Socratic dialogues); his purpose, which may be either to profit or to please or, best of all, to do both (333-46); his faults, venial and otherwise (347-90); his need for *both* ability and training, and for unsparing criticism (419-52). The end-piece (453-76) is an uproarious sketch, in Horace's best satirical vein, of the mad poet.

Our summary may suggest how many of the leading ideas of Classicism are enshrined in the *Ars poetica*. What no summary, and no translation, can convey is the brilliance of the poem as a poem: not in its structure but in its texture, its striking figures, and memorable phrases. “Purpureus pannus” (purple patch), “brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio,” “in medias res” (q.v.), “bonus dormitat Homerus,” and dozens of others have passed into the common stock. To the It. critics of the Ren., Latinists and stylists all, it was a breviary. Aristotle they might admire; Horace was in their bones. And they learned more from him than rules. He encouraged them in the proud



belief that poetry is an honorable and exacting craft, fit to offer serious counsel and occupy a high place in the culture of a nation.

VII. RHETORICAL CRITICISM, GREEK AND ROMAN. The establishment of rhet. as the prevailing mode of higher education, esp. at Rome in the 1st c. B.C.. (in Greece proper it goes back to the 4th c.), had major effects on both poetry and poetics. Poetry itself began to show rhet. tendencies, and, more important for our purpose, lit. crit. now tended to become the professional property of the rhetoricians. (Horace is the lone exception among extant critics from this period.) In the rhet. schools poets were read, and to an increasing extent imitated, on the same basis as prose writers. This practice helped to foster the extension of two influential concepts from the rhet. sphere into the poetic: (1) “imitation” (q.v.) in the sense of imitation of authors, and (2) the analysis of style into three (occasionally four) kinds or levels, high (or grand), middle, and low (or plain) (see STYLE; SUBLIME). It also tended to dislodge poetry from its old pre-eminence in the curriculum, in favor of a more catholic view of all “literature” (*grammata; litterae*), prose and verse alike, as the basis of a liberal education.

The extant crit. works which represent this trend all belong—not by accident—to the 1st cs. B.C. and A.D. We can mention them here only briefly, without distinction between Greeks and Romans (in any case rhet. study in that period was essentially international). The treatises of “Demetrius” *On Style* (1st c. B.C.?) and of Dionysius of Halicarnassus *On Literary Composition* (actually on the placing of words; perhaps ca. 10 B.C.), though technical and rhet. in nature, deal with prose and poetry impartially. Poets like Sappho, Pindar, Sophocles, Euripides, and above all, Homer, are cited and analyzed, particularly by Dionysius, in illuminating detail. Cicero is a conservative but intelligent and informed critic of poetry ancient and modern, a not contemptible poet himself, and a firm believer (see particularly the speech *For Archias* and the *De oratore*) in the necessity of a liberal (i.e. literary) education for the orator and man of affairs. Tacitus's *Dialogue on Orators* (date uncertain; perhaps a youthful work) canvasses the reasons for the decline of oratory and lit., and presents poetry as a garden of refreshment and delight, a retreat from the hurly-burly of everyday life. Quintilian, Imperial Professor of Rhetoric, incorporated into Book 10 of his major work, the *Institutio oratoria* (The Training of the Orator; after a.d. 88), a complete sketch and appraisal of all the important Gr. and Lat. authors, poets and prose writers, from the point of view of their uses in education and as exemplars of style.

“Longinus” (see sublime) stands apart, a “sport” among the rhetoricians. In his lexicon Homer and Archilochus, Pindar and Sophocles figure equally with Plato and Demosthenes—Homer above the rest—as models of greatness of spirit. It is he who gives us the best definition of a classic, as a work that has had an intense effect, intellectual and emotional, on human beings of all ages, tastes, and situations throughout the centuries. His enthusiasm for great lit. is perennially infectious. With his indifference to poetic structure, and to genre and the rules of genre, he stands outside the trad. of Classicism as it was formulated in antiquity, but he also provides an important supplement to it.

## VIII. SURVIVAL AND INFLUENCE. Ancient crit.

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was never, at any stage of its hist., a continuous, stable enterprise. Its survival into the modern world was even more precarious. From Cl. Greece only Aristophanes, Plato, and Aristotle outlasted antiquity. Plato, though preserved complete, was not completely known or studied in the West until the Ren., and then seen mainly through Neoplatonic spectacles. The *Poetics* survived perhaps by accident through its inclusion in a miscellany of rhet. works by "Demetrius," Dionysius, and others. A Med. Lat. tr. by William of Moerbeke (1278) came to light in the middle of the 20th c.; otherwise, the treatise was available to the Middle Ages and the early Ren. only in a Lat. tr. of an Arabic paraphrase by Averroes. Horace and the Roman rhetoricians were never lost, though considerable parts of Cicero and Quintilian were not recovered until the Ren. By far it was Horace who had the most extensive and sustained influence on the transmission of crit. through the Middle Ages.

Poetic theory as such could not flourish in the Middle Ages, being assigned, like rhet., to a humble place in the *trivium*, as a part of grammar or logic. Petrarch and his followers, the humanists of the early Ren., began the process of recovery of the ancient heritage, but only gradually and, as it were, backward. The literary ideal of the Quattrocento was the Poeta Orator, and its critical attitudes were mainly Horatian, rhetorical, and based on Lat. lit. To the early It. humanists, whose consuming passions were Lat. style (in prose and verse) and personal glory, Horace, Cicero, and Quintilian spoke a familiar lang, that the Greeks could not rival. Plato, however, was drawn to some extent into the battle over the *defense of poetry*, which gained new point from the reawakened enthusiasm for pagan lit. In this struggle it was natural that he should appear now on the side of the attackers (e.g. Savonarola in the *De divisione ac utilitate omnium scientiarum*, ca. 1492), now on the side of the defense (either for the idea of inspiration or for the notion—actually Neoplatonic in origin—that the artist creates according to a true "Idea").

Systematic theorizing about the art of poetry as such, its nature, effects, and species, appears only in the 16th c., in the train of the rediscovery and gradual dissemination of the *Poetics* (Lat. tr. by Giorgio Valla, 1498; *editio princeps* of the Gr. text, Aldus, 1508; Lat. tr. by Paccius [Pazzi], 1536, It. by Segni, 1549; commentaries by Robortelli, 1548, Madius [Maggi], 1550, Victorius [Vettori], 1560, Castelvetro, 1570, and many others). The first treatises on poetics by Vida (1527) and Daniello (1536) were still essentially Lat. and Horatian. It was Minturno's *De poeta* (1559) and Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* (1561), together with Castelvetro's commentary, *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta* (ed. W. Romani, 2 v., 1978; abridged tr. A. Bongiorno, *Castelvetro on the Art of Poetry*, 1984), that established Aristotle's dictatorship over lit.; but even these works are only very imperfectly and halfheartedly Aristotelian.

In spite of the rage for "Longinus" in the 18th c., and sporadic phenomena like Shelley's literary Platonism in the 19th, the prestige and influence of Cl. p. diminished after Lessing's

dethronement (*Hamburgische Dramaturge*, 1767-69) of the “French”—actually It. —rules (q.v.). A revival, however, of critical and scholarly interest in Aristotle occurred in the second half of the 20th c., led by the critics of the Chicago School (q.v.) and by the attack on long-held orthodox interpretations of key concepts in the *Poetics* in which Gerald Else played a major role. See also APOLLONIAN-DIONYSIAN; CLASSICISM; CRITICISM, BIBL.; GENRE; GREEK POETRY. CLASSICAL, IMITATION; REPRESENTATION AND MIMESIS; RHETORIC AND poetry; cf. HEBRAISM.

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