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CRITICISM. This article provides an overview of the practice of crit. in the West from ancient times down to the present. For fuller discussion of the theory of lit. crit., see METACRITICISM AND THEORY.

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I. EARLY INTERPRETIVE PRACTICES. The practice of lit. crit. has its historical roots in the early readings of Homer and Scripture, which were most often allegorical in method and philosophical in intent, as in Theagenes of Rhegium (6th c. B.C.), the first known scholar to have interpreted Homer allegorically (none of his works survives), and in the surviving Gr. Scholia to Homer. Often the allegorical readings were Neoplatonic, and in a writer like Philo Judaeus (ca. 50 A.D.), Neoplatonic tendencies appeared in allegorization of the Old Testament. The texts were regarded as historical, but history was presumed to present a total pattern of meaning. Frequently, however, myths were treated as decayed history, following the method employed by Euhemerus (4th c. B.C.). This tendency to see myths and legends as historical accounts distorted by linguistic change and oral transmission persisted into the 18th c. (e.g. Samuel Shuckford [1694-1754]), and even had a 20th-c. practitioner in Robert Graves. By contrast, the mode of ethical or moralistic interp., at least in the Neoplatonic trad, that Porphyry (233-305 A.D.) and others followed, was atemporal and didactic. reading myth and legend as allegories of some part of the Neoplatonic concept of the passage into, through, and out of generation, as in Porphyry's own elaborate treatment of the cave of the nymphs scene in the Odyssey (see PLATONISM AND POETRY).

Early Jewish and Christian interps. of Scripture provide a contrast to each other, with some similarities in the Hellenistic period when both were influenced by Neoplatonic allegorizing. However, the Jewish trad, tended to more creative play with texts (see HEBREW PROSODY AND POETICS), while the Christian practice broke into two somewhat antagonistic methods: allegorization and typological reading (see ALLEGORY). The contrast between the Jewish and Christian trads. is that between a mode of reading that treats the text as rife with possibility, building reading on reading, and a mode that presumes a fundamentally imitative or referential conception of lang, that either represents actual events (see REPRESENTATION AND MIMESIS) or by allegorical interp. finds behind the events the spiritual or moral significance that history displays (see INTERPRETATION, FOURFOLD METHOD) . Even 20th-c. biblical typologists such as Jean Danielou still feared that strict allegorical interp. would spirit away the historicity of Scripture, reducing it to mere moral philosophy giving inadequate attention to God's plan of creation, history, and apocalypse. Early typologists, of whom

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St. John was certainly one, maintained both the historical and prophetic reliability of the Bible, relating the text to the whole sweep of time and refusing to reduce it to some ahistorical idea. The

method was to discover the events of the New Testament foreshadowed in the Old. It was to become incorporated into the fourfold mode of interp. developed by John Cassian (d. ca. 448) and later St. Thomas Aquinas, and explicitly secularized in the letter to Can Grande prefixed to the *Paradiso* and once attributed to Dante.

Critical practice, therefore, began with strong connections to moral philosophy and theology, and has never moved far from ethical concerns (see ETHICS AND CRITICISM), though at times morality narrowly conceived has been eschewed in favor of some form of aestheticism (q.v.). Such moments often come to be understood as expressions of an ethic strongly opposed to dogma, as in the work of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). Still, on the whole, critical practice has tended toward secularization. When relatively free from any specific moral or theological dogma, it admits a variety of practical problems and evolves numerous modes of behavior. When the earliest crit. was not directly concerned with poetry's being true to truth, whether Platonic or prophetic, it was concerned with its being true to life (see REALISM; VERISIMILITUDE).

II. MIMESIS. The early importance of the concept of mimesis or imitation (qq.v.) as an artistic criterion is attested as early as the 7th c. B.C. in a hymn to Apollo; and the connection between poetry and painting, with its emphasis on accuracy of portrayal, was remarked as early as Simonides (6th c. B.C.; see VISUAL ARTS AND POETRY). The earliest extant Gr. poetry, Pindar's for example (522?-443 B.C.), is clearly interested in being faithful to the facts. To this day, much reviewing presumes some form of accurate imitation of the external world or felt life as a criterion of value. The concept is derived from the analogy with painting, where it long seemed to have more practical use, though Aristotle early observed that "not to know that the hind has no horns is a less serious matter than to paint it inartistically" (*Poetics* 25.5). Virtually every Western critical theory possesses at least some trace of mimetic theory, if only by opposition to it.

The first Western theory of imitation was Plato's. His critique of poetry and visual art mounts an attack on imitation based on his ontological and ethical concerns. He was interested in Truth or Being, i.e. Ideas or Forms. Poems and paintings, tied to appearances, always failed adequately to represent the truth of the Idea. For Plato, the poem had no Being, or only very diminished Being, because it was an imitation twice removed from the Idea, where reality and truth were located. Behind this view was the desire to identify the ethical life with purely abstract thought, and immorality with too great attention to material appearances. The old war between philosophy and poetry to which Plato alluded was for him the war of reality with appearance.

Even for Plato, however, poetry had charm. If he advocated, half-ironically through his mouthpiece Socrates, banishment of poets from his Republic, it was precisely on account of their perceived power to enchant and persuade. Here arises the question of the roles of delight and instruction: in *Ion* and *The Republic* Plato's Socrates was suspicious of the delight poets gave and believed they taught that appearance was reality. In addition, they were irrational, even though he considered their irrationality divinely inspired (see POETIC MADNESS). All of these Platonic shortcomings were however turned into virtues by later critics.

Aristotle attempted to rescue the imitative function in three ways. First, for Aristotle, poetic imitation was not of the Platonic Idea. Second, it was not of objects but of human actions. Third, it had a creative aspect, giving it power to shape materials into new wholes. Finally, against Plato's refusal to allow the poem any being, always treating it as an appearance of an appearance, twice removed from the idea of the object it copied, Aristotle provided for the idea of the poem as inherent within itself; he did not consign the idea to abstraction but allowed it to inhere in the object as its principle of being or motion. In the opposition of Aristotle to Plato there was

established the long quarrel between an objectifying formalism and an emphasis on separable content, a quarrel that has had a variety of historical incarnations.

Aristotle's idea of formal unity (q.v.) did not, however, live as easily with the theory of imitation in later critics as it did in the fruitful ambiguities of his own *Poetics*, where he clearly tried to acknowledge poetry's claims to both intrinsic order and also truth to the world. In Ren. Italy and France, after the rediscovery of the *Poetics*, unity became rigidly interpreted in terms of the need for a quite literal imitation. Time, place, and action in a play were restricted in ways that answered to the strictest realism. But even as Aristotle's views became hardened into the Classicist prescription of the so-called "unities," Plato was being subjected to critical misreadings that liberalized his views and readmitted the poet to the commonwealth. This had begun as early as Plotinus (204-70 A.D.), whose elaborate Neoplatonist theory of emanations placed the image (q.v.) or appearance on a stairway upward to truth rather than downward to illusion. Ren. defenses of the image were common, though probably none so ingenious as that of Jacopo Mazzoni (1548-98) in his defense of Dante. The idea that the image might be an improvement on nature, the "second nature" of Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (1583), rescued poetry once again from Plato and also from a theologically based (and Platonizing) fear that poetry bred only licentiousness and untruthful

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fictiveness (see FICTION)—a view common in the Christian Middle Ages. Boethius (480-524) had written of "seducing murmurs" and "poisonous sweets" in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, but by the time of Boccaccio (1313-75), poetry was defended on the ground that theology was the poetry of God and that poetry held within itself hidden truth, more pleasing because acquired by toil and therefore better retained. This was an argument which had the stamp of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74). In the late Ren., the long period of the domination of ontological concerns ended, and the emphasis on imitation began to wane. Aristotle and Plato, through clever misreadings and selective appropriations, had almost been made to change places.

III. GENRE AND TRADITION. There is one other notion of imitation that has also had considerable practical consequence. This can be traced back to pronouncements like that of Horace (65-8 B.C.) that the imitation of great predecessors is important. Pope carried on this idea in his remark that Virgil discovered that to copy Homer was to copy nature (q.v.). The emphasis on poetic genealogy and tradition (q.v.) entailed by this remark is reflected in all critical practice that pays strong attention to the matter of genre (q.v.). Genre crit. has had a long history, in which poets have been either praised or attacked for their relation to or remoteness from trad. In practice, genre crit. has been both classificatory and judgmental. Many critics—e.g. Joseph Addison (1672-1719)—are not comfortable until they can determine what kind of poem they have before them. At that point, classification can generate judgment according to some standard of decorum (q.v.).

The connection of genre to decorum, however, did not survive the 18th c. unscathed, and since that time genre theory has been turned inside out. One sees the demise of its classificatory role prophesied in the comically absurd list of types of drama in *Hamlet*. Rather than considering a work as belonging to a genre, critics now try to imagine genre as an aspect of a work, and works may after all include many generic suggestions. In recent times, both T. S. Eliot and Northrop Frye have claimed that there is really no acceptable or even possible escape from trad.; indeed, Eliot held that real individuality occurs when the poet has set forth a relation to his or her

predecessors. Subsequently this idea was given an unexpected twist—with a strong dash of Freudianism—in Harold Bloom’s theory of the anxiety of influence (see INFLUENCE), where the relation of the strong poet to the predecessor is one of willful misreading and competition. Bloom’s own critical practice has been to chart this Oedipal strife through the work of those poets who make the most of it—who stand up, that is, to their strong predecessors.

IV. DIDACTICISM, AFFECT, AND TASTE. In practice, the concept of imitation has often had to be squared with a presumed didactic function (see DIDACTIC POETRY). Horace had seemed to treat poetry as a speaking picture (*ut pictura poesis* [q.v.]) and had proposed a twofold aim for poetry that has been much repeated—poetry must delight and instruct. This idea, frequently repeated up to the time of Sidney’s *Apology* and even beyond, is the predecessor of later concerns with questions of readerly taste (q.v.) and affect that came into prominence when, with the rise of science in the 17th c., the ontological emphasis gave way to the epistemological. Plato, of course, had been deeply concerned about readers, and his attack on Sophistic rhet. embodied his concern that tropes were seductively deceptive and irrational. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and the work of later Cl. rhetoricians sought to rescue rhet., but on grounds that Plato surely would have rejected (see RHETORIC AND POETRY). Rhet. was judged useful to both persuasion and delight. Pseudo-Longinus (1st c. A.D.) saw rhet. as the vehicle of poetic transport (see SUBLIME). A century before, Horace had seen nothing at all wrong with delighting while teaching, even as he accepted the idea of poetic imitation.

Affective theories in the 18th c. made more subtle what the effect in the reader might (ought to) be. Thereafter, modes of critical discussion eventuated that were predicated on something happening in the reader attributable to specific characteristics of the text. In the 18th c., critical theories were beginning to recognize a choice of location, or at least starting point, on one side or the other of the scientific bifurcation of nature into objective and subjective realms. Those choosing the side of the object had the problem of explaining away the subjective; those choosing the subjective had the problem of escaping pure solipsism and relativism. To some extent, particularly in matters of value but also in questions of interp., this division and these problems continued to plague critical thought into the late 20th c., as for example in reader-response crit. (q.v.).

The issue with respect to taste was nicely put by David Hume in his 1757 essay “Of the Standard of Taste.” His recourse was to “certain general principle of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind.” Hume believed that there was an objective standard of taste, but he was too shrewd to attempt transference of this standard into a description of specific characteristics a work of art should have. “Taste” had become a critical catchword by the time Hume wrote. Joseph Addison had earlier defined it in a *Spectator* essay (1712) as “that Faculty of the Soul, which discerns the Beauties of an Author with Pleasure and the Imperfections with Dislike.” The observation begs the question. How is the alleged objective beauty of the work to be connected with subjective pleasure? This problem came to be treated as part of aesthetics, a term coined by Alexander Baumgarten in midcentury to mean the science of perception and sensuous knowledge. Hume thought one had to presume

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that a standard of taste existed somewhere, and cited the persistent high rank of the classics as evidence. He had begun with the aim of demonstrating that a rational discussion of art must begin as a discussion of human response, but ended with the fiction of a standard that can never be

directly apprehended or uttered in particulars; only the results of its workings can be seen in the persistence of what we now call the literary canon (q.v.). Hume was by no means a subjectivist, yet he set forth a problem that eventually led to numerous positions of radical subjectivism, not only in judgment but also in interp.

Driven relentlessly to its extreme, subjectivism results in solipsism of response, such as we find in Pater's conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873), where isolated experience simply for the sake of the experience is praised as the end of life. Under such conditions the opportunity for the triumph of power, i.e. for someone to make arbitrary decisions about value, is virtually assured. Pater perhaps recognized this when he suppressed his conclusion. Part of his response, and later that of Anatole France, was due to his hatred of the materialistic scientific philosophies of the time.

However, subjectivity has no meaning apart from objectivity—these antinomies define each other—and there is therefore a sense in which the subjective impressionists had been captured by the terms of the enemy. Crit. based on analogy with science went to the opposite pole. So the 19th c. produced not only Pater but also Emile Zola (1840-1902), who would treat writing a novel as if it were a medical experiment, and Hippolyte Taine (1828-93), who would devise a “science” of lit. hist, (see SUBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIVITY) .

The philosopher who had early attempted to mediate—albeit starting from the position of the subject—between these oppositions was Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). His *Critique of Judgment* (1790) was a monumental effort to deal with the problems rapidly accruing to words like “taste,” “satisfaction,” “beauty,” and “sublime.” No modern theory of poetry is entirely untouched by Kant's effort to traverse what William Blake later named a “cloven fiction.” Beginning with the simple notions of pleasure and pain, Kant attempted to dissociate the sense of aesthetic value—beauty and the sublime—from pleasure and pain on the ground that the aesthetic sense was “disinterested” while pleasure and pain were not (see DISINTERESTEDNESS). Kant meant that the sense of beauty or sublimity could not be referred to any personally desirable end. The object, as art, had only “purposiveness without purpose” or “internal purposiveness.”

Kant was well aware that in making such a declaration he was appearing to attribute qualities to the object which, to be rigorous, had to be located in the reader or auditor; his own position did not admit the possibility of knowledge of the “thing in itself.” What we think of as the object is always constituted, in Kant's view, by the mind according to the categories of the understanding. In contrast, the judgment declares the object beautiful according to the principle of taste, which is “the faculty of judgment of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful.” This idea was adopted in England by S. T. Coleridge (1772-1834), and ever after, it has been a main element in the attempt to universalize a specifically artistic value. It was because of this attempt that the New Criticism (q.v.), despite its commitment to objectivist practical analysis and to some of I. A. Richards' anti-Kantian psychologism, tended to be friendly to Kantian aesthetics (conspicuous in John Crowe Ransom), while at the same time it was deeply suspicious of readerly orientations (as in W. K. Wimsatt).

Crit. as practiced by Coleridge and some other romantic writers implied the Kantian position that an aesthetic judgment is subjectively universal and assumes the agreement of others (principally because it is detached from purposiveness). Coleridge's analytic implied that there was a difference between the good and the beautiful (or the sublime). He held that texts were discussible by recourse to analysis (q.v.) of their organic form (see ORGANICISM) , thereby avoiding the complete relativity later practiced by Pater and France (the latter of whom was to

declare that the critic ought to say “Gentlemen, I am going to talk about myself on the subject of Shakespeare”).

V. IMPRESSIONISM AND OBJECTIVISM. The impressionistic mode of crit. was popular for a period in the latter 19th c., but its opposite reared up again in the 20th c., with some mediation by the art-for-art’s-sake movement of the *fin de siècle*, in which the poetic object was declared not merely able to affect the reader as beautiful without regard to its use, but actually had to be useless (see DECADENCE). This latter view was fairly short lived, though it did exert some influence on the objectivist crit. which developed out of the work of T. S. Eliot and eventuated in the New Criticism.

A parallel but quite different mode of objectification was meanwhile developing on the Continent, first in Rus. Formalism (q.v.), then in a marriage of linguistic theory and crit. known as structuralism (q.v.). But these new movements did not hold sway in America until the 1950s and ’60s, when Eng. trs. first became available. Prior to that time, the other version of subjectivist crit. revealed itself—a biographical crit. emphasizing authorial rather than readerly subjectivity. Much crit. written in the 19th c., and indeed still written today, moves from interest in the work to interest in the author. Wordsworth, for example, declared poetry to be the inner made outer and the “spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion.” And in reading Coleridge on Shakespeare’s genius, it is difficult to determine whether “Shakespeare” refers to the poems and plays or the person or to both indiscriminately.

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VI. AUTHORIAL GENIUS, IMAGINATION, AND INTUITION. The presence of the author was given more philosophical expression in Coleridge’s famous definition of “imagination” (*Biographia literaria*, ch. 13), which became the central term in this type of theory until Benedetto Croce sought to replace it with “intuition” (q.v.). In Croce’s *Aesthetic* (1902), intuition does not exist apart from expression (q.v.). In his view, there never have been any mute inglorious Miltons. One does not have intuitions that are not expressed, though they may be expressed only to oneself. Artists are different only in externalizing their intuitions; this is what art is. Here Croce ran up against one of the problems fundamental to all modern critical theory, the problem of the relation of form to content.

In claiming that intuition and expression were indivisible, Croce closed the gap between the two, a problem since the invention of the idea of imitation. That concept seemed to imply that content was one thing—the thing imitated or the idea conveyed—and the means by which conveyance was achieved another. But Croce reopened the gap in another place when he introduced his notion of externalization. For poetry, the form of externalization was the oral performance or production of a written text. To what extent, however, was lang, indivisible from intuition? Was intuition possible apart from lang.? Or was lang, constitutive in the Kantian sense? Were other forms also constitutive—music, painting, sculpture? Croce’s intuitive expressionism raised these problems but did not solve them. Ernst Cassirer’s Neo-Kantian theory of a multiplicity of constitutive symbolic forms sought to bring intuition and externalization closer together. Of these forms, lang, was one, but Cassirer (1874-1945) was equivocal about the status of lang, vis à vis the others—myth, art, science, history, religion. Was it fundamental to all or only one form among many?

Emphasis on authorial expression, usually identified with feeling as opposed to reason,



generated interest as well in literary biography, where the author's life and works are treated in close relation. Such a connection is quite in contrast to Dr. Johnson's earlier *Lives of the Eng. Poets* (1779-81), where the two subjects were kept separate, or Izaak Walton's still earlier life of John Donne (1670), where Donne's poems are not mentioned at all. In the 20th c., the devel. of psychoanalysis after Freud provided a specific method for treating poems as externalizations of inner life, though some varieties of psychological crit. (q.v.) interested themselves, rather, in the characters in the text, and still others concentrated on the reader.

The 20th-c. objectivist reaction to impressionistic and biographical crit. was lodged against both authorial and readerly forms of critical practice. There is a little more implied about authors and readers in Eliot's crit. than might be expected, given his claims that writing ought to be an extinguishing of the personality and a striving for the objective correlative (q.v.) of an emotion (q.v.). But this emotion was detached from both reader and author and lodged in the work. I. A. Richards in his influential early books (esp. *Practical Crit.* [1929]—the title coined the phrase) also avoided reference to authors and treated harshly the subjective responses of his students. Poems were for him not the inner made outer but "pieces" of lang. The New Critical attacks on the so-called intentional and affective "fallacies" (see INTENTION; AFFECTIVE FALLACY) exemplified further the tendency to consider a poem an object with a particular technical structure (q.v.).

The same cutting of lines between poem and author on the one hand and poem and reader on the other characterized the analytic practices of Continental structuralism. An important difference from the New Crit. was that structuralist crit. arose out of linguistics, while the orientation of Richards and his followers arose out of semantics (see SEMANTICS AND POETRY; SEMIOTICS, POETIC). New Critical practice, arising mostly out of a very uneasy and sometimes contradictory relationship between the ideas of Eliot and Richards, and in reaction also to both impressionism and a positivistic literary historicism, avoided the didactic and moralistic and identified itself ultimately with aspects of Kantian and Coleridgean aesthetics.

VII. THE NEW CRITICISM. The concept of the poem held by the New Criticism was of an objective structure with its own internal relations, variously described as objectified feelings, emotions, a density of metaphorical relations, a pattern of irony or paradox or ambiguity (qq.v.), a tension (q.v.), a structure and a texture (qq.v.), or statements not strictly propositional but rather "pseudo-statements" (q.v.), in nature dramatic rather than discursive. Always the lang. of the poem was treated as fundamentally different from the discourse of science in terms of both structure and ends (see SCIENCE AND POETRY). Much practical analysis came to conclude that poems were expressions of their own nature, including their difference from other uses of lang.; sometimes poems were characterized as producing an entirely separate form of knowledge (see MEANING, POETIC) outside the usual categories of belief (q.v.). Much emphasis was put on beginning with the formal or technical aspects of the poem, incl. its prosody and tropological structure, before attempting to state the theme (q.v.) of the poem, though many New Critics held that it was in fact impossible to articulate what the poem is "about" (see PARAPHRASE, HERESY OF). Any suggestion of a split between form and content was assiduously denied on organicist principles, and the poem came to be seen as having a unique mode of being. New Critics continued to employ the terminology of genre, but the terms no longer denoted strict categories into which literary works had to fit.

The objectivism of the New Critics was not, however, a scientific objectivism in which the ob-

ject was stripped of all its nonmeasureable or so-called secondary qualities. Indeed, the New Criticism was violently opposed to any such reduction. The New Critical object was so named because of its alleged independence from reduction of any sort. The movement's enemy was positivism, despite the fact that Richards, one of its forbears, can be said to have employed at least pseudoscientific methods.

VIII. CONTINENTAL STRUCTURALISM. By contrast, the Continental structuralists considered themselves practitioners of a "human science." Neither the philosophy of symbolic logic nor that of poetic logic was the ground for the rise of structuralist attitudes toward lang., which came to dominate the scene on the Continent esp. in the 1960s and 1970s. Structuralism is often, and perhaps too simply, traced back to the posthumously published work of Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1913), actually a compilation of lecture notes by his students. In making lang, a system of differences to be scientifically studied apart from speaker or auditor (though still claiming it to be speech), Saussure opened the way in literary theory to the dismissal of both the expressive subject and the responding reader. Lang, was only itself. The disappearance of the subject (and the object inasmuch as lang, was a self-containing differential system) was also desired later by a political mode of crit. that identified the subject with bourgeois individualism and the object—at least the literary object—with elitist aestheticism.

The concept of the differential system took many disciplines on the Continent by storm and became virtually the defining characteristic of what came to be known as the "human sciences." Lang., seen as the differential system par excellence, came to be the model even for psychoanalysis when Jacques Lacan dissolved the human subject into lang, or, as he called it, the "symbolic." Michel Foucault (1926-84) in his historical analysis of Western culture declared the disappearance of Man, in the sense that "Man" had meant the epistemological subject and bourgeois individual. This disappearance appealed to and helped to give new life to Marxist crit. (q.v.), which had always been at odds with Neo-Kantian theories that emphasized the autonomy (q.v.) of the text. The disappearance of "man" in this sense was also not inimical to the interests of feminist crit., which would attack the establishment of the literary canon (see FEMINIST POETICS).

For a Marxist, the problem with a purely structuralist argument would be that the concept of a differential structure, where the empty spaces between words were more important than any idea of the substantial nature of words, did not just call into question the human subject; it also raised questions about the material referent of lang. Saussure had proposed the linguistic sign as composed of a signifier (sound image) and a signified (concept), but he had been equivocal about the referent, and later theorists abandoned the referent entirely as having no demonstrable (other than arbitrary) relation to the sign. The disappearance of the referent seemed to spirit material reality away into a lang, that was all system, lacking even the substance it had had under the concept of the elite object.

For the structuralists and their successors, however, the notion of differential structure was for the most part regarded as radically liberating. Its fundamental principles were the following: (1) the arbitrary relation between the sound or written appearance of a word and what it signified; (2) the diacritical nature of the sign, its division into signifier and signified; (3) the view that a sign is such by virtue of its difference not only within itself but also from every other sign in the

system, which is a chain of such differences; (4) the positing of two kinds of linguistic investigation, synchronic and diachronic (the structuralists emphasized synchrony against virtually all linguistics that preceded them); and (5) the use of terminology that called the lang. system “langue” and smaller patterns of usage within it “paroles.” Structuralist literary theory tended to treat poems as “paroles” (see SEMIOTICS, POETIC) which were to be revealed as differential structures by stylistic analysis (see STYLISTICS), as in Jakobson and Levi-Strauss’s exhaustive (and exhausting) analysis of Baudelaire’s “Les Chats” (1962) or Jakobson and Jones’s of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129 (1970).

These principles made it possible to call in question—or simply ignore—some of the most fundamental concepts in Western critical theory. In addition to dispensing with both subjects—reader and author—structuralism rejected imitation, or, in its terms, representation. Rather than the referent being seen as present to lang., it was regarded as absent. The old idea of unity was also threatened; rather than a literary work being a confluence of parts, it was a pattern of differences, with its boundaries therefore problematic. But in spite of its wholesale commitment to difference, structuralism was monolithic in rejecting a difference that crit. had. in one way or another, always insisted on: for structuralism there was no fundamental difference between lit. and any other use of lang., i.e. between modes of discourse (see TEXTUALITY). In some quarters, it is true, space was allowed for the poem’s transgression of certain linguistic “rules” (see LINGUISTICS AND POETICS; SYNTAX, POETIC), resulting in a concept of “the literary” after all, most conspicuously in the Prague School notion of “literariness.” On the whole, however, one rule applied to all (here was another attack on so-called elitism), and therefore the term “text” came to signify any linguistic phenomenon at all, then any phenomenon whatsoever that happened to fall within the structuralist gaze. The methods of linguistic analysis, analogically applied beyond lang., reduced the world itself to a text. Lang. was now not like the world, as in the

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doctrine of imitation; the world was like lang.

Structuralist poetics tended, therefore, toward the purely descriptive and ground no axe against science, certainly not linguistic science. Indeed, structuralist crit. was never divided from structuralist practice in other fields such as anthropology; and out of this homogeneity there grew a tendency to reject the notion of lit. itself, both on grounds that the notion was politically elitist and that linguistics had once and for all leveled such hierarchical views of lang. Structuralism did not, in short, try to discover in poetry a culture-saving opposition of poetics to science, as the New Criticism had done.

IX. PHENOMENOLOGY. However, the Continental opponent of structuralism, the phenomenological crit. of the Geneva School (q.v.), with its connections to the philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, certainly did. Phenomenological crit. based its practices on a notion of intersubjectivity, the medium of which was the poem, which connected authorial consciousness to readerly consciousness without a tour through anything that might be described as an object. In one sense this was a return to a kind of romantic expressivism, and in another it foregrounded lang., but lang. now as the harboring mediator of consciousness itself. In practice, phenomenological crit. tended not to close analysis, since there was no object to analyze, but instead made contact with poetic consciousness. The result was frequently a form of critical discourse verging on the poetic and thereby blurring the boundary that the New Criticism and its

historicist predecessors had built up between crit. as a secondary and analytic activity (see THEORY) and poetry as a primary and creative one. Now, rather than lit. threatening to disappear, as in structuralism, all discourse threatened to become lit.

Continental structuralism and phenomenology proceeded along their opposed paths, for the most part uninterested in and often ignorant of the New Criticism in America and its sporadic outbreaks in England. Likewise, the New Critics knew little of European critical practice; it was not until the 1960s that the two movements appeared in America, quickly followed by their successor, variously called poststructuralism or deconstruction (q.v.). Am. New Criticism never did have its day in Europe, where an academic trad., of *explication de texte* (see EXPLICATION)—though not of the New Critical sort, with its emphasis on irony and paradox and its antipositivism—had been influential. It can perhaps be said that influence from the Eng. lang., on Continental crit. came more through literary artists like James Joyce than through practicing critics, just as it had come to the 19th-c. Fr. symbolist theorists through the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe not the crit. of Emerson.

X. MYTH CRITICISM. Structuralism, phenomenology, and the New Criticism all reflected a profound shift of philosophical and critical concerns from epistemological questions to linguistic ones. The devel. of modern myth crit. (q.v.) bears a more complex relation to the shift toward linguistic interests. Its sources go back to the many syncretic mythographers of the 18th and early 19th cs. and the convergence of mythological research with the linguistic scholarship of the time, perhaps best represented by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). A precursor whose importance came to be realized was Giambattista Vico (1668— 1744), whose *New Science* (1725) set forth a theory of poetic logic embedded in myth (q.v.). The principal modern theorist of myth, aside from structuralist anthropologists like Levi-Strauss, was Cassirer, known for his definition of man as the *animal symbolicum* and for his philosophy of symbolic forms.

In the realm of critical practice, the most noteworthy proponent of myth crit. was Northrop Frye (1912-91), particularly in his works on Blake, Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible, though his *Anatomy of Crit.* (1957), unquestionably one of the most important critical works of the century, regarded myth crit. as but one (though a fundamental one) of four critical modes. Although myth crit. has been criticized for reducing lit. to extrinsic patterns, it can answer that it brought some of what was ignored by strictly intrinsic formalism back into the text. This was true of its use of the concept of archetypal symbols (see ARCHETYPE), and also true of its revival of the idea of genres.

One form of myth crit. extends into the analytic psychology of Carl Jung (1875-1961), though Frye claimed that his own concept of literary archetypes did not require Jung, only an empirical survey of the literary field and attention to poetic conventions (q.v.). This view connects Frye with Eliot's conception of literary trad., and presumes something called "lit." with its own categories and modes. Thus myth or archetypal crit. was always making connections among works—sometimes, it was complained, at the expense of differences. Jungian crit., with its own emphasis on archetypes, is one form of psychological crit., but of course heretical from the point of view of Freudianism. Freudian critical practice emphasizes the psychology of the author, of the characters in the text, and of the reader. A revisionist brand of psychoanalytic theory developed by Jacques Lacan (1901-81) emphasizes the role of lang., on principles derived from structuralism.

XI. READER-ORIENTED CRITICISM. Critical practice emphasizing the reader has not, however, been dominated by psychoanalytic thinking; it has had a number of different facets,

some of which go back to 19th-c. hermeneutics (q.v.). Against a neopositivistic form of interpretation that declares the meaning (q.v.) of a text to be that which scholarship can reasonably show to be an intention (q.v.) carried out by the author (so Hirsch), there is the more historically oriented attempt to establish what a reader or community of readers con-

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temporaneous with the author would have been able to understand. This is the version of readerly crit. known as reception theory or reader-response crit. (q.v.). But all such attempts raise the question, which reader? The reader must be a fiction constructed on some set of principles—either some supposedly empirical, historical construct, or else an ideal form (so Iser), a displacement of the older notion of the aesthetic object. In the hermeneutic theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer (*Truth and Method* [tr. 1960]), any such critical act bears with it its own historical position, so that what is read is the historical space between reader and text, all recovery of the past being “thrown” into time.

From Pater onward, all critical practice with a readerly orientation has had to struggle with the problem of subjectivity and the threat of an uncontrollable relativism. If contemp. Am. reader-response crit. has a locatable beginning, it is probably with Louise Rosenblatt’s *Lit. as Exploration* (1938); this work was interested principally in pedagogy and began with the situation of a reader. Subsequent, more theoretically oriented readerly crit. is sometimes driven to embrace a thorough skepticism about objectively fixed meaning. Stanley Fish, for example, began his career by examining how a text controls the reader as it proceeds and later came to conclude that the reader, or a community of readers, controls what can be seen in a text. This control is interpretive power, which is often invested by convention in those in Fish’s professional position, namely academic critics. The text itself has none of the objectivity or power invested in it by the New Critics.

XII. LITERARY HISTORY. Nevertheless, except where absolute subjectivity reigns, readerly crit. has an inevitable relation to historical scholarship because of a need, in several of its versions, to establish the linguistic and semantic conventions of a given period. Historical literary scholarship is, however, relatively new, being, in the forms recognizable today, a product of the 19th c. (see HISTORICISM). Taine, for example, claimed to treat all lit. in terms of race, milieu, and epoch. V. L. Parrington early in the 20th c. saw Am. lit. through the lens of Jeffersonian values; Arthur Lovejoy brought into play the history of ideas. Subsequent historicist crit. has sought to develop the notion of reading communities. All through the modern period, there have been various forms of Marxist crit. observing lit. and judging it against the backdrop of the history of class struggle. More recently, Marxist crit. has been allied with other positions that claim all judgments to be historically grounded, and in this sense relativist—and political.

XIII. DECONSTRUCTION. The taking of structuralist thought to its logical extreme was one of the acts of the movement which became known as deconstruction. It has played a key role in the age of linguistics similar to that of Berkeleyan idealism in the 18th c. Berkeley, by expanding John Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities of experience, called into question the possibility of knowing the privileged primary qualities at all and thus emphasized the dilemma of subjectivism. After 1967, much of Am. crit. was influenced by Jacques Derrida (b. 1930), the leader of the project of deconstruction, who attacked all notions of presence in the sense of

referent, calling in question any “origin” or “center” of meaning and thereby seeking to undercut the entire ground of Western metaphysics—i.e. the concept of reference, the relation of words to their referents in the external world.

The New Critics had held that the literary work—or at least the successful literary work—was a formal unity. For the deconstructionist, there were no works, only “texts,” and everything from poems to fashions in clothing were texts; the verbal medium was no longer a criterion for textuality (q.v.). The text was now a disseminating disunity of differences. Things did not come together in a text, if it could be said that there were things (there weren’t, strictly speaking). The hope of closure (q.v.) slipped ever down the chain of signifiers. Rather than a totality, the text offered up only the endlessness of possibility, and one text flowed toward and into another. Derrida’s practice was to analyze a variety of texts, usually not Active or poetic, to demonstrate that what they seemed to profess as a structure of ideas was in fact contradicted by their own behavior, and that these contradictions were not superficial but fundamental—and finally inescapable. Out of deconstructive theory spread a critical practice that dismantled texts down to their purportedly inevitable contradictions, though in some versions, texts were said to deconstruct themselves.

Derrida had pointed out that structuralist theory taken to its logical end required the abandonment not only of the referent but also the signified, since every signifier signified but another signifier, and so on endlessly. There could be no end to the search for an origin or center, which Derrida named the ever-absent “transcendental signified.” It could not be known any more than could Locke’s primary qualities according to Berkeley; perhaps it did not exist. There was left only play among the signifiers in a search for meaning that could be carried on properly, in Derrida’s view, only with the knowledge that it could not be achieved. There was some analogy here to the Paterian championing of experience for experience’s sake, but Derrida’s position posed an ethic of irony rather than a passion for exquisite moments.

This deconstructive view was not entirely in contrast to that of the New Criticism, but there were very important differences. The New Critics embraced irony, and regarded it a positive principle of literary structure that held the work together; it was not just a principle of critical behavior or attitude. They could imagine a Active speaker of the text. They attacked the notion of fixed final

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meaning on the ground that a paraphrase could never contain a meaning coexistent with the poem’s formal being, but did not imagine that being itself was endlessly deferred. In practice, the New Critics tended to produce readings that sometimes violated their own strictures, resulting in allegorization. Derrida had been quick to point out that certain structuralists’ analyses inevitably implied the presence of the very “transcendental signified” that their concept of structure could not logically allow. When deconstruction came to America, deconstructionists attacked the New Critics on the same grounds. The work of Frye, which had some characteristics close to structuralism, though not the ground in linguistics, was criticized for creating categories that were substantial rather than differential. Yet Derrida himself never tired of observing that it was in the nature of lang, itself to presume existence of the “transcendental signified.”

The trick was to keep one’s discourse in motion in order to escape as long as possible this fixity. With irony transferred from poetry to the activity of critical theory itself, it began to appear, from this perspective, that deconstructive discourse was no different from the discourse it gazed

upon. The result was, on the one hand, either the disappearance of lit. or the declaration that all discourse was literary, depending on how one felt about the elitist aura of the term “lit.” At least in France, where these ideas had originated, it was regarded as elitist. On the other hand, there was a turning in on itself of critical theory toward a degree of self-consciousness of utterance and self-examination previously unknown. Hardly a theoretical statement could be made that was not quickly subjected to analysis. The Age of Crit. had given way to the Age of Theory.

In the deconstructive practice of Paul de Man (1919-83), texts were seen to have the inherent instability of lang, itself, by virtue of the fundamental role of tropes (see FIGURE, SCHEME, TROPE), which are at once both subversive and seductive. De Man called his critical practice “rhetorical.” Since ancient times, the practice of rhet. in the West has involved the analysis of a text so as to identify and categorize its tropes (see RHETORIC AND POETRY). Rhetorical treatises were generally encyclopedias of tropes with instruction on their appropriate use for purposes of persuasion, instruction, and delight—chiefly to persuade. De Man’s revival of the term “rhet.,” however, was for another purpose—revelation of the rule of tropes over the intentions of meaning.

Deconstruction has been characterized as both revolutionary and reactionary. Generally, deconstructionists saw themselves as the former, pointing to their project of criticizing all assumptions of centers, origins, and transcendental signifieds. Certainly deconstruction came about in France in an intellectually radical period, and deconstructionists had declared their sympathy for leftist positions during the student uprisings in France. On the other hand, it has been argued that deconstruction’s critique is so far-reaching, its skepticism so thorough, that it seems incapable of commitment to any specific action. Critics who propose certain political or ethical views have sometimes been interested in deconstructive method while at the same time expressing resistance to it on the ground that its endless irony seems paradoxically to be a dead end.

In the wake of deconstruction, and frequently opposed to it while at the same time often influenced by its methods, came a variety of politically oriented movements, most of which had their roots in the political activities of the 1960s (see POLITICS AND POETRY). Feminist crit. brought about an examination of writing by women, past and present, and a critique of masculine or patriarchal attitudes not only in lit. and crit. but also throughout Western culture (see FEMINIST POETICS). In this, feminism in its own way paralleled deconstruction’s critique of Western metaphysics. The feminist attack was principally against the so-called canon of great writers, virtually all male, and was one of the forces setting in motion a debate about canonicity in general. This in turn revived debate about literary value, though almost entirely on political grounds, a debate which had been virtually obliterated earlier in this century by intense preoccupation with problems of interp.

XIV. NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL STUDIES. The New Historicism, heavily under the influence of the writings of Michel Foucault, attempted to reconstitute literary history as a study of power relations (see HISTORICISM). This movement was paralleled by “culture studies,” particularly concerned with the social (and power) questions of race, class, and gender (see CULTURAL CRITICISM). These gave particular attention to the pressures of socio-historical circumstances on the production of the literary text, though most often the line between literary and other texts was deliberately blurred. Often, too, specifically lit. crit. or literary theory was tacitly rejected in favor of “critical theory” roughly in the sense established by the Frankfurt theorists (Adorno, Horkheimer, et al.) in the 1930s, when social crit. enclosed literary concerns.

In these developments the notion of textuality, as first developed in structuralism, lingered on. The notion of "lit." itself was called in question sometimes as conceptually elitist, sometimes as the victim of reductive tendencies in theories of textuality themselves, where differences between literary (or Active) and other uses of lang., elaborately developed over centuries of theoretical discourse, were explicitly rejected.

XV. CONCLUSION. Critical practices and theories have developed not only out of or parallel with philosophical trends. They have also appeared as responses to or deliberate defenses of challenging literary texts. Sidney and Wordsworth both defended their own practice. Aristotle responded to both the Platonic theory of imitation and Sopho-

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cles; he thereby set in motion, after the recovery of the *Poetics* in the Ren., a trad. of dramatic crit. that has affected Western poetry and fiction even to this day, the lang. of imitation having been revived by the Aristotelians of the Chicago School (q.v.) in the mid 20th c. Critical practice in the first half of the 20th c. was heavily influenced not only by T. S. Eliot's crit., but also by his poem *The Waste Land* (1922). And the challenge of James Joyce's texts continues to affect critical practice over half a century after the publication of *Finnegan's Wake* (1939).

In the latter half of the 20th c., lit. crit., apart from reviewing in the newspapers and certain magazines, was practiced in America almost entirely by the academic professoriate. This fact had interesting causes and consequences. One consequence may have been the tendency for critical theory (see THEORY) to replace practical crit. as a principal activity. Enormous attention was paid to methodologies, arguments about their relative merits, and unveiling of their often hidden assumptions. Virtually absent from this discourse was any discussion by an artist defending or promoting a practice, or by a critic concerned with the special nature of lit., with specifically literary value, or with the particular excellences of a given literary work. H.A.

For fuller discussion of specific types of crit., see the entries AUTONOMY; IMITATION; REPRESENTATION AND MIMESIS; AESTHETICISM; HISTORICISM; EXPRESSION; RUSSIAN FORMALISM; STRUCTURALISM; PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM; NEW CRITICISM; CHICAGO SCHOOL; ORGANICISM; CONTEXTUALISM; MYTH CRITICISM; LINGUISTICS AND POETICS; GENEVA SCHOOL; INFLUENCE; MARXIST CRITICISM; CULTURAL CRITICISM; READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM; DECONSTRUCTION; FEMINIST POETICS; ETHICS AND CRITICISM; PLURALISM; and THEORY. See also ANALYSIS; EVALUATION; EXPLICATION; HERMENEUTICS; INDETERMINACY; INTENTION; INTERPRETATION; INTERTEXTUALITY; SIMPLICITY AND COMPLEXITY; SUBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIVITY; TEXTUAL CRITICISM; TEXTUALITY. For a survey of crit. within the larger context of Western poetics, see POETRY, THEORIES OF. The major periods of Western poetics are discussed in greater detail in CLASSICAL POETICS; MEDIEVAL POETICS; RENAISSANCE POETICS; BAROQUE POETICS; NEOCLASSICAL POETICS; ROMANTIC AND POSTROMANTIC POETICS; and TWENTIETH-CENTURY POETICS. Non-Western traditions in poetics are surveyed in ARABIC POETICS; CHINESE POETICS; HEBREW PROSODY AND POETICS; INDIAN POETICS; and JAPANESE POETICS. For overview of the Western and Eastern trads. in poetics, see POETICS.

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