

## THEORIES OF THE LITERARY READER TO c.1900

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### THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

**PLATO (c.427 - c.347 BCE)** was perhaps the first to argue, in chapters 36 and 37 of The Republic, that the impact of poetry in general (and drama in particular) is negative in that it stirs up emotions and desires that ought ideally to be controlled and, accordingly, makes people do things which he considered to be regrettable. In his view, for example, mature men ought neither to cry nor laugh excessively, if at all, something which tragedies and comedies by their respective natures tend to encourage. Literature, in short, appeals to what Plato terms (at least in Francis Cornford's translation) the 'affectations,' i.e. that component of the 'tripartite' psyche responsible for the emotions, and even the 'appetites' (for food, sex, and what not), rather than cater, like philosophy does, to the rational part of our psyche (our reason). This is one of the two reasons he advances for banishing poets from his ideal state.

Where Plato, the ethicist and socio-political philosopher that he primarily was, is prone to *prescribing*, **ARISTOTLE (c.384 - c.322 BCE)** in his Poetics is content, perhaps like most natural philosophers (the forerunners of what we would today call scientists), to merely *describe*. He seeks, accordingly, neither to praise nor condemn but merely to document his own empirical observations concerning the emotional impact that plays like Sophocles' Oedipus Rex had on him and other members of the audience at performances in fifth century BCE Athens. The plot-structure peculiar to tragedies, he notes in particular, characteristically inspires pity and fear in the audience. Neither praising nor condemning the emotional effect proper to tragedy, Aristotle seems more interested in grasping its psychological outcome. To be precise, by the end of the play, the audience has been purged of the emotions aroused within them by means of a process to which he attaches, perhaps not insignificantly, the term 'catharsis' which has, in addition to other possible interpretations, certain medical connotations. Although the emotions inspired by comedies are arguably, by implication, the opposite of those inspired by tragedies (his purported treatise on comedy has, regrettably, been lost), Aristotle seems to imply that there is altogether something psychologically and perhaps even physiologically beneficial derived in the final analysis from the simple experience of going to the theatre, whether this be to watch a tragedy or a comedy. Aristotle simply does not comment, however, on their moral dimension. Unlike Plato, he expresses no view on whether or not plays, by stirring up certain emotions, thereby affect the moral character of members of the audience by encouraging them to adopt attitudes or act in ways that are either good or bad.

Like Plato, the Roman poet and literary theorist **HORACE (65 BCE - 8 BCE)** emphasises in his Ars Poetica (Art of Poetry) of c.20 BCE the traditional power which poetry has wielded over man for both good and bad. He stresses that it is "not enough for poems to be beautiful; they must be affecting and must lead the heart of the hearer as they will" (69). He famously underscores that the virtue of poetry is that it is both *utile et dulce*: the

aim of the poet is to inform or delight, or to combine together, in what he says, both pleasure and applicability to life. . . . He who combines the useful and the pleasing wins out by both instructing and delighting the reader. (72)

In short, for Horace, poetry should be not only aesthetically pleasing but also morally didactic.

The rhetorician and literary theorist whom we know today as '**LONGINUS (c. First Century CE)**' also focuses on the emotional impact of literature, arguing in his "On the Sublime" that the 'sublime,' which he defines as a "certain distinction and excellence in expression" (76) or "elevated language" (76), may be measured by its *impact* on the audience.

He stresses that this effect is one not of "persuasion" (76), as in rhetoric, but what he terms "transport" (76). Persuasion, a phenomenon of a mainly *intellectual* sort in the course of which one assents rationally to the propositions put forth (though, as Aristotle tells us, this is facilitated by an attempt to appeal to the audience's emotions), is the effect aimed at in rhetoric. By 'transport,' however, 'Longinus' seems to suggest that the audience is 'carried away' arguably on an *emotional* level, enchanted even, by discourses that contain this magical ingredient called the 'sublime.' He argues to this end that "imposing speech, with the spell it throws over us, prevails over that which aims at persuasion" (76) as well as mere "gratification" (76). He seems in the latter regard to also take aim at Horace who argues, as discussed above, that poetry ought to be 'utile et dulce' (morally useful and pleasing). This is because our "persuasions we can usually control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over the hearer" (76).

### THE MIDDLE AGES

**ST. AUGUSTINE (354 - 430), ST. THOMAS AQUINAS (1225 - 1274) and DANTE ALIGHIERI (1265 - 1321)** each address mainly the issue of literary representation. For some interesting insights into the reading process derived therefrom, however, please see the relevant section of the entry **THEORIES OF LITERARY REPRESENTATION TO c.1900**.

### THE RENAISSANCE

The Renaissance poet and literary theorist **SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1554 - 1586)** responds in his "Apology for Poetry" (1595) to Plato's invitation to advance suitable arguments in defence of poets which would convince him to allow them back into his ideal state. He responds in particular to two claims, that poetry is not only less important than "other more fruitful knowledges" (154), but also the "nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires" (154), making many nations, including Britain, effeminate and unmanly, distracting its men from more manly pursuits like war. He argues that literature, by presenting images of an ideal world, is more effective than either philosophy or history in improving the moral character and conduct of readers. He defines poetry in a Horatian way as functioning "to teach and delight" (146). What distinguishes poetry from other forms of writing is not the rhyming or versification but "that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching" (146). Poetry does not merely hold a mirror up to nature as it really is but seeks to improve upon it in order to act as an example to mankind: for this reason, poets

do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be. . . . [F]or these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved: which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed. (146)

Poetry performs, he argues, a very important pragmatic or didactic function:

This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of. (147)

Evidently reading from a Christian perspective Plato's view that the soul is a prisoner in the

dungeon of the flesh, Sidney's point is that poetry is capable of enabling the soul to return to its natural element. Its effect is to induce men "to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence" (147). However, knowledge alone is not enough because action on the basis of such knowledge is even more important: the goal of poetry is the "knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, *with the end of well doing and not of well knowing only*" (my emphasis; 147). The "end of all earthly learning" (147) is ultimately "virtuous action" (147).

### THE NEO-CLASSICAL PERIOD (17<sup>th</sup> AND 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES)

**ALEXANDER POPE (1688 - 1744)** predicates his "Essay on Criticism" (1711) on the assumption that objectivity in critical 'judgment' is both desirable and possible once the critic/judge possesses good 'taste' and knows what to look for in a literary work (i.e. by following Pope's instructions to the letter). Pope's target audience in the essay is those "who seek to give and merit fame, / And justly bear a critic's name" (46-47). In Part I, using the term 'judgment' as a synonym for criticism, his focus is less on the dangers of "writing" (2) badly than "judging ill" (2) because where the former functions merely to "tire our patience" (3), the latter can "mislead our sense" (3) or reason. Bad criticism can, in other words, mislead us as to what good poetry is and ultimately affect our judgement adversely in other areas by a process of contamination.

Pope argues that *taste* (the sense that allows us to know good poetry from bad) is to the critic what 'genius' is to the poet. Both qualities are rare and something you are either born with or without:

In poets as true genius is but rare,  
True taste as seldom is the critic's share;  
Both must alike *from heav'n derive their light*,  
These born to judge, as well as those to write. (my emphasis; 11-14)

That is, the "seeds of judgment" (20) are implanted in the minds of some people. However, Pope fears that the possibility exists that "by false learning is good sense defaced" (25). In other words, even those in whom the capacity for sound judgement is innate may be misled by false or even over-education: "Some are bewildered in the maze of schools" (26). However, education will make no difference to those not born with this capacity:

And some made coxcombs nature meant but fools:  
In search of wit, these lose their common sense,  
And then turn critics in their own defense. . . . (27-29)

Unable themselves to write, many failed authors turn critics in order really to defend their own work and put down others'. In a self-serving manner, Pope advances the view that those who are good writers themselves make the best critics:

Let such teach others who themselves excel,  
And censure freely, who have written well. (15-16)

Of course, though, Pope himself does not hesitate to resort to invective in his own attacks on other poets and critics with whom he disagrees, comparing "half-learned witlings" (40) to mules (neither horse nor ass), "half-formed insects" (41), and "Unfinished things" (42).

Pope advises critics to know the extent of their limitations and thus avoid the dangers that inhere in "pretending wit" (53):

Be sure yourself and your own reach to know  
How far your genius, taste, and learning go;  
Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet,  
And mark the point where sense and dullness meet. (48-51)

The reason for this is that

Nature to all things fixed the limits fit,  
 And wisely curbed proud man's pretending wit. . . .  
 One science only will one genius fit;  
 So vast is art, so narrow human wit:  
 Not only bounded to peculiar arts,  
 But oft in those confined to single parts. (52-63)

This is why Pope contends later that the greatest flaw which afflicts the minds of critics is pride:

Of all the causes which conspire to blind  
 Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,  
 What the weak head with strongest bias rules,  
 Is pride, the never failing vice of fools.  
 What nature has in worth denied,  
 She gives in large recruits of needful pride. . . .  
 Pride, where wit fails, steps into our defense,  
 And fills up all the mighty void of sense;  
 If once right reason drives that cloud away,  
 Truth breaks upon us with resistless day. . . .  
 A little learning is a dang'rous thing;  
 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.  
 There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
 And drinking largely sobers the brain. (201-216)

Pope's view is that the critic, like any person who seeks to be wise, must seek to know his subject thoroughly. A lot of harm can be done by those who have only a surface acquaintance with the subject of their investigation.

Pope offers some do's and don'ts to the aspiring critic who wants to properly judge a work. He advises that good critics judge a work in accordance with the writer's intention; consider a work holistically, that is, in its entirety and do not zero in on any faults which may plague particular parts of a work; do not pay excessive attention to language and, in particular, figures of speech found in a work; judge works on the basis of whether they utilise an appropriate style; assess whether the metre and the rhyme scheme are pertinent to the subject-matter; avoid narrow nationalist or sectarian prejudice which can only lead to misjudgements; are wary of the danger posed by subjectivism, parochialness and partiality in general to the fashioning of true judgments; do not follow fads or the herd; and, last but not least, do not let an author's fame and glory cloud his judgement of his work.

The Neo-Classical lexicographer, literary writer and theorist as well as general savant, **SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709 - 1784)**, is an ardent proponent of literary realism both in "On Fiction" in no. 4 of *The Rambler* (1750), in Chapter X of his novel *The History of Rasselas* (1759) and in his preface to *Shakespeare* (1765). He also argues in the first of these that with realism, however, comes moral responsibility. The "task of our present writers" (317) is based on "that learning which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse, and accurate observation of the living world" (317). They are "engaged in portraits of which everyone knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance" (308). He argues that fear on the part of poets of not being "approved as just copiers of human manners" (318) (i.e. for their veracity or fidelity to nature) is less important, though, than a consideration of the work's effect upon the reader. Demonstrating a keenly Platonic concern with the role of literature in the education of the young, Johnson argues that a consideration of the work's impact is imperative given that books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed

by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account. (318)

This is why "nothing indecent should be suffered to approach their eyes or ears" (318). Caution is required "to secure them from unjust prejudices, perverse opinions, and incongruous combinations of images" (318).

Johnson argues that the impact of romances where "every transaction and sentiment was so remote from all that passes among men" (318) is far less important than that of realistic works:

when an adventurer is leveled with the rest of the world, and acts in such scenes of the universal drama as may be the lot of any other man, young spectators fix their eyes upon him with closer attention, and hope, by observing his behaviour and success, to regulate their own practices when they shall be engaged in the like part. (318)

The reason for this, he explains (à la Sidney), is that fiction is "perhaps of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality" (318) (i.e. abstract moral philosophising) in that it conveys "knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions" (318). Because the "power of example is so great as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produce effects almost without intervention of the will" (318), "care should be taken that . . . the best examples only should be exhibited" (318).

**DAVID HUME (1711 - 1776)**, in "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), appears to be torn between believing in the existence of objective, trans-personal standards of taste, on the one hand, and acknowledging that such standards are necessarily affected by a whole host of factors peculiar to the critic and his environment. He begins by acknowledging that the "great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under every one's observation" (307) but stresses that "difference among men is . . . oftener found to lie in generals than in particulars; and to be less in reality than in appearance" (308). He believes that it is "natural for us to seek a Standard of Taste; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another" (309). He admits, however, that this might very well be an unattainable goal because the

difference . . . is very wide between judgment and sentiment. All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true; and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being. Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. (309)

Arguing, however, that there is a "species of common sense which opposes" (309) such a seemingly common-sensical assumption, Hume asserts that there is a self-evident value attributed to some authors which elevate them over their peers: the "principle of the natural equality of tastes is then totally forgot, and while we admit it on some occasions, where the

objects seem near an equality, it appears an extravagant paradox, or rather a palpable absurdity, where objects so disproportioned are compared together" (309). The cause of such seemingly unquestionable distinctions? Not whether or not their works are true but the pleasure which all agree they inspire.

Hume points out that the "general rules of art are founded only on experience and on the observation of the common sentiments of human nature" (310), though it must not be supposed that "on every occasion the feelings of men will be conformable to these rules" (310). The reader's normal response may be affected by a whole host of factors. The true test, however, is that of endurance:

The same HOMER, who pleased at ATHENS and ROME two thousand years ago, is still admired at PARIS and at LONDON. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator, but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or by foreigners, the enchantment is dissipated, and his faults appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with. (310)

Hume concludes that

amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind. Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease; and if they fail of their effect in any particular instance, it is from some apparent defect or imperfection in the organ. (310)

There are, however, obstacles which stand in the way of universal approvals or censures. What he calls "defects in the internal organs" (310) as well as external "incidents and situations" (310) either "throw a false light on the objects" (310) or "hinder the true from conveying to the imagination the proper sentiment and perception" (310). Moreover, one "obvious cause, why many feel not the proper sentiment of beauty, is the want of that delicacy of imagination, which is requisite to convey a sensibility of those finer emotions" (310).

Hume, in keeping with his general philosophical premises, is of the view that "beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects" (311) but, rather, "belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external" (311) of the perceiver. All the same, there are "certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings" (311). Accordingly, some possess a greater "delicacy of taste" (311) than others but it is possible to establish "general rules of beauty . . . drawn from established models, and from the observation of what pleases or displeases" (311). The "best way of ascertaining" (311) this is to "appeal to those models and principles, which have been established by the uniform consent and experience of nations and ages" (311). Though there be "naturally a wide difference in point of delicacy between one person and another" (311), "nothing tends further to encrease and improve this talent, than practice in a particular art, and the frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty" (311). In short, critical "practice" (312), in other words, frequent exposure to deserving works that have stood the test of time, is "advantageous" (312) to the "discernment of beauty" (312). It is "requisite" (312), in this regard, for works of art to be "more than once perused by us" (312) as well as "surveyed in different lights with attention and deliberation" (312). Hume stresses the importance, too, of comparisons between the several species and degrees of excellence, and estimating their proportion to each other. A man, who has had no opportunity of comparing the different kinds of beauty, is indeed totally unqualified to

pronounce an opinion with regard to any object presented to him. By comparison alone we fix the epithets of praise or blame, and learn how to assign the due degree of each. (312)

Only "one accustomed to see, and examine, and weigh the several performances, admired in different ages and nations" (312) can "rate the merits of a work exhibited to his view, and assign its proper rank among the productions of genius" (312).

Crucial to all this is the critic's need to "preserve his mind free from all prejudice, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his examination" (312). Hume argues that

though I should have a friendship or enmity with the author, I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances. A person influenced by prejudice, complies not with this condition; but obstinately maintains his natural position, without placing himself in that point of view, which the performance supposes. If the work be addressed to persons of a different age or nation, he makes no allowance for their peculiar views and prejudices; but, full of the manners of his own age and country, rashly condemns what seemed admirable in the eyes of those for whom alone the discourse was calculated. (312)

It is obvious that "prejudice is destructive of sound judgment, and perverts all operations of the intellectual faculties" (312) and it is "no less contrary to good taste; nor has it less influence to corrupt our sentiment of beauty" (312).

Though the "principles of taste be universal, and, nearly, if not entirely the same in all men; yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty" (313). This is because the "organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect as to allow the general principles their full play, and produce a feeling correspondent to those principles" (313). They "either labour under some defect, or are vitiated by some disorder; and by that means, excite a sentiment, which may be pronounced erroneous" (313). Given the limitations, whether derived internally or externally, inherent all humans, Hume is forced to ask: is it possible to find in any human the "true standard of taste and beauty" (313) and, thus, the ability to offer an objective account of the artwork in question? Hume is of the view that although the "taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing" (313), "some men . . . will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others" (313). Hume believes that "[t]heories of abstract philosophy, systems of profound theology, have prevailed during one age" (313) only in a "successive period" (313) to "have been universally exploded" (313). Once their "absurdity has been detected" (313), "[o]ther theories and systems have supplied their place, which again gave place to their successors" (313). Nothing, to boot, has been "experienced more liable to the revolutions of chance and fashion than these pretended decisions of science" (313). However, the "case is not the same with the beauties of eloquence and poetry" (313) for "[j]ust expressions of passion and nature are sure, after a little time, to gain public applause, which they maintain for ever" (313). Moreover, though "men of delicate taste be rare, they are easily to be distinguished in society, by the soundness of their understanding and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind" (314).

Hume insists that "notwithstanding all our endeavours to fix a standard of taste, and reconcile the discordant apprehensions of men" (314), there nonetheless remain "two sources of variation" (314) which, though inadequate to "confound all the boundaries of beauty and deformity" (314), often "serve to produce a difference in the degrees of our approbation or blame" (314). One is the "different humours of particular men" (314), the other the "particular manners and opinions of our age and country" (314). The "general principles of taste are uniform in human nature" (314) but "where men vary in their judgments, some defect or

perversion in the faculties may commonly be remarked; proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy" (314). There is "just reason for approving one taste, and condemning another" (314) but "where there is such a diversity in the internal frame or external situation as is entirely blameless on both sides, and leaves no room to give one the preference above the other; in that case a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments" (314). It is "almost impossible not to feel a predilection for that which suits our particular turn and disposition" (314) but "such preferences are . . . unavoidable, and can never reasonably be the object of dispute, because there is no standard, by which they can be decided" (314).

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Romantics agreed with Sidney and Johnson on the potential benefits of literature, though they differed with regard to exactly how this is accomplished. Arguing in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) that the poet is a "man speaking to men" (441), **WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770 - 1850)** believes that the impact that literature has upon the reader is understandably a subject of "great importance" (439). Plato warned, as noted above, that poetry inspires feelings in us that we would be better off without because it was, he argued, far more important to cultivate our reason than our passions. However, where for Plato this is necessarily a bad thing, for Wordsworth this can be a beneficial process, given the necessary link between our feelings and our thoughts. Briefly, inspired by the 'associationism' of David Hartley which in turn was shaped by Lockean empiricism, Wordsworth feels that if our thoughts are derived from our sensations and the feelings attached thereto, then we can change our thoughts by changing the objects which inspire our feelings and writing about these. To this end, Wordsworth suggests that by "contemplating the relation" (438) between particular feelings and their concomitant thoughts, "we discover what is really important to men" (439). He argues that by the

repetition and continuance of this act [i.e. contemplating the link between our feelings and our thoughts], our feelings will be connected with important subjects till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified. (439)

Arguing that the "human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants" (439) and that humans are distinguished from each other "in proportion as he possesses this capability" (439), he contends that "to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which . . . a writer can be engaged" (439).

Such a function is especially important, he feels, at the present time when a variety of causes have conspired to "blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor" (439). Not the least important factor in this regard is the "increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the conformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident" (439). This has led to a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" (439), the worst example of which is the abandonment of great literature for "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" (439). Arguing that the poems found in the *Lyrical Ballads* have a "worthy purpose" (439), Wordsworth is of the view that his poetry constitutes a "feeble attempt . . . to counteract" (439) these tendencies.

The focus of **PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792 - 1822)** in his "A Defence of Poetry" (1821) is likewise, at least in part, on poetry's beneficial "effects upon society" (519). Shelley responds in particular to the claim that while the "exercise of the imagination is most delightful [Horace's *dulce*]" (525), "that of reason is more useful [*utile*]" (525). He does so by arguing that poetry's "utility" (525) (i.e. its usefulness) is accomplished by means of both the "pleasure" (525) (i.e. the delight) which it produces and the "good" (525) behaviour which it thereby inspires in the reader. It is in this way that poetry has a beneficial moral impact.

Shelley first turns his attention to the goodness which poetry inspires in people. He contends that the "whole objection . . . of [i.e. to] the immorality of poetry rests upon a misconception of the manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man" (519). Shelley is of the view that "all spirits upon which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight" (519). Poetry "acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness" (519). Pointing out that it is not "for want of admirable [religious and philosophical] doctrines that men hate, and despise, and censure, and deceive, and subjugate one another" (519), Shelley contends that poetry "acts in another and diviner manner" (519). It "awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought" (519) which are the product of the imagination. It "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar" (519). The "impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them, as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it coexists" (519). The "great secret of morals is love" (519), Shelley writes, that is, a "going out of our nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own" (519). A man, he argues, in order "to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own" (519). For this reason, the "great instrument of moral good is the imagination" (520). Poetry, he asserts, "administers to the effect [i.e. the propagation of good] by acting upon the cause" (520), that is, enlarging the "circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts" (520). Poetry "strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man" (520) in the same manner as "exercise strengthens a limb" (520). This is why Shelley counsels against openly moralising in poetry: the "effect of . . . poetry is diminished in exact proportion to the degree in which they compel us to advert to this purpose" (520). He acknowledges, too, the possibility that morality may be socially and historically specific, arguing that the poet's "conceptions of right and wrong . . . are usually those of his place and time" (520), rather than universally applicable.

Having discussed the moral benefits of poetry (Horace's *utile*), Shelley then turns his attention to the pleasure (*dulce*) produced by poetry. In a way that anticipates Sigmund Freud's notion of the pleasure-pain principle (i.e. his contention that humans instinctively seek pleasure and avoid pain), Shelley argues that pleasure is "that which the consciousness of a sensitive and intelligent being seeks" (525), the implication being that the opposite is true where pain is concerned. He argues that there are two kinds of pleasure: "one durable, universal and permanent; the other transitory and particular" (525). The former "strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense" (525). The latter performs a much "narrower" (525) function in that it merely "banishes the importunity of the wants of our animal nature" (525) (i.e. it satisfies our natural needs, especially those sexual and nutritional in nature); assists in "surrounding men with security of life" (525); "dispersing the grosser delusions of superstition" (525) and in "conciliating such a degree of mutual forbearance among men as may consist with the motives of personal advantage" (525) (i.e. it

encourages humans to treat each other kindly only insofar as there is some personal advantage to be gained). However, this is a much more "limited" (525) form of pleasure and those who are concerned with propagating it merely "follow in the footsteps of poets" (525).

The "production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense" (526) of the word, Shelley argues, is the province of poetry. This is poetry's "true utility" (526). It is poetry which will save us from ourselves, Shelley suggests, not the calculations of philosophers and scientists. The thoughts and feelings evoked by poetry are "elevating and delightful beyond all expression" (526). Through the powerful and unique combination of moral utility with pleasurable delight in poetry, Shelley argues, the "state of mind produced" (527) in the reader is one "at war with every base desire" (527). By 'state of mind,' he has in mind "such emotions" (527) as the "enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship" (527).

In the Preface to his *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835-1836), **THÉOPHILE GAUTIER (1821 - 1872)**, whose name is synonymous with the notion of 'art for art's sake' (though he did not coin the term), takes an opposing view. He rejects the idea that literature has or should have anything to do with the moral betterment of humankind. Gautier lambastes those, "however virtuous and however moral" (754) they may be, who would contribute to the "rehabilitation of virtue" (753). Responding to those whom he labels "utilitarian critics" (755), the "Don Quixotes of morality" (755) and the "policemen of literature" (755), he contends that it is as ridiculous to say that a

man is a drunkard because he describes an orgy, a rake because he describes debauchery, as to claim that a man is virtuous because he writes a moral book. Every day one sees the contrary. It is the character who speaks and not the author. His hero is an atheist, that doesn't mean that he himself is an atheist; he makes the brigands act and speak like brigands,, he is not a brigand for that reason. At that rate, one would have to guillotine Shakespeare, Corneille, and all the authors of tragedies. . . . (754)

It is, he stresses, "one of the manias of these little scribblers with tiny minds, always to substitute the author for the work and to turn to the personality" (754-755).

Moreover, literature is not the cause of immorality in society. Rather, it is the other way around. Gautier exclaims: "[b]ooks follow manners and manners don't follow books" (755). In other words, literature is a product of its time and place and not the other way around. The "age is immoral" (755), he avers, and "we need no proof except the quantity of immoral books that it produces and the success which they enjoy" (755). Literature accordingly reflects, rather than fashions, human behaviour. He is particularly severe on any who would lend credence to the notion not only that man can be bettered but also that literature performs an important didactic function in this regard: "My God! What a stupid thing it is, this so-called perfectibility of the human race! I am sick and tired of hearing about it. You could really think that man was a machine which could be improved. . . ." (759).

The focus of **MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822 - 1888)**, in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864), is not on the effect of literature on the reader but, rather, what readers do to literature, to be precise, how readers should interpret literature. He continues in the footsteps of Pope, asserting famously that the goal of all criticism, literary and otherwise, is to avoid misunderstanding. The goal of all criticism (i.e. judgment on any and all things, including literary works), Arnold argues, is "to see the object as in itself it really is" (593). Criticism consequently functions to

establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is stir and growth everywhere; out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature. (593)

Because a poet "ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry" (593), the "creation of a modern poet . . . implies a great critical effort behind it" (593).

The key quality on the part of the critic is, Arnold argues, "disinterestedness" (597) which the critic accomplishes by:

keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things;' by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches. By steadfastly refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, practical considerations about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them . . . but which criticism has really nothing to do with. Its business is . . . simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and in its making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas. Its business is to do with inflexible honesty, with due ability; but its business is to do no more, and to leave alone all questions of practical consequences, and applications. (597)

He defines such disinterestedness as, in short, the "free play of mind upon all subjects being a pleasure in itself, being an object of desire, being an essential provider of elements without which a nation's spirit . . . must, in the long run, die of inanition" (596).

"The Study of Poetry" (1880) is the preface to an anthology of English poetry collated by Arnold. It applies, he believes, that objective critical 'judgment' which he advocates in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," the primary goal of which is to 'see the object as in itself it really is.' The result is a collection of what he considers to be indisputably the best English poems written to that point worthy of being anthologised. He contrasts here what he terms the "real estimate" (604), with "two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate" (604), which are both "fallacies" (604). The former calculates a poet's merit on historical grounds, that is, by "regarding a poet's work as a stage" (604) in the "course and development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry" (604) (this is the view advanced by Hippolyte Taine). The latter calculates a poet's merit on the basis of our "personal affinities, likings and circumstances" (604) which may make us "overrate the object of our interest" (604) because the work in question "is, or has been, of high importance" (604) to us personally. Arnold seems to have the views of Walter Pater in mind here. Many people, Arnold argues, skip "in obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses, and of the reason for keeping what it keeps, and of the whole process of growth in poetry" (505). All this misses, however, the indispensability of recognising the "reality of the poet's classic character" (605), that is, the test whether his work "belongs to the class of the very best" (605) and that appreciation of the "wide difference between it and all work which has not the same character" (605).

Agreeing with Wordsworth that a 'poet is a man speaking to men,' **LEO TOLSTOY (1828 - 1910)** argues, in "What is Art?" (1898), that literature is a "means of intercourse between man and man" (680) that shares not solely the author's thoughts, but also, perhaps more importantly, his feelings: literature is, as such an important medium through which the author communicates certain emotions to the reader who is thereby 'infected,' to use Tolstoy's celebrated metaphor, in a way that ultimately redounds to his/her benefit and that of the wider community. Every work of art "causes the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship both with him who produced, or is producing, the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously or subsequently, receive the same artistic impression" (680). "Speech, transmitting the thoughts and experiences of men, serves as a means of union among them, and art acts in a similar manner" (680). A "man, receiving through his sense of hearing or sight another man's expression of feeling, is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it" (680). The

feelings with which the artist infects others may be most various – very strong

or very weak, very important or very insignificant, very bad or very good: feelings of love for native land, self-devotion and submission to fate or to God expressed in a drama, raptures of lovers described in a novel, feelings of voluptuousness expressed in a picture, courage expressed in a triumphal march, merriment evoked by a dance, humour evoked by a funny story, the feeling of quietness transmitted by an evening landscape or by a lullaby, or the feeling of admiration evoked by a beautiful arabesque. (681)

Art is, Tolstoy insists, "not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious Idea of beauty, or God; it is not, as the aesthetical physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored-up energy; it is not the expression of man's emotions by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects and, above all, it is not pleasure" (681). It is, rather, a "means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings" (681) and, as such, "indispensable for the life and progress towards well-being of individuals and of humanity" (681).

By contrast to Arnold, **WALTER PATER (1839 - 1894)** argues, in the Preface and Conclusion to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), that in the final analysis what the critic can know with certainty is not the art object per se before him but only his own response thereto. He argues that many attempts have been made "to define beauty in the abstract, to express it in the most general terms, to find some universal formula for it" (xxix). Alluding in particular to Arnold's influential "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Pater stresses that the ideal in aesthetics has been to "see the object as in itself it really is" (xxix). However, he argues, beauty

like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative, and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness. To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find, not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the student of aesthetics. (xxix)

This is why the "first step toward seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly" (xxix).

Arguing that the "objects with which aesthetic criticism deals – music, poetry, artistic and accomplished forms of human life" (xxix) are "receptacles of so many powers or forces: they possess, like the products of nature, so many virtues or qualities" (xxix), the question consequently arises:

What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, *to me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? And if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence? The answers to these questions are the original facts with which the aesthetic critic has to do; and . . . one must realise such primary data for one's self, or not at all. (xxix)

He who "experiences these impressions strongly, and drives directly at the discrimination and analysis of them" (xxx) has no truck with the "abstract question what beauty is in itself, or what is its exact relation to truth or experience – metaphysical questions" (xxx).

**ANATOLE FRANCE (1844 - 1924)** argues in *The Literary Life* (written between 1888-1893) for the necessarily subjective nature of all literary interpretation. In his view, "criticism is, like philosophy and history, a kind of novel" (656). Because "every novel, rightly understood, is an autobiography" (656), France argues, the "good critic is he who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces" (656). France maintains that there is "no such thing as objective criticism any more than there is objective art" (656). All those who "flatter themselves that they put aught into their work are dupes of the most fallacious illusion" (656).

The reason for this is that "one never gets out of oneself. That is one of our greatest miseries" (656):

What would we not give to see, if but for a minute, the sky and earth with the many-faceted eye of a fly, or to understand nature with the rude and simple brain of an ape? But just that is forbidden us. We cannot, like Tiresias, be men and remember having been women. We are locked into our persons as into a lasting prison. The best we can do, it seems to me, is gracefully to recognise this terrible situation and to admit that we speak of ourselves every time that we have not the strength to be silent. (656)

Hence, France's conclusion that the critic "ought to say: 'Gentlemen, I am going to talk about myself on the subject of Shakespeare, or Racine, or Pascal, or Goethe – subjects that offer me a beautiful opportunity'" (656).

**OSCAR WILDE (1854 - 1900)**, in "The Critic as Artist" (1890), is as iconoclastic as Gautier in his attitude towards any putative connection between literature and morality. It critiques a whole host of assumptions concerning not only the role played by literature in the moral improvement of human beings, but also the very nature of right and wrong itself. Gilbert, Wilde's mouthpiece in the dialogue, elevates the "aesthetic criticism" (865) of Aristotle over Plato's predominantly ethical approach. He contends that the "ethical effect of art, its importance to culture, and its place in the formation of character, had been done once for all by Plato" (864). He admits that Plato was perhaps the first critic who "stirred in the soul of man that desire . . . to know the connection between Beauty and Truth, and the place of Beauty in the moral and intellectual order of the Kosmos" (864). By contrast, in Aristotle's *Poetics* "we have art treated, not from the moral, but from the purely æsthetic point of view" (864):

deals with art primarily in its concrete manifestations, taking Tragedy, for instance, and investigating the material it uses, which is language; its subject-matter, which is life; the method by which it works, which is action; the conditions under which it reveals itself, which are those of theatric presentation; its logical structure, which is plot; and its final æsthetic appeal, which is to the sense of beauty realised through the passions of pity and awe. That purification and spiritualising of the nature which he calls *katharsis* is, as Goethe saw, essentially æsthetic, and is not moral, as Lessing fancied. Concerning himself primarily with the impression that the work of art produces, Aristotle sets himself to analyse that impression, to investigate its source, to see how it is engendered. . . . The mimic spectacle of life that Tragedy affords cleanses the bosom of much 'perilous stuff,' and by presenting high and worthy objects for the exercise of the emotions purifies and spiritualises the man; nay, not merely does it spiritualise him, but it initiates him also into noble feelings of which he might else have known nothing. . . . (864-865)

Gilbert engages in a tirade against conventional notions of morality. Gesturing towards Friedrich Nietzsche's deconstruction of morality, he contends that our virtuous actions may turn out to be worthless, while our "sins" (869) may be transformed into "elements of a new civilisation" (869). Gilbert advances the view that what is "termed Sin is an essential element of progress. Without it the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become colourless. By its curiosity Sin increases the experience of the race. Through its intensified assertion of individualism it saves us from monotony of type" (869). He similarly dismisses the conventional "virtues" (869) such as "Charity" (869), "conscience" (869) (which is a "sign of our imperfect development" [869]), "Self-denial" (869) (a "method by which man arrests his progress" [869]), and "self-sacrifice" (869) which is a "survival of the self-mutilation of the savage, part of that old worship of pain which is so terrible a factor in the history of the world" (869). In short, he asks, "[w]ho knows what the virtues are? Not you. Not I. Not anyone"

(869).

Gilbert intones, in the light of all this, that "[a]ll art is immoral" (881) because "emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of art" (881), while "emotion for the sake of action is the aim of life, and of that practical organisation of life that we call society" (881-882). Society, "which is the beginning and basis of morals, exists simply for the concentration of human energy, and in order to ensure its own continuance and healthy stability" (882). It "demands, and no doubt rightly demands, of each of its citizens that he should contribute some form of productive labour to the common weal, and toil and travail that the day's work may be done" (882). All the "arts are immoral" (884), he contends, "except those baser forms of sensual or didactic art that seek to excite to action of evil or of good" (884). This is because "action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics" (884) whereas the "aim of art is simply to create a mood" (884). The "first condition of criticism is that the critic should be able to recognise that the sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate. When they are confused, Chaos has come again" (889). Such "ethical considerations" (890), according to Gilbert, reduce criticism to "Puritanism" (890) and mere "journalism" (889).

A concern with morality, Gilbert suggests, should be replaced by an eye for beauty. Critics must cultivate a "[t]emperament . . . exquisitely susceptible to beauty, and to the various impressions that beauty gives us" (890). There exists, Gilbert asserts, "in us a beauty-sense, separate from the other senses and above them, separate from the reason and of nobler import, separate from the soul and of equal value — a sense that leads some to create, and others, the finer spirits as I think, to contemplate merely" (890). To be "purified and made perfect, this sense requires some form of exquisite environment. Without this it starves, or is dulled" (890). To "develop that real love of beauty" (890) is, "as Plato is never weary of reminding us, is the true aim of education" (890). By "slow degrees there is to be engendered in him such a temperament as will lead him naturally and simply to choose the good in preference to the bad, and, rejecting what is vulgar and discordant, to follow by fine instinctive taste all that possesses grace and charm and loveliness" (890). Gilbert claims, citing Plato, that "'he who has received this true culture of the inner man will with clear and certain vision perceive the omissions and faults in art or nature; and with a taste that cannot err, while he praises, and finds his pleasure in what is good, and receives it into his soul, and so becomes good and noble, he will rightly blame and hate the bad, now in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason why'" (890-891).

Wilde also argues, in the same vein as Anatole France, that criticism is necessarily subjective. He contends that the critic is an artist in his own right who possesses the same freedom to interpret a work in any way he sees fit that the artist has to interpret reality. Like France, as the title of Wilde's essay implies, Wilde believes that literary criticism is in fact a form of artistic expression. Gilbert is explicit that "Criticism is itself an art. And just as artistic creation implies the working of the critical faculty, and, indeed, without which it cannot be said to exist at all, so Criticism is really creative in the highest sense of the word" (871). Criticism is not only "creative" (871), it is also "independent" (871). Arguing that the "critic occupies the same relation to the work of art which he criticises as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought" (871), he contends that criticism is 'independent' in the sense that it is "no more to be judged by any low standard of imitation or resemblance than is the work of poet or sculptor" (871). "To an artist so creative as the critic, what does subject-matter signify? No more and no less than it does to the novelist and the painter. Like them, he can find his motives everywhere" (872). Rather, what Gilbert terms "[t]reatment" (872) is the "test" (872) of great criticism.

In response to his interlocutor Ernest's query whether "Criticism [is] really a creative art" (872), Gilbert suggests that it "works with materials, and puts them into a form that is at once new and delightful. What more can one say of poetry?" (872). Indeed, Gilbert calls criticism

a "creation within a creation" (872). For "just as the great artists, from Homer and Æschylus, down to Shakespeare and Keats, did not go directly to life for their subject-matter, but sought for it in myth, and legend, and ancient tale" (872), that is, writers merely regurgitate other writings rather than holding a mirror up to life, so too the "critic deals with materials that others have, as it were, purified for him, and to which imaginative form and colour have been already added" (872). The "highest Criticism, being the *purest form of personal impression*, is in its way more creative than creation, as it has least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing, and, as the Greeks would put it, in itself, and to itself, an end" (872). For this reason, it is "never trammelled by any shackles of verisimilitude" (872) or "ignoble considerations of probability" (872). "One may appeal from fiction unto fact. But from the soul there is no appeal" (872). Alluding to Anatole France, Gilbert explains 'from the soul' in this way: the "highest criticism really is . . . the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself" (872). It is the "only civilised form of autobiography, as it deals not with the events, but with the thoughts of one's life; not with life's physical accidents of deed or circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind" (872). The critic turns his "eyes away from the chaos and clamour of actual existence" (872): his "sole aim is to chronicle his own impressions" (872). It is "for him that pictures are painted, books written, and marble hewn into form" (872).

At this point, Ernest alludes to "another theory of Criticism" (872), once more that of Matthew Arnold, which has "claimed the proper aim of Criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is" (872-873). However, in Gilbert's view, this is a "very serious error" (873) in that it "takes no cognisance of Criticism's most perfect form, which is in its essence purely subjective, and seeks to reveal its own secret and not the secret of another. For the highest Criticism deals with art not as expressive but as impressive purely" (873). It does not matter whether the views of critics like John Ruskin or Walter Pater on painters like J. M. W. Turner or Leonardo Da Vinci are "sound" (873). Rather, criticism "treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation. It does not confine itself . . . to discovering the real intention of the artist and accepting that as final (873). This is because

for the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it, as it was in his soul who wrought it. Nay, it is rather the beholder who lends to the beautiful thing its myriad meanings, and makes it marvellous for us, and sets it in some new relation to the age, so that it becomes a vital portion of our lives, and symbol of what we pray for, or perhaps of what, having prayed for, we fear that we may receive. (873-874)

For "when the work is finished it has, as it were, an independent life of its own, and may deliver a message far other than that which was put into its lips to say" (874). At different times, the same artwork "speaks to me of a thousand different things" (874). "Beauty has as many meanings as man has moods" (874). Criticism is "more creative than creation" (874) for which reason, the "primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not" (874):

To the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticises. The one characteristic of a beautiful form is that one can put into it whatever one wishes, and see in it whatever one chooses to see; and the Beauty, that gives to creation its universal and æsthetic element, makes the critic a creator in his turn, and whispers of a thousand different things which were not present in the mind of him who carved the statue or painted the panel or graven the gem. (874)

The highest form of criticism, then, is entirely, subjective and impressionistic.

**KEY THEORISTS AND WORKS ON THE READER**

<b>The Classical Period</b>
Plato (c.427 - c.347 BCE): • <u>The Republic</u> (5 <sup>th</sup> Century BCE)
Aristotle (c.384 - c.322 BCE) • <u>Poetics</u> (5 <sup>th</sup> Century BCE)
Horace (65 BCE - 8 BCE): • <u>Art of Poetry</u> (c.20 BCE)
<b>The Middle Ages</b>
St. Augustine (354 - 430): • <u>On Christian Doctrine</u> (c.395): Book IV
St. Thomas Aquinas (1125 - 1274): • <u>The Nature and Domain of Sacred Doctrine</u> (1256-1272): Articles 9 & 10
Dante Alighieri (1265 - 1321): • <u>The Banquet</u> (1304-1308) • Letter to Can Grande della Scala (1318)
<b>The Renaissance</b>
Sir Philip Sidney (1554 - 1586): • "An Apology for Poetry" (1595)
Ben Jonson (1572 - 1637): • <u>Timber, or, Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter</u> (1640)
<b>The Early Modern Period: Neo-Classicism</b>
Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744): • <u>An Essay on Criticism</u> (1711)
Samuel Johnson (1709 - 1784): • "On Fiction" (1750)
David Hume (1711 - 1776): • "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757)
Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804): • <u>The Critique of Judgement</u> (1790)
Edmund Burke (1729 - 1797): • <u>A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Beautiful and Sublime</u> (1757)
<b>Nineteenth Century: Romanticism</b>

<p>William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Preface to <u>Lyrical Ballads</u>" (1800)</li> </ul>
<p>Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 - 1822):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>A Defence of Poetry</u> (1821)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nineteenth Century: the 'Victorian' Period</b></p>
<p>Theophile Gautier (1821 - 1872):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preface to <u>Mademoiselle de Maupin</u> (1835-1836)</li> </ul>
<p>Matthew Arnold (1822 - 1888):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864)</li> <li>• "The Study of Poetry" (1880)</li> </ul>
<p>Walter Pater (1839 - 1894):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Studies in the History of the Renaissance</u> (1873): Preface and Conclusion</li> </ul>
<p>Leo Tolstoy (1828 - 1910):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "What is Art?" (1898)</li> </ul>
<p>Anatole France (1844 - 1924):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The Adventures of the Soul" (1888-1893)</li> </ul>
<p>Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The Critic as Artist" (1890)</li> </ul>

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**SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

For a general overview of the topic of the literary reader, see also **LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM: THE FOUR 'POLES.'**

For a discussion of the philosophical concepts and frameworks which inform literary theory and criticism, see also **THE PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS OF LITERARY THEORY: RELEVANT BRANCHES OF PHILOSOPHY AND THEIR ADJACENT DISCIPLINES.**

This article mainly addresses developments in the history of literary theory and criticism up to about 1900. For information on more recent developments since then in the field, see the entries on the following schools of criticism:

- **AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **ANGLO-AMERICAN FORMALIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **DECONSTRUCTIVE LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **DIALOGICAL LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **FEMINIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **FOUCAULDIAN DISCURSIVE LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **MARXIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **PHENOMENOLOGICAL, EXISTENTIALIST AND HERMENEUTICAL LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **POST-COLONIAL LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM:**
  - **AFRICAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
  - **EAST ASIAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
  - **SOUTH ASIAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
  - **CARIBBEAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **STRUCTURALIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **STRUCTURALIST MARXIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **STRUCTURALIST PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**

**REFERENCES**

All references in the article above, unless otherwise stated, are documented in one or the other of the following bibliographies:

- **THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED PRIMARY SOURCES IN PHILOSOPHY AND 'THEORY'**
- **THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED PRIMARY SOURCES IN RHETORIC**
- **THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED PRIMARY SOURCES IN LITERARY THEORY**