

Literary theory and the definition of literature Although any definition of literature is debatable, most would agree that an examination of a text's total artistic situation such as the work itself, the artist, the world the work represents, and the audience or the readers would help us decide if it is literature or not. Sainte-Beuve, with his immense range of learning and his keen sense of critical and judicious detachment, was the supreme exponent of historicism. Whether we read a text to learn from it or to be entertained, we can say that after we have read a text, we "know" that text. We can know a text in two distinct ways. The first way happens when we have studied, analyzed a text and arrived at an interpretation in a typical literature classroom. The second way is when we spend time reading a novel and by the novel's end, eagerly seek the resolution. Both methods – one with its chief goal to learn, the other to entertain – cause us to know a text, but in two different ways. To say that we know a text is no simple statement. The formal study of literary theory enables us to explain our responses to any text and allows us to articulate the function of literature in an academic and personal way. Who are the first persons who developed the philosophy of art & Life? The Greeks of the fifth century. These Athenians questioned the very act of reading and writing itself. From the fifth century to the present, critics such as Plato, Dante, and Wordsworth have developed principles of criticism. – 14 – History of Literary Criticism Literary criticism begins with the Greeks, but little of their work has survived. Aristotle's *Poetics* is mostly devoted to drama; and Plato's theories of literature are scarcely literary criticism. From the Romans the major works are Horace's *Ars Poetica* and the works on rhetoric composed by Cicero and Quintilian. The first important critical essay in the Christian era is Longinus's *On His Sublime*, and the first medieval critic of note was Dante who, in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, addressed himself to the problems of language appropriate to poetry. The new views found expression in Wordsworth's Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Shelley's *Defense of Poetry* (1820) – a reply to Peacock's ironical debunking in *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820) and *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846), and Matthew Arnold's *Essay in Criticism* (1865, 1888). Recent criticism has tended to be more and more closely analytical in the evaluation and interpretation of literature, as is evident in the achievements of major critics like M. I. Abrams and Eric Auerbach. Such a consideration of a text's artistic situation broadens the definition of literature from the concept that it is simply a written work with certain qualities to a definition that includes the dynamic interrelationship of the text and the readers. There was thus a reaction against Neoclassicism, an increasing interest in literatures other than those of Greece and Rome, and a greater variety of opinions about literature, about the language to be used, and about the creative and imaginative faculties and processes of the writer. For example, Vida's *Poetica* (1527), a treatise on the art of poetry; du Bellay's *Deffense et Illustration* (1549); and Lope de Vega's *New Art of Making Comedies* (1609). On the other hand, for reader-oriented critics, the interaction between the text and the reader help determine whether a document should be deemed literary.