

# Literary Criticism: An Introduction

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# CRITICISM

- The term criticism comes from the Greek *kritikos*, which refers to the ability to discern or judge.
- The overall term for studies concerned with defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of literature.

# THEORETICAL CRITICISM

- proposes an explicit theory of literature in the sense of general principles, together with a set of terms, distinctions, and categories, to be applied to identifying and analyzing works of literature, as well as the criteria (the standards, or norms) by which these works and their writers are to be evaluated.

# CRITICS

- Aristotle's Poetics (fourth century BC).
- Horace in Rome;
- Boileau and Sainte-Beuve in France;
- Baumgarten and Goethe in Germany;
- Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold in England;
- Poe and Emerson in America.

## **PRACTICAL CRITICISM/APPLIED CRITICISM**

- concerns itself with particular works and writers; in an applied critique, the theoretical principles controlling the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation are often left implicit, or brought in only as the occasion demands.

# CRITICS

- Dryden in the Restoration;
- Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* (1779–81);
- Coleridge's chapters on the poetry of Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and his lectures on Shakespeare;
- William Hazlitt's lectures on Shakespeare and the English poets,
- Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* (1865 and following);
- I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1930); T. S. Eliot's *Selected Essays* (1932); and the many critical essays by Virginia Woolf, F. R. Leavis, and Lionel Trilling.
- Cleanth Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947)

## Two Types of Practical Criticism:

1. Impressionistic Criticism
2. Judicial Criticism

# IMPRESSIONISTIC CRITICISM

- attempts to represent in words the felt qualities of a particular passage or work, and to express the responses (the “impression”) that the work directly evokes from the critic.
- The Greek Longinus (On the Sublime),
- Hazlitt
- Walter Pater
- E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf.

# JUDICIAL CRITICISM

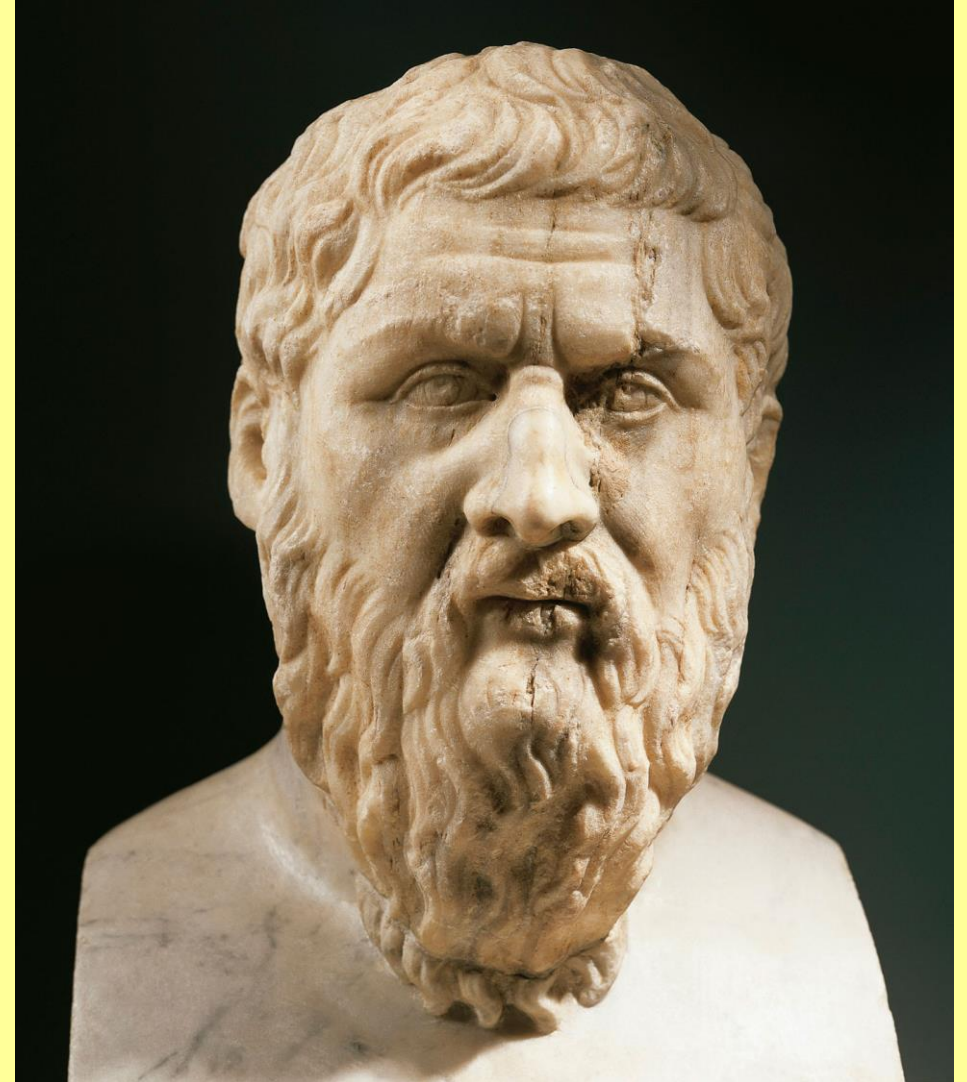
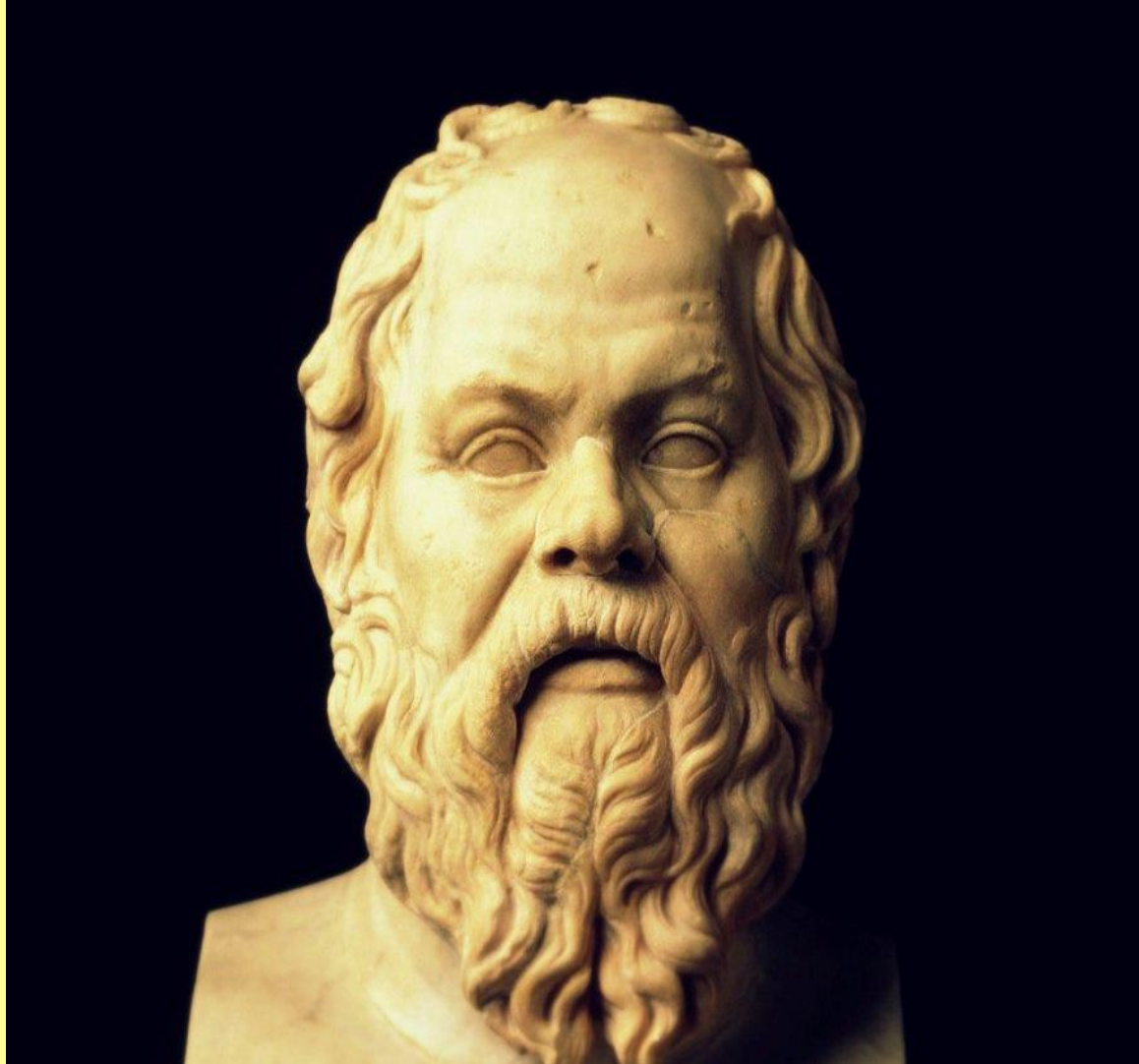
- not merely to communicate, but to analyze and explain the effects of a work by reference to its subject, organization, techniques, and style, and to base the critic's individual judgments on specified criteria of literary excellence.
- Alexander Pope
- Dr Johnson

# TYPES OF TRADITIONAL CRITICISM

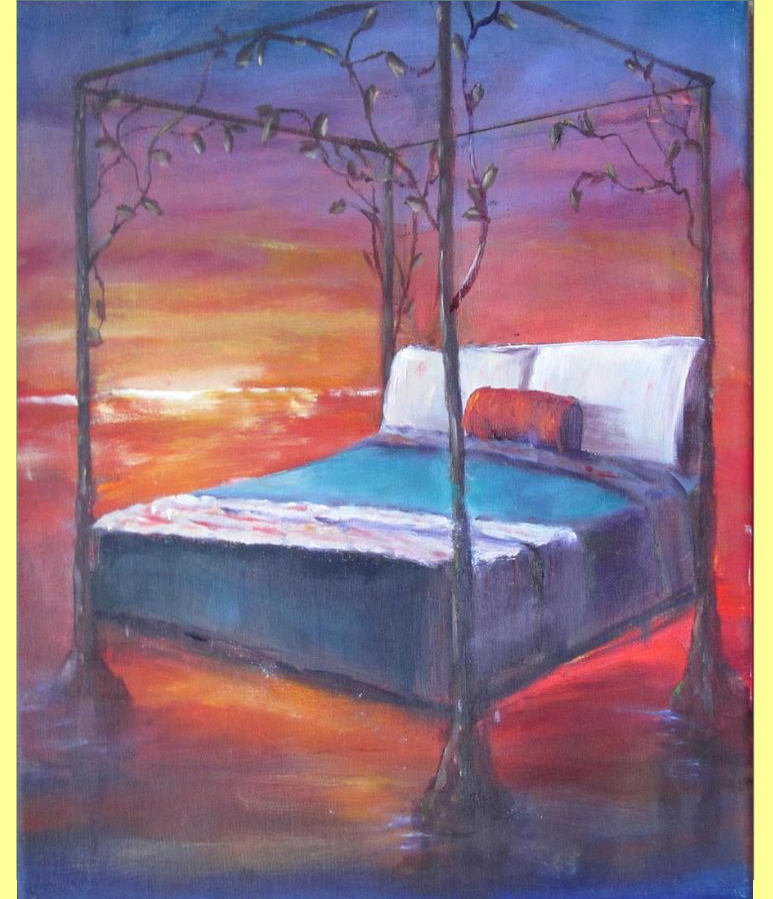
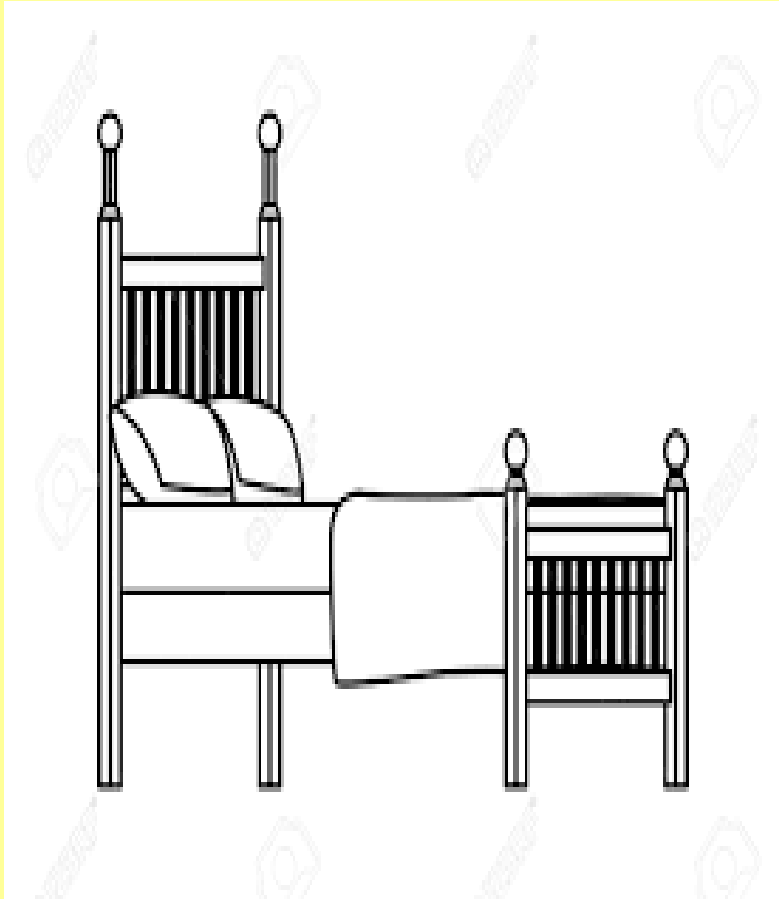
## 1. MIMETIC CRITICISM

- Views the literary work as an imitation, or reflection, or representation of the world and human life, and the primary criterion applied to a work is the “truth” and “adequacy” of its representation to the matter that it represents, or should represent.
- Plato
- Aristotle

# SOCRATES AND PLATO



# SOCRATES: THREE BEDS



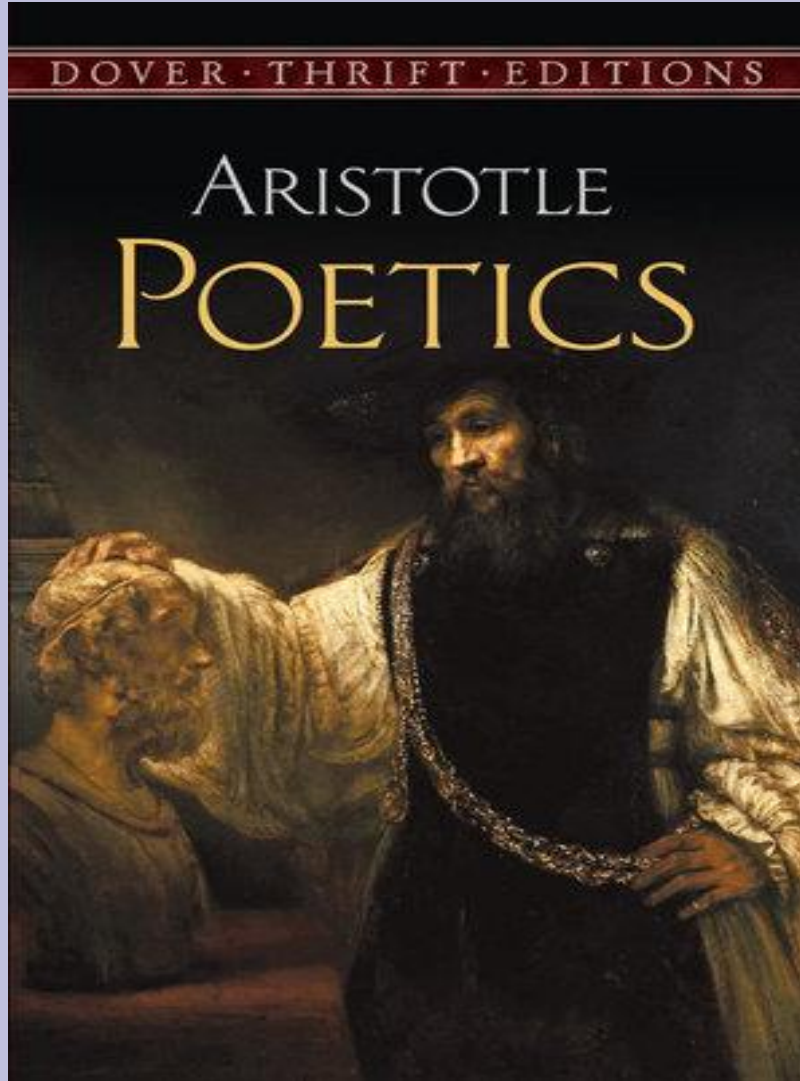
# ARISTOTLE (384-322BC)



# ARISTOTLE

- Stageira
- Established Lyceum
- Dedicated to Apollo Lyceus, God of shepherds.
- Plato: Academy – mathematics, metaphysics and politics.
- Lyceum – natural sciences, botany, music and medicine.

# POETICS

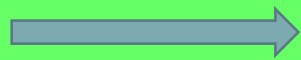


- 26 Chapters
- Aristotle's Poetics can be read as a response to Plato's attack on art.
- Main focus on Greek tragedy

# MIMESIS

- Mimesis is basic to art.
- Mimesis is imitation/copying
- Imitation requires three things:

OBJECTS



MEDIUM



METHOD



Human actions



Colours

Stone

Words, rhythm and

Harmony



As they are

As better than they are

As worse than they are,

# TRAGEDY

Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in a language embellished with various kinds of figurative ornaments, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; arousing pity and fear effecting a catharsis of these emotions.

# CATHARSIS

- Religious Meaning: Purification
- Medical Meaning: Purgation

# 6 ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY

1. Mythos (Plot)
2. Ethos (Character)
3. Dianoia (Thought)
4. Lexis (Diction)
5. Melos (Melody)
6. Opsis (Spectacle)

# P L O T

- The soul of tragedy
  - Simple Plot:
    - The simple plot is defined as a unified construct of necessary and probable actions accompanied by a change of fortune.
  - Complex
    - Anagnorisis
    - Peripeteia

# H A M A R T I A

- Tragic Flaw in the hero's character
- From archery – Miss the mark
- Error in judgement
- Hubris

## 2. PRAGMATIC CRITICISM

- views the work as something which is constructed in order to achieve certain effects on the audience (effects such as aesthetic pleasure, instruction, or kinds of emotion), and it tends to judge the value of the work according to its success in achieving that aim.
- Art of Poetry by the Roman Horace (first century BC) through the eighteenth century
- The pragmatic approach has also been adopted by some structuralists who analyze a literary text as a systematic play of codes that produce the interpretative responses of a reader.

**QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS (HORACE)  
(65 – 8 BC)**



# ARS POETICA

- Three fold structure:
  - Content
  - Style
  - Poets

# DECORUM

- Poetry should conform to the principle of Decorum
- Decorum means what is fitting or proper, and it must be embraced if a poet is to produce a work of lasting value that will strengthen and ennoble, rather than weaken and scandalize, its audience.
- Thus, if you are a tragedian, your tone must be serious, your language heightened, and your characters noble. If, instead, you choose to compose a comedy, then make sure your tone, language, and characters are taken from the lower echelons of society.

# H O R A C E

- Aristotle more philosophic, Horace more practical.
- The ultimate end of poetry is to instruct and to afford pleasure.
- Queen Elizabeth attempted a translation of the book.
- Imitation – a recreation and not copying

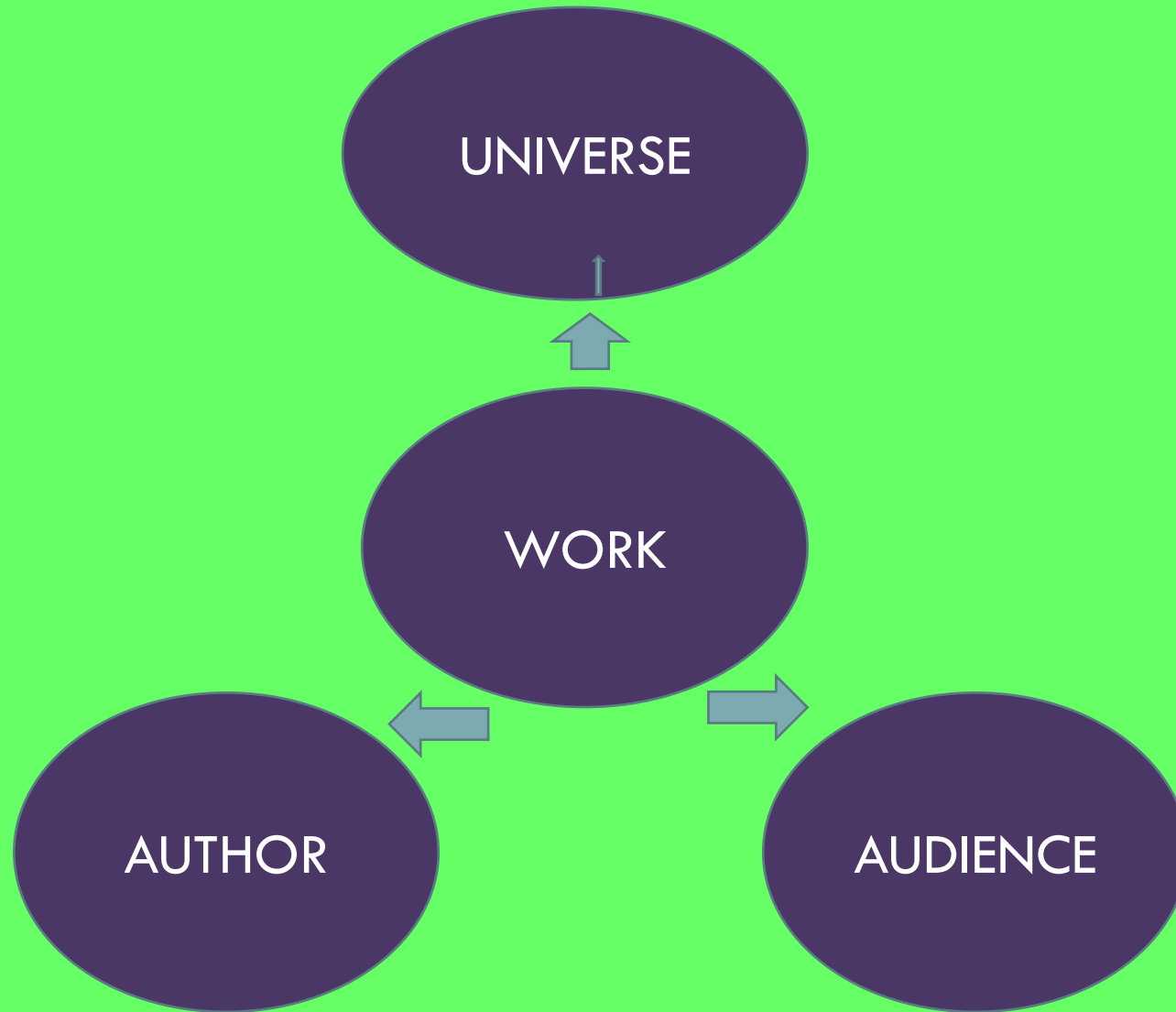
### 3. EXPRESSIVE CRITICISM

- treats a literary work primarily in relation to its author.
- It defines poetry as an expression, or overflow, or utterance of feelings, or as the product of the poet's imagination operating on his or her perceptions, thoughts, and feelings
- it tends to judge the work by its sincerity, and it often seeks in the work evidences of the particular temperament and experiences of the author who, deliberately or unconsciously, has revealed himself or herself in it.
- Romantic critics in the early nineteenth century.
- Psychoanalytical Criticism

## 4. OBJECTIVE CRITICISM

- deals with a work of literature as something which stands free from what is often called an “extrinsic” relationship to the poet, or to the audience, or to the environing world.
- it describes the literary product as a self-sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be contemplated as its own end, and to be analyzed and judged solely by “intrinsic” criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelations of its component elements.
- Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgment (1790)
- art for art’s sake in the latter part of the nineteenth century
- the New Critics,
- the Chicago School, and proponents of European formalism

# FOUR ELEMENTS OF A WORK OF ART



# LONGINUS

- On the Sublime
- Dedicated to Posthumius Terentianus
- 5 sources of sublimity
  1. Grandeur of thought
  2. Powerful Emotions
  3. Figures of Speech
  4. Noble Diction
  5. Dignified word arrangement