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Introductory Note

This survey traces the development of English literary criticism from its roots in classical and mediaeval theory to the controversies of the present day. The standpoints of major critics are examined in their respective historical contexts, and crucial foreign influences are noted. Proportionate space is also given to many lesser writers who contributed to the liveliness of contemporary debate or provided stimulating commentaries on current literature. In this way the significant critical attitudes of succeeding ages are clearly defined.

In the case of the less easily accessible critics, I have to acknowledge gratefully that my survey is often dependent on the work of the scholars who have selected and edited representative material from succeeding centuries: R. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (*Ancient Literary Criticism*), Allen H. Gilbert (*Literary Criticism, Plato to Dryden*), C. Gregory Smith (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*), J. E. Spingarn (*Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*), Scott Elledge (*Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays*), David Lodge (*Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*), and K. M. Newton (*Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*). Another indebtedness, for which gratitude is due, is to the 'Critical Heritage' series in which nineteenth-century journalists and reviewers are represented in action. See the section *Further Reading*, for full citation of these and other sources.

Editor's Preface

THE study of literature requires knowledge of contexts as well as of texts. What kind of person wrote the poem, the play, the novel, the essay? What forces acted upon them as they wrote? What was the historical, the political, the philosophical, the economic, the cultural background? Was the writer accepting or rejecting the literary conventions of the time, or developing them, or creating entirely new kinds of literary expression? Are there interactions between literature and the art, music or architecture of its period? Was the writer affected by contemporaries or isolated?

Such questions stress the need for students to go beyond the reading of set texts, to extend their knowledge by developing a sense of chronology, of action and reaction, and of the varying relationships between writers and society.

Histories of literature can encourage students to make comparisons, can aid in understanding the purposes of individual authors and in assessing the totality of their achievements. Their development can be better understood and appreciated with some knowledge of the background of their time. And histories of literature, apart from their valuable function as reference books, can demonstrate the great wealth of writing in English that there is to be enjoyed. They can guide the reader who wishes to explore it more fully and to gain in the process deeper insights into the rich diversity not only of literature but of human life itself.

A. NORMAN JEFFARES