

**ESTIMATIONS IN
CRITICISM: VOL. I.
POETS AND POETRY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649577675

Estimations in Criticism: Vol. I. Poets and Poetry by Walter Bagehot & Cuthbert Lennox

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

WALTER BAGEHOT & CUTHBERT LENNOX

**ESTIMATIONS IN
CRITICISM: VOL. I.
POETS AND POETRY**

ESTIMATIONS IN CRITICISM

ESTIMATIONS IN CRITICISM

BY

WALTER BAGEHOT

|||

IN TWO VOLUMES

EDITED BY

CUTHBERT LENNOX

I

POETS AND POETRY

LONDON: ANDREW MELROSE
3 YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN

1908

PR
99
B14
v.1

CONTENTS OF VOLUME I

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY NOTE	vii
HARTLEY COLERIDGE	I
WILLIAM COWPER	40
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY	102
JOHN MILTON	161
ART IN ENGLISH POETRY	218

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

WALTER BAGEHOT was born in 1826, and died in 1877. A banker, a merchant, and a shipowner, his excursions into literary criticism were of the nature of a leisurely aside, and took the form of articles contributed to the *Prospective Review* and the *National Review* between the years 1852 and 1864. He also made time to act as editor of the latter periodical, in conjunction with Richard Holt Hutton, from 1855 until 1864, when the venture came to an end. In later years he gave his attention, almost exclusively, to economics; and, as editor of *The Economist* and author of a number of technical works, achieved considerable distinction as a political economist.

English literary criticism by way of review article may be said to have begun with the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, and the mode was strengthened and extended on the inception of the *Contemporary Review* in 1809, and the *London Magazine* in 1820. Conspicuous among the early critics were Francis Jeffrey, foremost of the 'Edinburgh Reviewers'; William Hazlitt, whose contributions to the *Edinburgh* commenced in 1814; and Macaulay, whose essay on Milton in 1825 was the first of a series which awakened the interest

of a wider public in the 'intellectual entertainment,' to use Bagehot's phrase, to be derived from the appreciation of literature. The next critical luminary to appear was Matthew Arnold, and he was a contemporary of Walter Bagehot.

If we are to make any attempt to differentiate between the criticism of Bagehot and that of Jeffrey and his successors, it may be maintained with some show of reason that the difference was one of imagination and of technique. These main elements of style manifest themselves in two ways. On the one hand, we have diction—the salient phrase, the right word. On the other, there is tectonic—the composition of the well-built sentence, paragraph, thesis. The one relates more or less directly to the writer's imagination, to his perception of beauty. The other is structural and logical, and is the product of a sense of proportion. In style at its best both elements appear in due measure, but the writings of most men exhibit a deficiency in one or other of these constituents.

If we assess Jeffrey, by way of instance, on the basis of this analysis of style, we find him lacking in imagination. His logic may be unexceptionable, but his phrasing is commonplace, and his judgment—whether correct or not—is stated in hard terms. The rational always received undue emphasis from him: to him 'the finer raptures of poetry were not revealed.'

Turning to Bagehot, we see at once that the position is absolutely reversed. He has not the ghost of an idea of tectonic. For him the rules of grammar and laws of syntax might as well not have existed; his

paragraphing was left to the hazard of the printer's stick ; and in no one of his articles did he succeed in saying all that he had meant to say—each lacks proportion and completeness. It follows that he is no trustworthy guide on technical questions of criticism, nor does he offer much commentary in that direction. But what we do find in his style is the nice phrasing and saliency of diction that we have identified with imagination. Bagehot was an imaginative critic if ever there was one, and Pater has gone the length of laying it down that the best sort of criticism is the imaginative—penetrating as it does through the given literary or artistic product into the mental and inner constitution of the producer. This is the characteristic of all Bagehot's estimates, as he called them.

Bagehot was immediately interested in the humanities of literature rather than its æsthetics, and his method was psychological rather than literary. He sought to relate his author with his own observation of men and his theories of life—to extend his acquaintance with great minds in their working. By intuition, *per saltum*, he found his keynote in the personality of the writer behind the book, and sounded this in a formula of classification. A few instances of these keynotes in classification may serve, by way of illustration. Men are either 'perfect' or 'imperfect' in their 'realisations.' There are two kinds of goodness—'the sensuous' and 'the ascetic.' Novels are 'ubiquitous' or 'sentimental.' Intellects are 'subtle' or 'creative.' There are two kinds of education—'the education of facts' and 'the education of speculation.' Men of genius are

divided into 'regular' and 'irregular.' There are many kinds of reader—'the voracious,' 'the subtle,' 'the stupid,' 'the matter-of-fact, or positive.' Scott is great because he has an 'experiencing nature.' He has communed with men and things: observes, enjoys, records. Shakespeare is greater than Scott, because he combines with an experiencing nature that of the reflective solitary who communes with himself. The possession of an 'enjoying nature' made the difference between Cavalier and Puritan.

Thus and thus does Bagehot exercise his critical imagination. Of course, as Leslie Stephen has justly remarked, his classifications do not always bear reflection. Now and again, the reader becomes conscious that essential facts are being ignored or glossed over, in order to make the instance fit the theory advanced; or he feels, at any rate, that one aspect is being emphasised while others are neglected. It must be conceded, too, that the critic's terminology is occasionally quite arbitrary: his formula is not self-interpretative. But, throughout, we are impressed by the fecundity of the writer's imagination; his mind is 'swarming with theories.'

Much might be said about Bagehot's felicitous phrases and wide vocabulary; about his broad views of life, both in its spiritual and in its social aspects; about his keen sense of humour and his 'spirit of mockery.' But these lie on the surface, and they may be left to surprise the reader as he comes upon them. Setting aside analysis, it may be claimed that, if, as Matthew Arnold has put it, the end of criticism is to create a current of true and fresh ideas, Bagehot's essays are full of this sort of sugges-