

**TWO PHASES OF CRITICISM, HISTORICAL
AND AESTHETIC: LECTURES DELIVERED
ON THE LARWILL FOUNDATION OF
KENYON COLLEGE MAY SEVENTH AND
EIGHTH, 1913, PP. 1-68**

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Two Phases of Criticism, Historical and Aesthetic: Lectures Delivered on the Larwill
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Woodberry

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GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

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I
HISTORICAL CRITICISM

HISTORICAL CRITICISM

WHAT is the act of criticism? It has lately been succinctly described as repetition of the creative act of genius originating a work of art; to criticise is to re-create. The critic is genius at one remove; he is not unlike an actor on the stage, and incarnates in his mind, as the actor embodies in his person, another's work; only thus does he understand art, realize it, know it; and having arrived at this, his task is done. This is the last word of modern theory. It is obvious that it simplifies the function of criticism, and relieves it apparently of much of its old service. It relieves it, for example, of judgment; the critic understands, he does not judge. It relieves it of interpretation; the critic presents, he does not interpret. Strictly speaking, it seems a private affair that he is engaged in, an appreciation within his own consciousness; for the public to benefit by this method, every one must become his own critic, since to create or re-create is a deeply personal act. I pass no judgment on

this theory now, but I shall return to it in my second lecture and shall endeavor to draw out its fruitful side. I desire, however, to state it at the outset, in order to throw into relief against it the matter of the present discourse, which deals with an older conception of the critic's service.

The theory whose main position I have outlined, limits art narrowly to its own world, the aesthetic sphere of the soul in which genius works and from which its creations proceed, a world transcending that in which human life habitually goes on, and existing by virtue of its ideality on a higher plane of being. The world of art has an absolute and eternal quality which it imparts to its creations; and one feels this the more in proportion as he has intimacy with them, enters into and lives in their world, and achieves its reality by virtue of that union with the creative mind which the new theory sets forth as the end of criticism. But works of art have also a purely phenomenal side; once created, they belong to the world of phenomena, and having come into existence there, they are subject to the order of time, to

current human conditions, to changing judgments intellectual and moral, to varieties of fortune; in short, they are no longer isolated and in a place of their own, the artist's mind, but are part of a larger world. They put on many relations, and thereby enlarge their being; they generate new interests, and thereby vary their significance; and the older criticism took note of these things. In brief, works of art take their place in time, and give rise to a history of art.] They are terms of a temporal series; they "look before and after;" and however isolate and absolute may be their aesthetic value, they offer, to say the least, other pertinent phrases of interest, when taken as a development in time.

The older criticism concerned itself much with germinal origins and shaping influences, questions of race, climate, geographical position, social environment, political fortune. [I need only recall to you the brilliant monographs in which Taine made the art of the North emanate from fog, shadow and damp, and the art of the South weave its being of sun, color and broad prospects, till it almost seemed that poetry was a branch of climatology, that temperature