

Banha University - Faculty of Arts
English Department

MA Program

Literary Criticism
Lecture 3

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PART III
GREEK AND LATIN
CRITICISM DURING
THE ROMAN EMPIRE

HORACE (65–8 BC)

Horace's *Ars poetica*, composed toward the end of his life, has been vast, exceeding the influence of Plato, and in many periods, even that of Aristotle. Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus) is known primarily as a poet, a composer of odes, satires, and epistles. In the realm of literary criticism, he has conventionally been associated with the notions that "a poem is like a painting," that poetry should "teach and delight," as well as the idea that poetry is a craft which requires labor.

HORACE

- But what has Horace, in this “classic,” really told us about art and literature? Effectively, he has merely reiterated the then customary notion of literature as a compromise of pleasing and instructing. Even his deprecation of poetry as a “game” is conventional. And his emphasis on poetry as an act of labor, as effort (*ars*) rather than innate creativity (*ingenium*), was hardly original: a controversy had long been raging concerning these

The influence of Horace

- The influence of Horace's critical tenets, expressed primarily in *Ars poetica* but also in some of his letters such as the "Epistle to Florus" and the "Epistle to Augustus," has been even more extensive and continuous.
- Stoic philosophy had some impact on Horace's worldview as expressed in his Odes, though the major Roman Stoic philosophers, such as Seneca (4 bc–ad 65), Epictetus (ca.ad 60–120), and the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180) all wrote after Horace's death.

LONGINUS (FIRST CENTURY AD)

There is only one surviving manuscript of *On the Sublime*, with a third of the text missing, and it is not known for certain who the author was. The manuscript bears the name “Dionysius Longinus,” which led ancient scholars to ascribe the work to either Dionysius of Halicarnassus or a third-century rhetorician, Cassius Longinus. Modern scholars have been more inclined to date the manuscript to the first or second century.

The author must certainly have been a rhetorician and his essay is personal in tone, addressed to Postumius Terentianus, his friend and one of his Roman students.

Like Horace, Longinus

Like Horace before him, Longinus now enters the long-raging debate as to whether art comes from innate genius or from conscious application of methodology and rules.

His answer echoes the compromise offered by Horace. Longinus argues that nature is indeed the prime cause of all production but that the operations of genius cannot be wholly random and unsystematic, and need the “good judgment” supplied by the rules of art.

NEO-PLATONISM

Like the rhetoricians of the Second Sophistic, the

Neo-Platonists held the classical authors in the highest esteem; so high, in fact, that they attempted to reconcile discrepancies between various classical authors such as Plato and Aristotle, as well as between philosophy and poetry; they attempted in particular to reconcile Plato's theories of poetry with the poetic practice of Homer and other poets.

Plotinus (AD 204/5–270)

The third-century philosopher Plotinus has been variously referred to by scholars as the greatest metaphysician of antiquity, the founder of Neo-Platonism, and the most profound single influence on Christian thought. The philosophy of Neo-Platonism takes from Plato the idea that ultimate reality subsists in another world, a transcendent and spiritual realm, from which the physical world takes its existence and meaning.