

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERATURE AND CRITICISM IN  
THE ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PERIODS**

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**Abstract:** *The present study investigates the emergence of literary criticism in the context of ancient intellectual traditions, with a particular focus on the foundational roles of Plato and Aristotle in shaping classical theories of literature and artistic representation. It examines the conceptual distinction between the “literature of power” and the “literature of knowledge,” alongside key principles of classical criticism, including harmony, proportion, and formal unity. The article further analyzes Plato’s conception of poetry as a form of ethically and epistemologically problematic imitation of reality, as well as Aristotle’s theoretical framework, which legitimizes the aesthetic and cognitive significance of art through the notions of mimesis, catharsis, and tragic structure.*

**Keywords:** *Plato, Aristotle, literary criticism, classical tradition, poetry, mimesis, catharsis, tragedy, sophists, rhetoric.*

**Аннотация:** *Mazkur maqola antik davrda adabiy tanqidning shakllanish jarayonini tahlil qiladi va unda Platon hamda Aristotelning adabiyot va san’at haqidagi klassik nazariy qarashlarni rivojlantirishdagi o‘rnini alohida yoritadi. Tadqiqot doirasida “kuch adabiyoti” va “bilim adabiyoti” o‘rtasidagi konseptual farqlanish, shuningdek klassik tanqidga xos bo‘lgan uyg‘unlik, me‘yor va badiiy mukammallik tamoyillari ilmiy jihatdan ko‘rib chiqiladi. Platonning she‘riyatni axloqiy va epistemologik muammoli taqlid shakli sifatida talqin etishi hamda Aristotelning san’atning estetik va kognitiv ahamiyatini mimesis, katarsis va*

*tragediya strukturasi orqali asoslashiga doir qarashlari tizimli ravishda tahlil etiladi.*

***Kalit soʻzlar:** Platon; Aristotel; adabiy tanqid; klassik anʼana; sheʼriyat; mimesis; katarsis; tragediya; sofistlar; ritorika.*

***Аннотация.** Данная статья рассматривает становление литературной критики в античной традиции, уделяя особое внимание вкладу Платона и Аристотеля в формирование классических представлений о литературе и искусстве. Анализируется противопоставление «литературы силы» и «литературы знания», а также основные принципы классической критики, такие как гармония, мера и художественная завершенность. Подробно рассматриваются философские взгляды Платона на поэзию как морально проблематичное подражание действительности и концепция Аристотеля, который обосновывает эстетическую и познавательную ценность искусства через понятия катарсиса, мимесиса и структуры трагедии.*

**Ключевые**

**слова:**

*Платон, Аристотель, литературная критика, классическая традиция, поэзия, мимесис, катарсис, трагедия, софисты, риторика.*

In the history of literary study, particularly in ancient and medieval thought, Plato and Aristotle occupy a central and formative position. As Thomas De Quincey famously distinguished, literature may be understood as either a “literature of power,” concerned with aesthetic and imaginative expression, or a “literature of knowledge,” oriented toward instruction and factual communication. This distinction underlines the difference between creative writing and literary criticism, the latter being concerned with evaluation and interpretation of literary works.

Classical criticism is associated with principles such as harmony, proportion, restraint, and formal clarity, which are evident in the works of ancient Greek and Roman authors. The term “classic” is typically used to denote works considered exemplary in

quality, particularly those produced by canonical writers from Homer to Juvenal, whose texts have long been treated as models of artistic excellence.

Plato and Aristotle, active during the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE, are regarded as foundational thinkers of the classical tradition. Plato, a student of Socrates, was among the earliest philosophers to engage with poetry through the lens of ethical and philosophical inquiry. Although he was not primarily a literary critic, his reflections on poetry appear in dialogues such as *Ion*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Laws*. In *Ion*, poetry is treated as a form of inspired creative expression, whereas in *Republic*, Plato critiques poetry on moral and epistemological grounds, particularly in relation to the ideal state.

Plato's approach to poetry is largely shaped by his ethical philosophy, in which truth and moral good are closely linked. As a result, he tends to evaluate poetry not in aesthetic terms but in relation to its moral consequences. He often regards poetic imitation as a distorted representation of reality, raising concerns about its ethical influence on society. Plato's philosophical method is predominantly dialogic, employing dialectical questioning to examine fundamental concepts such as justice, virtue, courage, and piety. His dialogues, including works from both early and middle periods such as *Gorgias*, *Apology*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*, reflect sustained inquiry into ethical and metaphysical issues. Although he did not produce a systematic treatise on literary criticism, his scattered reflections laid the groundwork for later critical theory.

Aristotle, Plato's student and one of the most influential philosophers of antiquity, made more systematic contributions to literary theory. His surviving critical writings, *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, examine poetry and persuasive speech respectively. In *Poetics*, Aristotle analyzes the structure and function of literary art, particularly tragedy.

He argues that art serves a natural human impulse toward imitation and provides intellectual and emotional satisfaction. Tragedy, in particular, is designed to evoke pity and fear, leading to catharsis—an emotional purification experienced by the audience. The treatise is organized into sections addressing different poetic forms, with a central focus on tragedy, which Aristotle considers the highest form of poetic expression in his time.

Key concepts introduced in *Poetics* include the tragic hero, hamartia (error or flaw), and the unities of time, place, and action. Aristotle illustrates these principles through reference to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, using it as a model for analyzing dramatic structure and character development. In contrast to Plato, Aristotle defends poetry as a legitimate and valuable form of artistic imitation that contributes to moral and emotional understanding.

While Plato views poetry as a misleading imitation of reality and potentially harmful to society, Aristotle argues that poetic representation has a constructive function, enabling audiences to process emotions and gain insight into human action. For Aristotle, tragedy is not divinely inspired madness but a rational and structured form of artistic creation grounded in universal human tendencies.

In ancient Greek society, sophists were educators who taught subjects such as rhetoric, philosophy, and practical skills including mathematics and music. They were particularly known for instructing young elites in *arete*, or civic virtue. Rhetoric, the art of persuasive speech, was central to their teaching, while sophistry came to be associated with arguments that are logically deceptive yet rhetorically effective.

Sophists were skilled in constructing arguments on multiple sides of an issue, employing the technique of *dissoi logoi*, which emphasizes the possibility of opposing perspectives on any claim. Although they did not form a unified philosophical school, their approaches significantly influenced public discourse and education in ancient Greece.

The legacy of sophistic rhetoric continues in modern academic and intellectual traditions. Contemporary interest in rhetoric spans numerous disciplines, including literary theory, philosophy, law, sociology, and political science. This renewed focus—often described as the “rhetorical turn”—is reflected in scholarly organizations, academic journals, and interdisciplinary studies that continue to explore the role of language, persuasion, and interpretation in human thought and society.

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