

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-28083-9 - Selected Essays in Criticism
L. C. Knights
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

SELECTED ESSAYS IN
CRITICISM

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-28083-9 - Selected Essays in Criticism

L. C. Knights

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

'The Strange Case of Christopher Marlowe' was first published in *Further Explorations* (Chatto & Windus, 1965). 'George Herbert' was first published in *Explorations* (Chatto & Windus, 1946). 'All or Nothing: a Theme in John Donne' was first published in *William Empson: the Man and his Work*, ed. Roma Gill (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974). 'Ben Jonson: Social Attitudes and Public Poetry' was first published in *A Celebration of Ben Jonson*, ed. William Blissett, R. W. Van Fossen and Julian Patrick (University of Toronto Press, 1973). 'The Social Background of Metaphysical Poetry' was first published in *Scrutiny*, vol. XIII, no. 1 (Spring 1945). 'Reflections on Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*' was first published in *Scrutiny*, vol. XV, no. 2 (Spring 1948). 'Restoration Comedy: the Reality and the Myth' was first published in *Scrutiny*, vol. VI, no. 2 (September 1937). 'Early Blake' was first published in the *Sewanee Review*, 79 (Summer 1971). 'Coleridge as a Critic' was written for *Coleridge's Variety: Bicentenary Studies*, ed. John Beer (Macmillan, 1974); and 'A Tract for the Times' appeared as a review in the *New York Review of Books*, XVI, 7 (April 1971). 'Idea and Symbol: Some Hints from Coleridge' was first published in *Metaphor and Symbol*, ed. L. C. Knights and Basil Cottle (*Proceedings of the Colston Research Society*, Bristol, 1960) (Butterworths Scientific Publications London). 'Henry James and the Trapped Spectator' was first published by the Louisiana State University Press and reproduced in *Explorations* (Chatto & Windus, 1946). 'Henry James and Human Liberty' was first published in the *Sewanee Review*, 83 (Winter 1975). 'Poetry and Things Hard for Thought' was first published in the *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 7 (1980). 'Literature and the Teaching of Literature' was first published in *I. A. Richards: Essays in his Honour*, ed. Reuben Brower, Helen Vendler and John Hollander (Oxford University Press, Inc. New York, 1973).

SELECTED ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

L. C. KNIGHTS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-28083-9 - Selected Essays in Criticism
L. C. Knights
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521280839

© L. C. Knights 1960, 1965, 1971, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1980, 1981

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1981
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-23628-7 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-28083-9 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
1. The Strange Case of Christopher Marlowe	1
2. George Herbert	25
3. All or Nothing: A Theme in John Donne	44
4. Ben Jonson: Public Attitudes and Social Poetry	51
5. The Social Background of Metaphysical Poetry	66
6. Reflections on Clarendon's <i>History of the Rebellion</i>	88
7. Restoration Comedy: the Reality and the Myth	105
8. Early Blake	124
9. Two Notes on Coleridge	137
(1) <i>Coleridge as Critic</i>	
(2) A Tract for the Times: Coleridge and <i>The Friend</i>	
10. Idea and Symbol: Some Hints from Coleridge	152
11. Henry James and the Trapped Spectator	166
12. Henry James and Human Liberty	181
13. Poetry and 'Things Hard for Thought'	196
14. Literature and the Teaching of Literature	217

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-28083-9 - Selected Essays in Criticism
L. C. Knights
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For out of olde feldes, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere.

The Parlement of Foules

Preface

Anyone who chances on this book in a bookshop should be warned that 'the new corn' of my epigraph does not refer to the following essays, all but one of which have appeared in one or other of my previous collections, *Explorations* (1946), *Further Explorations* (1965) and *Explorations 3* (1976): it merely indicates a fairly persistent element in my approach to works that I have enjoyed, or in which I have found an interest strong enough to make me puzzle over them. Even works that carry the strongest stamp of individuality are what they are because of the culture, the tradition, the language to which they belong. So it seems legitimate for the critic to allow his enjoyment of a particular work *now* to extend into an interest in what helped to shape the work *then*; the current and continuing value of the work will not be lessened, and the student may get a few insights into those social conditions – a term whose difficulties I am well aware of – that are favourable to the production of significant literature. Acclaimed inferior work can also tell us something about the society that admired it.

And the work of great writers has not only a social context, but a more immediately personal one, in the strains and preoccupations of an individual life. Attention to those strains – reductive 'explanations' – can so reduce 'the object in itself as it really is' as to make it disappear altogether. But guided by an active literary sense it can show how even obsessive preoccupations which so hamper our ordinary lives can be transmuted by genius into living and life-giving art. That interest also has its place in the pages that follow.

Finally I should like to give a new twist to Chaucer's metaphor. The intellectual corn that nourishes us comes from old fields (as well as new). The point is that it nourishes *us*, whose lives, assumptions and possibilities of effective action are so different from those of, say, George Herbert, Clarendon or Henry James. Whatever we take from them by way of lively appreciation will be, not static patterns, but energizing insights and modes of apprehension that (though it is not

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-28083-9 - Selected Essays in Criticism
L. C. Knights
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE

popular to say so) are the only effective means of radical social change: certainly they are the only barrier against wholesale planning for the future that, by ignoring 'the question of our speech' and thereby the question of our real relations with each other, can only mean a change of machinery, and a change in the personnel of the machine-tenders. If this remark sounds simplistic or cryptic I can only hope that some of the essays in this book will give it substance and clarity.

A word of apology is called for. Through a lifetime of reading and teaching English literature, the remarks of certain writers, certain critics, have stayed in my mind as illuminating points of reference. When essays written for different occasions are brought together the aperçus I have appealed to appear a little too often, as though to take a formal bow. I cannot change the references now, and I hope that any irritation caused by yet one more appearance of a remark by X or Y will not spread to the authors invoked: they are not responsible for the fact that over so many years I have found in them touchstones of authentic criticism.

The one piece not previously collected is 'Poetry and "Things Hard for Thought"'. This was given as the Ernest Jones Lecture in October 1979, at a meeting of the British Psycho-Analytical Association. It was published in the *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* (May 1980) and I am grateful to the editor of the *Review* for permission to publish it in the *Times Literary Supplement* (29 February 1980) and to reproduce it here.

L. C. Knights

Cambridge, May 1980