

The New Criterion

Letters

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Crucial points: A reply

by [Jeffrey Meyers](#)

A response from Jeffrey Meyers.

Sisman perfectly exemplifies the first sentence of my review: “Writers, craving praise and hating criticism, are unusually contentious.” It has never occurred to Sisman that he might find new material by doing a bit of work in the archives. Kenneth Johnston’s recent life of Wordsworth, for example, was based on extensive research in the Public Records Offices in Carlisle, Kendal, Winchester, Halifax, Norfolk and Edinburgh; and in the manuscript collections of the British Museum, Bristol University, Guildhall Libraries, Hawkshead School, Kendal Public Library, Bibliothèque Nationale and the Royal Post Office.

Sisman, never venturing beyond the London Library, has served up the old familiar story, puffed out with potted history and pathetically inept comments on the poetry. Sisman may have mentioned the crucial points, but that is not sufficient. He failed to discuss them in a meaningful way. He seems to feel biography envy when ...

Jeffrey Meyers is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and is writing a biography of Samuel Johnson.

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