

DISTINCTIONS IN LITERARY CRITICISM

... Κατ' εἶδη δύνασθαι τέμνειν, κατ' ἄρθρα, ἢ
πέφυκε, καὶ μὴ ἐπιχείρειν καταγγύναι μέρος μηδέν,
κακοῦ μαγείρου τρόπον χρώμενον.

PLATO (Phaedrus)

That we live in a scientific age is a fact of which we neither wish nor need to be reminded. But the platitude inherent in this pertinent truth may be glossed by observing that the Renaissance was, in contrast to our own, an artistic age. So indeed were many other ages. But the Renaissance offers a more striking contrast, because it also affords a basis of comparison; that is to say, that whereas *we* adopt a scientific attitude even towards art, *it* adopted an artistic attitude towards science. For illustration, one has only to recall Leonardo da Vinci, whose mechanical and anatomical diagrams were finished works of art; or his letters, in which he refers to his own mechanical genius in terms reminiscent of those in which Prospero or Glendower boasted proud control of the spirit world. Or again, one may think of Machiavelli, whose political science found room for an epic hero in the person of Cesare Borgia. And then, there are those old charts, which, with their dolphins, sirens, sea-serpents, cannibals; and chubby-cheeked wind-gods, indeed resemble

...magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn,

rather than an objective record of discovery.

As against this, in our own era, we may set the tortured theorising of successive modern schools of painting, modern textual criticism of literature and the proud title of "Scientific Bibliography" claimed by Professor Dover Wilson for his method; and more significant still, the invocation of psychology to lend a scientific flavour to the novel and to poetry. Only recently a writer in the

"Fortnightly" deprecated the scientific or analytical tendency in literary criticism as dry and uninspired (1). Yet it is just in the field of literary criticism that the modern scientific spirit may hope to encroach upon the frontiers of Art with some success.

It would perhaps be audacious to claim that literary criticism is more a science than an art. Such distinctions have to be preceded by very careful definition, and though we might venture to specify that the functions of science and art are respectively to discover new truth and to illuminate truth already known, there remains an objection to assembling the critical faculty without qualification in the realm of science. Indeed, the boundary line cuts literary criticism in two; while there are types of criticism which lie on the border, some owing their position to the critic's choice, others to his indecision. Hazlitt, for instance, is a predominantly artistic critic. Anyone who undertakes, as he did, that a genuine criticism should reflect "the colour, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work," is surely more concerned with illustration than with discovery in a definitive sense. Coleridge, on the other hand, is frankly definitive in his approach. He does not hesitate to assume that task, summarily rejected by Wordsworth, of "classing the cabinet of his sensations". Coleridge in his criticism is unquestionably a scientist.

With "artistic" criticism the present study is not concerned. It sets out, however, to impeach "scientific" criticism for not being, in many cases, as scientific as its general tone and style lead the reader to expect. That there is scope for such scientific criticism goes without saying. Literary criticism can be to literature what psychology is to life. Both sciences conduct an enquiry into the human mind. But as psychology reaches its ends mainly by analysis of the subnormal mind, criticism claims the abnormal, that is to say the super-normal, as its sphere, and makes genius, not mania, its starting-point. It is therefore desirable that anyone who undertakes literary criticism in a scientific spirit should adhere to scientific procedure, and one of the first essentials is an agreement as to the meaning of terms.

It is just this point in which the science of literary criticism has been so unfortunately lacking. Aristotle certainly tried to give criticism a scientific basis at what may be considered its birth. But data has accumulated since Aristotle's day. We have more phenomena to explain than were "dreamt of in his philosophy".

1) John Arlot in an article on C. Day Lewis' "The Poetic Image". (The "Fortnightly". June 1947).

The first ambiguity that must occur to anyone who deplors the chaotic state of critical terminology must centre round that word "poetry". For the way in which we understand it determines our attitude to major distinctions; or rather, it determines just what major and basic distinctions we will make. Few critics would be prepared to regard *poetry* and *verse* as synonymous; yet very few theoretical, that is to say scientific, critics avoid implying as much, when they venture to discuss these terms. And they imply, in this way, what they would almost certainly repudiate, not by direct confusion of the terms in question, but by the confusion of the opposites of those terms in the use of the single word "prose".

The importance of the question becomes clear when a critic begins to dogmatise about the "proper language" of verse or prose, or whenever *vers libre* is being discussed, to cite only two occasions where the point at issue is prejudiced by an unscientific application of terms.

Examine this sentence from Coleridge: "I write in metre because I am about to use a language essentially different from that of prose." We may take "metre" here as synonymous with *verse*. But what is meant by "prose"? Non-metrical composition? Such an interpretation is not helpful. "I write in metre because I am about to use a language different from that of non-metre"! An earnest enquirer may feel like the inquisitive child, who, in answer to his reiterated "why?", at last gets the exasperated ultimatum: "Because it is so"!

Yet if we take "prose" as the antithesis not of metre but of poetry, Coleridge appears to beg the question: "I write in metre because I am about to use a language that is not prosaic (i.e. a language that is poetic)." *But the necessary connection between verse and poetry is the point at issue, and cannot be assumed in this way.* Surely, this is the very connection which he is asserting in the teeth of Wordsworth's denial that there is or can be "any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition."

Coleridge has been misled by the ambiguity of the word "prose". Because he uses a word which has two senses, he assumes that he has established a real, as distinct from a purely verbal, association between the two senses. His argument would seem to be: "Since there is a clear connection between non-metrical and prosaic language (as is proved by the general use of the word "prose" to cover both meanings), so we may take it that there is

a connection between metrical and poetic language." One is not here questioning the conclusion, but the argument. The popular use of a word to cover two meanings does not prove anything. It admittedly represents an association in the popular mind. But it remains for the scientist to arbitrate as to the reality or speciousness of that association.

This is disconcerting, especially when one recollects the controversies and fashionable prejudices which have accumulated round the work of Dryden and Pope, not to mention any of their contemporaries or imitators. For it has been both asserted and denied that Dryden and Pope were no "poets", and that their verse was "prosaic". How can anyone venture on such a topic without the clearest notion of what he means by such terms as "poetry", "prose", and "verse"?

This trio of terms is a peculiarly unfortunate one. It is a case of: "Two's company, three's none." If we regard verse as the opposite of prose, and at the same time as something of a different order from poetry, of what is poetry the opposite? The assumptions which bring us to this dilemma are surely reasonable, and do no violence to the popular and received usage of words. Verse is readily distinguished from poetry in doggerel. "Verse in prose" sounds like nonsense, so we can safely take the two terms as counterparts, mutually exclusive. If, however, "prosaic verse" has quite a different implication and a readily apprehended meaning, it is due to the treacherous ambiguity of the word "prose". "Prosaic" is the opposite not of "verse" or "metrical", but of "poetic". The adjective marks a different contrast from that indicated by the noun. Could we not adopt some such word as "dissertation" to express the alternative to "poetry", and retain "prose" only as the opposite of "verse"?

Turning again the pages of the "Biographia Literaria", we find Coleridge criticising three stanzas from Daniel's "Civil Wars". Coleridge's terms are here prejudicial because he describes Daniel as "prosaic", and the ambiguity of that word has been made clear. But even apart from the question of ambiguity, the word has an unfortunate connotation. In fact, the word "poetic" suffers in much the same way, though as a critical term it is indispensable. For "prosaic" has a bad, and "poetic" a good connotation. That is to say, the terms are used more or less synonymously with "unimaginative" and "imaginative". One would never accuse the style of a cookery-book of being "unimaginative," because imagination is not a quality which one would

expect or desire in a cookery-book. "Imaginative", as a critical term then, means desirably imaginative, and "unimaginative" means undesirably unimaginative. And it is just because "prosaic" and "poetic" can be equated with these meanings that they become dangerous as terms to express two contrasted literary faculties. In the instance referred to above, Coleridge is using the word together with its connotation, in such a way as to suggest that the connotation follows from the meaning. These stanzas, he seems to say, exemplify a faculty other than that of poetry; they are of prose, prosaic; being prosaic, they are unimaginative. And "unimaginative", as we have seen, implies a defect. This is not logic. It is playing on words.

But however prejudicial Coleridge's terms are, the issue which he raises is significant: is dissertation in verse (to use our own term) a tolerable form of literature? Is verse, except as a vehicle of poetry, never justified? Our first instinct is to answer "No, never", making allowance, as Coleridge does, for mnemonic rhymes, doggerel, and necessarily pedestrian parts in long poems. Indeed, the last instance hardly amounts to an exception, as here the effect is *ultimately* poetic. But the full force of the question is not felt until one looks for the corollary. If dissertation in verse is intolerable, we shall be expected to condemn poetry in prose. Is prose never justified except as a vehicle of dissertation? It becomes very hard to be consistent. What a quantity of prose has been praised for the poetry which it contained! In this connection, one has only to mention the name of Sir Thomas Browne; and we do not feel that he needs any special pleading to justify the poetic qualities of his work! Yet on the other hand, for how long had it been, till comparatively recent times, the conventional attack on Dryden and Pope that their work amounted to mere prose? By which word must have been intended "dissertation", for nobody would wish to deny the faculty of versification to those writers. Coleridge alludes to a type of language which would be "vicious and alien in correct and manly prose." But he probably shirked stigmatising any prose passage for being poetic, in the way that he criticised Daniel's lines, specifically, for being prosaic, because he felt instinctively that such a criticism would, like Balaam's curse, resolve itself into a blessing. As has been observed, it is hard to call anything poetic without implying praise, just as it is hard to label anything prosaic without implying censure.

But if terms have acquired this misleading nature, it is at least

worth while investigating how they acquired it. Have we simply been prejudiced by the arbitrary use of terms? Or is there "method in their madness"? Have they acquired their misleading nature as a result of some fundamental prejudice in our own attitude?

To begin with, it would be well to define exactly what we mean by poetry and dissertation, and we may conveniently define them in terms which have themselves been defined at the outset of this study. By poetry, we mean the artistic use of language, and by dissertation, the scientific use of language. Poetry uses words to illuminate, dissertation to designate. The language of poetry has an explicit meaning, but it implies much more than that meaning; it illuminates the meaning in a way that music or painting illuminates. Dissertation, on the other hand, aims at achieving no more and no less than the explicit meaning. To the extent that it implies or suggests the indefinable it is either alloyed or vitiated.

But indeed, the greater part of literary composition is an alloy between poetry and dissertation. The two faculties are not easily found in their pure state - perhaps cannot be. It is vain to classify a work as poetry, and bind it accordingly to the observance of preconceived rules. One can only estimate that a writer's purpose lies at a certain pitch between poetry and dissertation, and murmur reproof if he takes a plunge too far in one direction or the other, or if his purpose itself entertains incongruities. Thus poetry and dissertation are more safely regarded, not as different faculties, but as different elements in the one faculty of literary composition; and the scientific critic will find it more convenient to speak, not of poets and writers of dissertation, but simply of writers or authors, in general.

Now what of verse and prose? These also are no hard and fast species. The Greeks spoke of their choruses as "logaoedic" compositions, suggesting that these, with their irregular and changing rhythms, were half-way between prose and verse. Much of Shakespeare's mature blank verse could be written in prose form without devastating loss; and modern *vers libre* represents just such another compromise - not to mention many parts of the Scriptures. There are even novelists who in their lyrical moments cross the border completely into verse, let alone linger on the brink of it. In such instances, it is not just a question of *poetry*, but of actual verse.

Wordsworth attributes to metre "the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude." He

observes: "From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all passions connected with it, take their origin... It would not be a useless employment to apply this principle to the consideration of metre, and to show that metre is hence enabled to afford much pleasure." This would stand as a very good definition of verse (by which we must understand something rather wider than metre, (1) something that will embrace the parallelism of Hebrew poetry). But in brief, we may say that verse is the adoption of more or less regular repetition in our language, prose its deliberate and studied avoidance; always bearing in mind that "regular" is a comparative term. Perhaps, even considerable tracts of our conversation have a loose verse form, comparable with *vers libre*; in which case, the Bourgeois Gentilhomme had not been talking prose all his life, after all. But prose, as a literary faculty or form, surely implies the *studied* avoidance of repetition, just as verse implies its *studied* cultivation.

But what connection have verse and prose with poetry and dissertation? To deny any correspondence between verse and poetry, even while rejecting their entire interdependence, would be taking too great a liberty with the ordinary associations of words. Let us formulate the connection as follows: - Verse originated as a "useful" art, as distinct from the "fine" art into which it later developed. It was first purely utilitarian in function, as an aid to memory, but later was adopted as a musical principle, that is to say, as a means to an artistic purpose, not as a means to a utilitarian purpose attended sometimes by incidentally artistic effects.

Now if poetry is the artistic use of language, verse, in so far as it serves an artistic purpose, is a contribution to poetry; though everything that is poetry will not employ the means of verse. There are other means. Roughly speaking, we may divide the sources of poetry into two: — lyric and graphic, to give them names. And in anticipation of protests, let it be said that the term «lyric» is much more usefully employed in denoting the musical element in poetry than as a vague word for any kind of short poem that lends itself to the anthologist. To the lyric element then, verse contributes. But even the lyric element in poetry may exist independently of verse. Sounds may be arranged for artistic

(1) Metre, rhyme, and alliterative verse are subdivisions of acoustic verse, as contrasted with the graphic or pictorial verse principle exemplified by Hebrew parallelism.

effect without involving a degree of regularity which qualifies them to be regarded as verse.

In addition, however, to this lyric element, we have to consider the graphic sources of poetry, the use of images, the pictorial as distinct from the musical content. Both elements are responsible for that artistic effect which distinguishes poetry from dissertation and gives to words an illuminating power that is not inherent in their mere meaning. The explicit meaning of the words is an element of dissertation which is, nevertheless, inevitable in poetry. Swinburne did his best to minimise this element; and perhaps when people talk about «pure poetry», they have in mind a type of poetry which would depend entirely on musical or pictorial effect, without reference to the sense of the words. James Joyce's work suggests an experiment in this direction. But it is probable that too much «purity» in art, as in eugenics, results in the loss of virility. And in the same way painters and sculptors may go too far in rejecting the humble propositions of what they call «representationalism.»

In poetry, however, the sense of the words does not merely provide a theme, to be embroidered with sounds and images. It may make a more subtle artistic contribution. One finds this so in Hebrew poetry, where the verse does not consist in the similitude of metre contrasting with the dissimilitude of the words, but in the similitude of the explicit meaning, which is restated in different words. The explicit meaning, then, discharges that function which is assigned to metre in most European poetry. It is precisely the meaning of the words which informs them with the properties of verse. For this reason Hebrew verse must remain verse (even as distinct from poetry) in translation. And as each restatement of the sense is apt to evoke a different picture, we may say that such verse is based on imaginative, (1) not acoustic repetition, and that its contribution to poetry is made through graphic, not lyric channels. At this point it is worth noticing that the greater body of English literature derives its verse from acoustic sources, while its poetry, by way of contrast, is essentially graphic in type.

On the other hand, one need not look further than French or English neo-classic literature to discover the subtle artistic relation between the explicit meaning of words and the lyric element

(1) Imaginative in the sense of "image-making" or "picture-making".

in poetry. One might even describe it as a «contrapuntal» relation. When Pope wrote «The sound must seem an echo to the sense», if we understand him as indicating something more than a crude onomatopoeia, something in fact of which his own work is a constant example, we can but infer this «contrapuntal» use of the sense in poetry. That is to say, it is not just a question of vocal embroidery. Sound and sense contribute on an equal footing to an artistic effect; to an implicit meaning which does not permit of purely explicit statement (any more than the meaning of music does), though it makes use of explicit statement as a means to expression. A fair analogy is, perhaps, the joint contribution of words and music in a song. In Pope's pastoral addressed to Garth, nothing but this counterpoint of music and meaning accounts for that tenderness with which, whatever the immaturity of the poem, the words are laden; a tenderness which Handel must surely have felt when he interpreted it in terms of his own art. Yet many listeners who applaud the well-known setting of «Where'er you walk» are deaf to that music for which Handel substituted his own. Purcell, it is related, with great delicacy of implication, refrained from tendering a similar office to Dryden's «Alexander's Feast», on the grounds that the words were their own music.

It is impossible, however, to speak of the English neo-classics in terms of enthusiasm without feeling that one is prejudicing a controversial question. Just how much importance may we attach to the verse of Pope and Dryden? Dr. Johnson says: «After all this, it is surely superfluous to answer the question that has once been asked, Whether Pope was a poet? otherwise than by asking in return, If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?» Place beside this Matthew Arnold's observation: «Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose.» And finally, take into consideration the modern view, which tends to replace Pope and Dryden on the pedestals from which the Romantic Revival had somewhat unceremoniously hustled them. Faced with such fluctuating estimates, a modest deference to perplexed authority may well cause us to hesitate in our attempts to assess the real merit of the writers in question. We feel, however, that this discrepancy of opinions is aggravated and the whole position obscured owing very largely to the inconsistency of the usual critical terms employed; and there seems to be some hope that armed with other and more carefully defined terms, we may with greater confidence approach a balanced view. All arguments appear to turn on what is meant by *poetry* and what is

meant by *prose*. Some critics take the line that if verse can be proved unpoetic it is proved unliterary. But Matthew Arnold treats the reputation of Pope and Dryden fairly courteously before coming to the conclusion that they are «classics of our prose». Is the conclusion meant to neutralise the courtesy, reducing it to mere irony? Or did Arnold contemplate with equanimity the prospect of dissertation in verse? Mr. T. S. Eliot expressed the view, in his essay on Dryden, that nineteenth-century prejudice had its roots in the *material* of neo-classic verse. Generally speaking, the neo-classic writers wrought their verse from the accessories of street or tavern, boudoir or drawing-room, and employed it to celebrate occasions of state or flay their political and literary enemies; while the Romantics and their successors conceived it as the poet's duty to stock his imagination with the fauna and flora of the unspoiled countryside, and held that meditation, not satire, was the natural function of serious verse.

This divergence of taste certainly accounts for a good deal of the unpopularity into which the neo-classics fell during the nineteenth century. But it is surely not the whole reason. It should be noticed that in Doctor Johnson's time the question had already been *asked*: Is Pope a poet? The Romantics were not the first to ask that question. They were the first to give it a significant negative answer. In view, then, of what seems to be a perennial doubt, a fresh investigation will not come amiss, especially when we embark on it with newly defined terms. For the two-century-old debate concerning Dryden and Pope has revolved round the use of the words *poetry* and *prose*; and it is clear that the use of those words, hitherto made by analytical critics, has been in the main compromising and confusing.

It has already been suggested that failure to appreciate the neo-classic poets arose out of a deafness to their music as much as from a prejudice against the material of their verse. But what is the origin of that failure? Even if this also is prejudice, is not prejudice sometimes confirmed by the facts? It is certainly our duty to give it a fair hearing, and even to approach it sympathetically, in order to arrive at a balanced view.

Now, considering again Matthew Arnold's remarks about Dryden and Pope, and his use of the words «poetry» and «prose» in this connection, it becomes clear that by «poetry», he, like many other English critics, often means no more than *graphic* poetry. And it is precisely our contention that certain languages have a *graphic* and others a *lyric* genius. Among the former we would place

English, German and Hebrew; among the latter, Latin Greek, and the modern Romance languages. Compare an English translation from the Hebrew with one made from the Greek; Isaiah, say, with a translation of a Greek play. How perfectly the Hebrew lends itself to the English instinct for imagery! While the Greek mannerisms seem in translation to parody themselves. Again, it is worth comparing the success of Shakespeare in German translation with the tardy recognition of his greatness in France. Arnold himself stumbled on this distinction when he wrote: "The power of French literature is in its prose-writers, the power of English literature in its poets." But his onesided view of poetry prevented him from expressing the distinction in its true terms or apprehending its exact nature.

Perhaps it is unfair to accuse the nineteenth century critics of being deaf to the music of poetry. Who could be more musical or more popular in his own time than Tennyson? But it is clear that the taste of that epoch refused to accept music in certain combinations. It cherished the lyric where it was combined with the graphic element, almost to the exclusion of explicit meaning, as, for example, in Keats' "Ode to Autumn", or in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". But it could not tolerate music combined with explicit meaning to the exclusion of the graphic element.

At first sight, this might seem to be a passion for "pure" poetry which would suffer the intrusion of no non-artistic element, however artistic the total result. In this case the nineteenth-century critics are not to be accused of prejudice, but credited with a consistent principle of taste. But how can this be so, when the same pens which denounced Pope and Racine as prosaic, acclaimed Dante, Virgil, and Sophocles as mighty poets? The greatest Italian, Latin, and Greek poetry boasts the same recipe as the French and English neo-classics? It subsists, that is to say, in the blending of music with explicit sense, and what pictorial power it possesses is very much in the background. How then can the typical nineteenth-century criticism escape the charge of inconsistency and prejudice? One route of escape lies open to it; and that route leads through the varying genius of different languages. Musical effects in an unmusical language, one might claim, cannot give an artistic balance over the dissertational element unless they are assisted by graphic effects. One might with reason have insisted that English, and even French, have not the same musical capacity as Italian, Latin, or Greek; though it seems hard to regard French as an unmusical language. At any rate,

it could be urged that Pope and Dryden were trying to do with the English language something that had been done with the Latin language, and that the effects to which Latin lent itself were not so naturally accommodated by English.

But there is another nineteenth-century aversion which has to be taken into consideration — the aversion to didactic verse. This brings us back to the question: Is dissertation in verse a tolerable literary form? The objection is obvious. Is not the *music* of verse in such works a disadvantage? Is not any kind of poetry a disadvantage, in a work of which the avowed object is explicit instruction? Poetry will surely distract us when we need to concentrate our whole attention on following the often complex ratiocinations of the writer. And if there is to be no poetry, of what use is verse? This objection, as long as it is made consistently, both against the "Essay on Criticism" and the "De Arte Poetica", against the "Essay on Man" and the "De Rerum Natura", must be squarely met.

But verse has a *useful* as well as a *fine* purpose. We should do wrong to condemn *ipso facto* a composition in which verse has a merely mnemonic value. Much of Pope's "Essay on Criticism" is pure dissertation, as Matthew Arnold would have been quick to assert, but it has a mnemonic value which is integral to the purpose of the work. If all the dissertation that Pope wrote had been written in prose, his words would not live in our mouths to-day, in a multitude of ever recurring quotations.

But apart from this it must be admitted that passages of poetry may have their place in a didactic work. They usually intervene at a climax, as a relaxation to the reader's mind. At least, such poetic passages are generally allowed in a didactic prose work, as is instanced in the Dialogues of Plato. So why should we not expect them, *a fortiori*, in a composition where the useful element of verse can be transmuted so readily into the fine art of poetry? The "De Rerum Natura" contains many such passages; and it is worth noticing in this connection how much of Shakespeare's verse is pure dissertation, or nearly so, simply explaining the bald outlines of a situation in a style incomparably more matter-of-fact than we find in his great passages of poetic prose. In fact, it was Coleridge, one of the fathers of nineteenth-century criticism, who observed that a long poem could not be all poetry. Only the confusion of terms in the word "poem" gives an air of paradox to that statement.

But to recapitulate, in view of the now almost traditional Eng-

lish aversion to a poetry which tempers its music which dissertation, may we not expect to find an opposite and corresponding aversion in the critics of other languages which derive their poetry naturally from just such a combination of elements? In the French we certainly find it. Such phrases as "Shakespeare et la violence anglaise" (1) are so commonplace as to fall almost casually from the pen of a French critic. But among ancient critics, also, we find those who attack the poetic prose-writer in terms analogous to the severity with which English critics have attacked the writer of verse dissertation. This is exactly what we should expect: that the ancient Sir Thomas Browne or Jeremy Taylor will meet a comparable fate to that of the modern Horace or Lucretius. The following passage from Lucian is of interest:-

But if History is to adopt this type of flattery, what else is it but a sort of poetic prose, deprived of its lofty accents, and leaving a residue of imposture all the more patently exposed because it is stripped of metre? This is a defect of the first order, that anyone should be unable to distinguish the appurtenances of poetry from those of history, and introduce into history all the hyperbole of legend, and such ornate writing as is proper only to the faculty of poetry. It is as if one should take some robust and stalwart athlete, drape him in purple and other meretricious accessories, rub in fard, powder his face - heavens! what a fool you'd make of him by that shameful exhibition! (1)

Antiquity had its Sir Thomas Brownes. One of them - from a literary point of view at least - was St Paul. But it is doubtful

(1) G. Lanson. "Voltaire". Hachette. V. 103. The book contains other references to English poetry in similar terms, that is to say, as an affront to classic taste.

(2) ἡ ἱστορία δὲ ἦν τινα κολακείαν τοιαύτην προσλάβῃ, τί ἄλλο ἢ περὶ τις ποιητικὴ γίνεταί, τῆς μεγαλοφωνίας μὲν ἐκεῖνας ἐστερημένην, τὴν λοιπὴν δὲ τερατείας γυμνὴν τῶν μέτρων καὶ δι' αὐτὸ ἐπισημοτέραν ἐκφαίνουσα; μέγα τοίνυν, μᾶλλον δὲ ὑπέρομεγα τοῦτο κακόν, εἰ μὴ εἰδείη τις χωρίζειν τὰ ἱστορίας καὶ τὰ ποιητικῆς, ἀλλ' ἐπεισάγει τῇ ἱστορίᾳ τὰ τῆς ἑτέρας κομμώματα, τὸν μῦθον καὶ τὰς ἐγ' αὐτοῖς ὑπερβολάς, ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις ἀθλητὴν τῶν καρτερῶν τούτων, καὶ κομιδῇ πρηνίαν, ἀλουργίσι περιβάλοι, καὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ κόσμῳ τῷ ἑταιρικῷ καὶ φύκιον ἐντρίβου, καὶ ψιμύθιον τῷ προσώπῳ. Ἡράκλειος, ὡς καταγέλαστον αὐτὸν ἀπεργάσαιτο αἰσχύνας τῷ κόσμῳ ἐκείνῳ.

NOTE:- Clarendon Press translators (1905) render περὶ τις ποιητικὴ as "poetry without the wings". This is significant. Why should such a deliberate periphrasis recommend itself to the translators, if "poetic proso" did not suggest a good connotation to an Englishman, such as περὶ τις ποιητικὴ obviously did not suggest to a Greek?

if Lucian, ideological considerations apart even, would have appreciated "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels". He would have asked: "What is it but poetical prose, etc.?" And his readers would not have suspected him, by that phrase, of paying a compliment. Yet the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians I is poetry, and not only poetry, but verse; poetry and verse on the Hebrew, graphic model, alien to classical antiquity.

Again, compare Lucian's scornful reflection on "poetic prose" with Arnold's pronouncement that Dryden and Pope are "classics of our prose." That is to say "classics of our dissertation." The comparison is significant. To the Greek, metre was such an important element in poetry, to the Englishman such an unimportant one. Or let us say: in Greek, a language of lyric genius, mere metre carried a work so much further toward being poetry, than it does in English, a language of graphic genius. It is also worth recalling that the term "purple patch" was coined by Horace (τ) in a spirit of criticism; yet how indulgent that catchword sounds on the lips of many a modern English critic! Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in his introduction to the Oxford Book of English Prose even makes a special plea for it. But the "purple patch" as its name proclaims, represents a graphic element, and was as unnatural in Horace's tongue as it is natural in ours.

It is our contention here that Lucian's view expresses the normal attitude of the ancient world throughout its long literary history. Phrases in Aristotle, which might seem at first sight to weaken the force of our argument, really tend to support it. For instance, we find in the "Poetics": "Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common but the metre. It is right, therefore, to call the one a poet, the other a physicist rather." And again: "The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history; with metre, as without it." These sentences taken by themselves would seem to reflect the English rather than what we have claimed was the Greek view of poetry. But if the

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- (1) Purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus et alter
Adsuitur panis, cum Lucus et ara Dianae
Et properantis aquae per amoenos ambitus agros,
Aut flumen Rhenum aut pluvius describitur arcus.
Sed nunc non erat huius locus. (De Arte Poetica. 15)

Note:— Surely "purple patch" refers not to any fleeting passage of poetic writing, but specifically to *graphic* poetry. For us, vivid imagery has a natural pertinence. Our cruder syntax requires this compensation. It was not so for the ancients.

two instances are taken in their context, it will be seen that Aristotle was using the word "poetry" in a different sense from that in which it was generally used even by his contemporaries, and he admits as much. "Poetry" in his vocabulary does not refer primarily to the manipulation of language, but of subject matter. It is to be contrasted with history and science. It is what we might term "composition" as distinct from "exposition". It deals with the hypothetical rather than the actual, with what might happen rather than what has happened; or if with what has happened, simply because the actuality has interest as a hypothesis (1). This being so, his failure to reserve any term for poetry in our sense of the word, as distinct from verse, only goes to suggest that for him, as for other ancient critics, there was no great distinction. For him, as for them, the music of able versification gave to the words that lustrous quality which renders them artistic.

Yet while a consideration of ancient criticism supports the theory of linguistic tendencies that we have put forward, one has only to cite examples of New Testament poetry to forestall any attack, based on this theory, against the English neo-classics (or indeed to cut off the possible line of retreat which we recommended to their assailants). For if Pope and Dryden are accused of cultivating a foreign, Latin faculty in English, a language that can ill accommodate it, the same attack must be directed against the Hebrew idiom of New Testament Greek. We are assured, in fact, with a suspicious suggestion of epigram, that the New Testament only makes such good English because it is such bad Greek. There is a significant truth in that. St Paul wrote Hebrew poetry in Greek, yet what he wrote was none the less poetry.

With an eye, then, to this analogy, we may say that the nineteenth-century aversion to the neo-classics had its root in a sound intuition; but that intuition was rendered incoherent by the obtuse reasoning which strove to interpret it; by a failure to make the right basic distinctions; a terminological failure.

The advantage of correct and basic distinctions is that they afford a balanced view. They leave us free to incline either to the classic or the romantic school, without attributing the attitude of the other side to stark insensibility; and indeed the personality neither of Matthew Arnold nor of Samuel Johnson will allow of such a construction. Classic verse, we see, is alien to the genius of our language, and we may choose to stress this, pointing out

(1) *Poetics* I and IX.

the difficulties under which a writer of Pope's pretensions was labouring, by the very nature of his intractable medium. On the other hand, it is possible for a writer to triumph over his medium; and the grafting of foreign stock may bring new virility into the literature of any language. If classical antiquity had been more ready to import from the Hebrew and other exotic sources, it might not have lapsed, as it did, into centuries of sterility.

But we must always recognise the special and often delicate task of a classic poet working in a romantic language. For it is no solecism to speak of "classic and romantic" languages, if, by these terms, we mean respectively languages which naturally avail themselves of explicit statement as a means to an artistic end, and languages in which the paucity of musical content makes this method a secondary recourse, and postulates the more usual invocation of a pictorial element at the expense of the explicit. Of course, if this terminology is adopted, Romanticism cannot be retained as the opposite of Realism; though the claim of the word in this respect is equally strong. Our principle must always be: one word, one meaning. Again, complications will ensue if we try to apply the terms "Classic and Romantic" to music or the plastic arts. But in this context the words already cover a multitude of meanings, all better expressed in other terms.

Mr. T. S. Eliot finds in the distinction of Classicism and Romanticism a fundamental issue of right and wrong, each side demanding our unequivocal allegiance or dissent (1). It is refreshing in this age of flabby agnosticism to be reminded of the existence of such vital issues. But it is in no such sense that the terms are used above. The only thing that is vital, from the point of view of literary criticism — as far as we are concerned — is to realise that the distinction exists; and that its basis rests as much in a writer's language as in his taste.

J. G. WARRY

(1) "Function of Criticism". Selected Essays by T.S. Eliot. Faber p. 26.