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AND POETICS

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POETICS

I. WESTERN

- A. *Theoretical*
- B. *Historical*

II. EASTERN

- A. *Theoretical*
- B. *Historical*

I. WESTERN. A. *Theoretical*. The term “p.” has been used in the West in several senses. In recent decades it has been applied to almost every human activity, so that often it seems to mean little more than “theory” (q.v.); such usage is the most general and least useful. Applied to the works of authors, as in “the p. of Dostoevskij,” it means something like “implicit principles”; for discussion of the relation between extrinsic theory and intrinsic principles, see rules. More narrowly, the

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[p. numbers refer upwards. I.e. read them as being at the bottom of the page]

term has been used to denote “theory of lit.,” i.e. “theory of literary discourse”: this usage is more productive because it remains framed within theory of (verbal) discourse and it specifically retains the concept of the literary, i.e. the distinction between literary and nonliterary. Critics who have denied that distinction, extending “textuality” (q.v.) beyond the realm of the verbal, hold a minority view. This is the sense used by Aristotle, who bases the *Poetics* on verse drama, and by most 20th-c. theorists, e.g. Jakobson, operating after the collapse of the Cl. theory of genres. Part of the virtue of this usage is that it will allow concepts such as “the p. of prose.” For Northrop Frye, p. is “theory of crit.” (*Anatomy* 22), which is one level up from “theory of lit.”; for discussion of p. as theory of crit., see METACRITICISM.

Granting the distinction of the literary, the most specific sense of “p.” denotes “theory of poetry.” Taking the term in this sense entails the claim that there is a fundamental distinction between the modes of verse and prose (q.v.). There have been two views taken, in the hist. of crit., on whether the mode or form of verbal discourse is essential to category distinctions within the “literary” or, indeed, to “the literary” (lit.) itself. Aristotle holds that it is not metrical form which makes for poetry but rather *mimesis*—a skillfully contrived imitation (q.v.) of actions that is *convincing*. Texts set in versified form but which lack this motive, such as Empedocles’ versified history, are not poetry for Aristotle (*Poetics* 1). For him, “poetry” inheres in the purpose not the form (though cf. Rhet. 3.1.1404a). And so Sidney and Shelley after him: “poetry” can be written in prose, and many versified texts are not worthy of the name of “poetry.” So too, in our time, Wallace Stevens, for whom “poetry is not the lang. of poetry but the thing itself, wherever it may be found. It does not mean verse any more than philosophy means prose” (Opusposthumous). Most such critics are implicitly Longinian, ascribing to “poetry” some transcendent mode of thought, imagination (q.v.), or insight which prose form could also convey.

The opposing view is that verseform matters, that form makes an irrevocable difference to poetry. The 5th-c. Sophist, Gorgias, in the *Defense of Helen*, holds that poetry is but one lang.-use among several for persuasion (or delusion): the differentia is the verse form. Subsequent critics who take verseform to be not ornamental but constitutive have included Scaliger, Coleridge, Jakobson, and the Rus. and Am. formalists (see VERSE AND PROSE). Such critics recognize the additional resources afforded for expression of transcendent thought, imagination, or insight by increased pattern or design, in aural prosody, and by strategies of deployment in visual prosody. Jakobson in his 1958 white paper on “Linguistics and P.” asserts that p. “deals primarily with the question, ‘what makes a verbal message a work of art?’” His answer, which is the Rus. Formalist answer, is that self-referentiality—the “poetic function” (q.v.)—is the one characteristic of poetic lang. Admittedly, this function also operates in other patterned forms of speech such as political slogans and advertising jingles (“I like Ike”). But in other lang.-use, sound patterning is secondary, whereas in poetry it is made “the constitutive device of the sequence” (see PROSODY). Prose, “where there is no dominant figure of sound,” Jakobson likens to “transitional” linguistic forms. *Pace* Aristotle, the overwhelming majority of critics and readers in the history of the world’s poeties have believed that verseform is an essential differentia of poetry which enables effects not otherwise obtainable in prose. P., then, is in the most specific sense a systematic theory of poetry. It attempts to define the nature of poetry, its kinds and forms, its resources of device and structure, the principles that govern it, the functions that distinguish it from other arts, the conditions under which it can exist, and its effects on readers or auditors. The term itself derives from the title of Aristotle’s work on verbal making, *Peri pioetike*—fragmentary and perhaps only lecture notes to begin with—which is the prototype of all later treatises on the art of poetry, formal or informal (e.g. Horace, Dante, Sidney, Shelley, Valery).

There have been two formal models produced within the past half-century which pertain to p. The most comprehensive taxonomy, given by Abrams in 1953 (see POETRY, THEORIES OF), posits a model which has four orientations poetic theories may take: toward the work itself (objective or formalist theories), toward the audience (pragmatic or affective theories), toward the world (mimetic or realistic theories), and toward the poet-creator (expressive or romantic theories). All literary theorists recognize these orientations; they only disagree about their respective valuations. The communication model mapped by Jakobson, more complex but not essentially different in its premises from Abrams’, identifies six components of any verbal discourse: the transactional continuum of course runs from speaker (poet) through message (text) to audience (auditor, reader), but the text itself must also comprise the context, contact type, and code (lang.) which make it possible. For Jakobson like most others it is the nature of the code which is the major issue: it is lang, which has been the model and trope for the major intellectual inquiries in the 20th c.

Western p. over the past three millennia has moved in three major waves (see section IB below). P. in the Aristotelian trad, was overwhelmingly objectivist and formalist down to the 18th c., with a lesser, Horatian strain being more affective and rhetorical but consonant with Aristotle (Howell); the literary mode valorized was the epic. Subsequently, romantic p., expressivist, restored the perceiving subject, consciousness, emotion (q.v.), and the Longinian sublime (q.v.) to the frame of what poetry presents; romantic p. ex-

erted influence on poetic praxis (though not on theory) well into the 20th c.: its mode was the lyric. In the 20th c., p. moved steadily toward the metacritical or theoretical. In the first half of the century, p. was again objectivist and formalist (Rus. Formalist, Am. New Critical, Structuralist), with an affectivist undercurrent in phenomenology (Ransom drew upon Hegel; Wellek's definition of poetry derives from Ingarden). In the last half of the century, however, literary theory has retreated from the work of crit. common to all Western critics from Aristotle through the mid 20th c.—articulating a p. inductively, on the basis of critical praxis—to the metacritical task of asking, rather, what would constitute an adequate p., what questions it must answer, and what entailments those answers have. In so doing, postformalist crit. has called into question most of the major assumptions of Western p., though in practice it has continued the close reading of texts while moving further into readerly affectivism. In general, we may say that Western p., unlike the several Eastern p. which have mainly concerned themselves with the expressive and affective powers of lit. (see section II below), has mainly taken as its central problem the issue of the reliability of verbal representations of the external world, i.e. mimesis (see REPRESENTATION AND MIMESIS; IMITATION). The main issue has been dispute over the nature and (objective) veracity of a work's depiction of "reality," whatever that is taken to be.

Put another way, the great specter haunting Western p. has been the issue of subjectivity. There have been repeated efforts since ancient times to establish p. on an objective basis, either as science or philosophy, and repeated counterefforts to deny it that status; the dispute concerns what kind of activity p. is and what its objects are. There have been strong proponents on both sides (see Hrushovski). On the objectivist side have stood all who view p. as a science: Classicists and philologists; the Rus. Formalists; the Czech, Fr., and Am. structuralists; nearly all linguists; critics who admit empirical methods in psychological crit. or stylistics (qq.v.); and critics who use statistical analysis or mathematical modeling. Other objectivist critics such as I. A. Richards and the New Critics (esp. Wimsatt) have insisted on an exclusive orientation to the text while yet adamantly opposing poetry to science. Nonobjectivist critics ("subjective" is too limited) treat art not primarily as an object but as an experience, subjective or intersubjective, whether in the making (see expression) or the reception: such critics include phenomenologists (see GENEVA SCHOOL), reader-oriented critics (see READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM), and, significantly, Aristotle himself (see below).

Jakobson, for example, held that since poems are verbal works of art, their rules fell within the purview of linguistics, as the global science of all verbal behavior. But others (e.g. Brogan, Intro.) have argued that this is the wrong plane of cleavage: poems are verbal works of art, hence their study falls within the domain of aesthetics rather than science, science being, strictly speaking, only a procedure for empirical verification of hypotheses which are objectively verifiable. The objects of study in science are objective phenomena the truth values of which constitute "facts"; the objects of literary study, on the other hand, are intersubjective meanings and values generated from an object which is itself a structure of forms (lang.), not marks on pieces of paper (see POETRY).

But this question about p. really amounts to the question of what, exactly, a poem is, i.e. whether it is an objective entity capable of being understood or analyzed with methods such that the results will be the same regardless of the reader, or whether the perception of a poem and the construction of meanings in and through it by readers results in inevitable and irreducible variability of response, making "the poem" seem more an interpersonal transaction

or process than an object. In this latter view, the structures of poetry turn out to be not inherent in “the poem” itself but the rules or procedures of cognition as yet largely undiscovered by cognitive science, but incl. the conventions of meaning-making and legitimization which are constructed by communities of readers. But all this eventually comes to but a single question, the issue of how much variability in interpretation (q.v.) is permissible, and what factors control the process of interp. The most immediate answer would be that *structures in the text* are the primary determinants (see PROSODY), though obviously not the only ones; some critics hold that cultural values (defined by these critics, stipulatively, as “ideologies”) control lang, hence control authors who write texts hence control reader response. But the link between reader and text is not determinate: historically, lit. has nearly always been perceived as a subversive act, which is why totalitarian governments always seek to suppress lit. Regardless of which position one takes on any of these issues, the nature of the process of interp. becomes central to p.

Seamon suggests that scientific p. and hermeneutics (interp.) are fundamentally opposed, and that the former is always undone by the latter: interp. by its nature—always incomplete, always generative—creates variability of response, whereas if the interp. of literary works were susceptible to scientific method, a computer could do it. More productively, we should see this opposition as antinomian, both processes being necessary and productive so long as each is reconciled to the fact of the other. Olsen shows that while interp. denies p. its dream of objectivity, it will always be necessary, for the critic’s judgments are irreplaceable. Scientific analysis—witness some of Jakobson’s own—will produce a virtual infinity of facts about a poem, most of which are irrelevant. It is only the critical mind that selects the few

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significant details from the mass of trivial ones. Interp. always involves the collection of evidence from a text so as to support a pattern of meaning or value seen by a critic; interps. are therefore arguments and can be countered by argument: essentially they are rhetorical. On the other hand, some questions about lit. which are admittedly important ones are undeniably factual; certain textual, philological, stylistic, and prosodic questions can only be answered definitively with facts, “facts” being patterns in the available evidence which no other analysis can presently contravene. What is most of importance is to see that these are not two kinds of answers to the same questions but two answers to two different kinds of questions which derive from two differing strata of the text. Literary theory runs to excess in believing it need not be grounded in texts; textual analysis runs to excess in denying the necessity of critical judgment in analysis (see METER, section IX).

The study of poems is always carried out on the basis of implicit assumptions about what is there and how it is to be taken: this means the reading of poetry always already assumes some kind of a theory. Conversely, theory requires poems to substantiate it, else it is mere speculation. Insofar as one believes that verbal art is more directly art than verbal, then p. must be viewed as a subset of aesthetics. Insofar as one views verbal art as more verbal than art, one can invalidate the distinctions between the literary and the nonliterary and between rhetoric and p.

Poetry being the art of words cast in verseform, every p. must therefore be based, either explicitly or implicitly, on a theory of lang, and, behind that, on a theory of mind, mind being the maker of lang. The philosophy of lang, on which Western p. is based, and the epistemology

underlying it, derives from the Greeks. Aristotle opens the *Peri hermeneias* (On Interp.) with the first principles that “spoken forms are symbols of mental impressions, and written forms are symbols of the spoken forms. And just as letters are not the same everywhere, so are not the vocal forms; but what all these forms [i.e. both spoken and written] are originally symbols of, the mental impressions, they are the same everywhere, and what the latter are likenesses of, the things, they are also the same” (tr. H. Arens). This account posits a four-level hierarchy running (if we reverse the sequence) from noumena (things-in-themselves) to phenomena, i.e. mental impressions (sense data decoded/constructed in consciousness and cognition) to speech (lang, as sound) to writing.

This account rightly recognizes the arbitrariness of lang, as a symbol system by making convention (q.v.) central to it (both writing systems and phonologies vary from one lang, to another; they are “not the same everywhere”), and it posits the inferiority of written lang, to spoken that was traditionally accepted and still is mainly accepted by linguists but denied by philosophical sceptics such as Derrida (see DECONSTRUCTION). However, it is the assumption that the phenomenal aspect of a thing, as perceived in the mind, is the same for every perceiver which constitutes the most fundamental divergence of modern epistemology from Aristotelian doctrine, for the joint effects of Cartesian dualism, 18th-c. empiricism, the romantic doctrine of the imagination (q.v.), 20th-c. psychology, and modern information theory have made this claim seem all but impossible. And the final principle, that things prior to perception are unitary, will seem, variously, either obvious and indubitable or else unknowable to we who are merely mortal.

For p., the central issues are the latter two of the three relations between the four levels, namely those of cognition to speech and speech to writing. Both address directly the fundamental nature of lang., i.e. *verba* as *res*. The latter of these two relations, that of written lang, to spoken lang., includes the issue of which mode of the two has ontological priority (see SOUND; POETRY), which Derrida used as one of the axioms of deconstruction. The former relation, that of mental representation to verbalization, concerns the question of whether lang., when it recodes sense data or cognitive data (incl. memory) or both into externalized forms (sound shapes, letters) subject to social use, produces a modeling system which is mainly mimetic (accurately descriptive, perhaps imitative) of the phenomenal or even (possibly) noumenal world (see REPRESENTATION AND MIMESIS), or rather mainly constructive and Active (see FICTION), fashioning a “world” like enough to the one presented to each individual by sense data so as to be verisimilar (see VERISIMILITUDE), yet which is of course in itself different by nature of the symbolic coding systems involved. In either case, it is certain that whatever descriptive adequacy or “realism” is achieved by lang, is conveyed by a mechanism that is fundamentally artificial and alien to the original sensory stimuli, yet which is nevertheless able to generate, by such wholly indirect and other means, an analogue that is, if defective in some respects (“blue” is not an attribute of objects but imposed in perception; hence the word should be a verb not an adjective), nevertheless accurate in others and seemingly adaptable, on the whole, to a wide variety of representational tasks.

When, now, lang, is used for narrative and dramatic lit. (esp. prose fiction), what is added is the construction of Active situations and characters, devices which only deepen the representational and mimetic functions of lang. Even style is meant to represent the shape, pace, or direction of thinking or the states of sensibility, hence is ultimately mimetic. The lang, itself, as medium, is still held transparent. What is added when lang, is used for poetry is that

lang, is wrought to a greater degree of design or pattern, thickening the medium— words and the sounds of words—into a palpable

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density, opacity, or texture (Hegel, Ransom) which is also brought into consciousness along with the semantic character of words and made contributory to meaning. The reader is aware not only of words' meanings but also of words' bodies, the symbols becoming concretized objects in their own right, things to be felt, valued, and weighed while, simultaneously, understood. The semantic structures built from the words taken lexically and syntactically are made more complex by the addition of excess pattern or form, achieved via rhythm and repetition (qq.v.). The reader's cognitive responses to the poem are thereby enriched twice over, once by addition of kinesthetic texture, once by semantic intensification and compression through form.

Some of the soundest observations of the 20th c. on p. were given by Northrop Frye in the "Polemical Intro." to his *Anatomy of Crit.* (1957). Frye had little interest in the linguistic and structural p. of the half-century before him, and subsequent critics have not been inclined to follow his grand mythmaking, so he now seems something of an isolated figure. And, indeed, the synthesizing, "synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of lit. crit." which Frye sought to give—or, more precisely, sought to furnish reasons for—has in succeeding decades seemed increasingly less of a goal for critics. After 1967, many critics retracted from all belief in objective knowledge about or determinate meaning from texts. Many postformalist and deconstructive critics posited the locus of interpretive authority in each reader, denying any standards of value by which to sift and prefer some interps. among the babble of them all (though they themselves certainly did). The "too enormous" gaps which Frye recognized in his own theory were subsequently valorized rather than filled. Many cultural critics, Marxists, and feminists investigated social phenomena—gender, race, class, power—as manifested in lit., though not, primarily, so as to deepen our understanding of the nature of lit. as, rather, to effect social change. Consequently lit. itself came to be devalued in "theory" as only one discourse among many, and a suspect one at that. But lang, serves all ends, some reactionary, some radical, some oppressive, some liberating. The idea of disinterested inquiry (see DISINTERESTEDNESS) is at present simply absent in crit., rejected on the claim that every inquiry is motivated by a "political" purpose. Two millennia of Western philosophy did not think so.

The weakness of socially committed crit. is precisely that of the formalist crit. it attacked. All single-issue and one-sided theories, said Frye, are engaged in "substituting a critical attitude for crit., all proposing, not to find a conceptual framework for crit. within lit., but to attach crit. to one of a miscellany of frameworks outside it"—no one of which has any theoretical precedence over any other. "There are no definite positions to be taken in chemistry or philology, and if there are any to be taken in crit., crit. is not a field of genuine learning. . . . One's 'definite position' is one's weakness." The proper framework, for Frye, must be derived solely from "an inductive survey of the literary field." For Frye, as for Leo Spitzer, all "systematic study alternates between inductive experience and deductive principles," of which study p. furnishes half, but not more. Some theorists, far more knowledgeable about theory than lit., have eagerly approved Frye's remark that, even now, "we have no real standards to

distinguish a verbal structure that is literary from one that is not” (13). But Frye also insisted that “crit. cannot be a systematic study unless there is a quality in lit. which enables it to be so.”

Frye in 1957 despaired of any “consolidating progress” in crit. Nearly a half century later, after a profusion of new approaches, crit. seems to have borne out his prediction with a vengeance. All this work notwithstanding, the fundamental matrices within which any p. must be framed remain the same. It is as certain that we cannot know a thing, fully, without inquiry into its relations with the other things in the world with which it interacts, as it is that these interactions, much less the other things, are not the thing itself. The theory Frye sought, a “coherent and comprehensive theory of lit.,” which would explain, of literary works, why they are so and not otherwise, still lies before us. It will not be a scientific theory, and it must make a place for the reader’s interp. of texts within both cognitive and cultural frames. It must resolve the continuing problematic—unstable, antinomian— of subjectivity and objectivity (q.v.) posed for the modern world by Kant. It must give a better account of what meaning itself is. But it must also recertify the simple fact that common readers automatically certify fictive and patterned texts as literary and aesthetic rather than utilitarian (or ideological), and that they look upon these as delivering a certain version of “truth” superior to history—as Aristotle himself held. The insight of Aristotle was that poets show us true universals in fictive particulars (see CONCRETE UNIVERSAL). Theory must rediscover the author and the concept of expressiveness. Lang. itself may no longer be the model for such a synthesis, though the nature of verbal representation will be a key component of any account of *poiesis*, for all representation whether visual or verbal is a making, a constructive activity, a *poiesis*.

For more extended discussion of the foundation of Western p. in mimesis, see REPRESENTATION AND MIMESIS; IMITATION. For alternatives thereto, see GENEVA SCHOOL and ROMANTIC AND POSTROMANTIC POETICS. For the relation of theory to poems, see POETRY; PROSODY; RHETORIC AND POETRY; THEORY. For discussion of the ontological status of poetry, see POETRY; for the theoretical basis of p. in poetic form, see VERSE AND PROSE; PROSODY; SOUND. For typology of the critical orientations in Western p. concerning poetry, see

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POETRY, THEORIES OF. Modern criticism is surveyed in TWENTIETH-CENTURY POETICS and analyzed in CRITICISM AND METACRITICISM. See also MEANING, POETIC; INTERPRETATION; PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY; FEMINIST POETICS; LINGUISTICS AND POETICS; ETHICS AND CRITICISM; PLURALISM. T.V.F.B.

B. *Historical*. Scattered commentary on poetry as entertainment and didactic instrument appears in the West as early as Homer (e.g. *Iliad* 2.484, *Odyssey* 8) and Hesiod. Commentary on poetic making first appears in Pindar, who emphasizes skill and technique. The 5th-c. Sophists, attacked by Plato as deceivers, studied verbal effects extensively, though for a rhetorical end, persuasion. But Western p. begins with, and is still framed largely in the terms established by, Plato and Aristotle.

Plato’s views on poetry are inconsistent, but in general they derive directly from his metaphysics: the world of material reality presents appearances that are only an imitation of the truth of things as manifested in the world of ideal Forms. Poetry as a made object consequently produces images that are copies of copies and so twice removed from reality. Truth inheres

only in nonmaterial Forms, then poems deceive. This makes them dangerous. And if only Forms contain Being, then poems have, in fact, only diminished Being if any at all. At *Republic* 10, Plato uses *mimesis* to denote all artistic activity as imitation of reality, though elsewhere he uses it in the sense of “discourse.” In the *Phaedrus* Plato seems to espouse the doctrine of poetic inspiration (q.v.) by the Muses, i.e. the doctrine of “poetic madness” (q.v.); on this account the poet is a mere mouthpiece for the gods, making p., as Tigerstedt remarks, superfluous.

Aristotle is the first writer in the West known to have constructed a taxonomy for the systematic study of lit. Like Plato, Aristotle recognizes *mimesis* as imitation, but conversely he treats it as a natural, pleasurable, and productive human drive. Too, the emphasis falls not on the veracity of the *mimesis* in the end or even the kinds of things it produces but on the skillfulness of it at the hands of the poet and its convincingness: *poietike* is not a class of objects but *techne*, i.e. “making.” Aristotle is not directly concerned with “the nature of poetry” in the *Poetics*, rather, he is concerned with the *art* of poetry, the skill of making poetry that will succeed in moving its audience (Else). Aristotle reverses the attribution of Being from another world to this one: now the poem itself has Being; the ideas it “contains” or evokes are of only secondary reality. Further, form for Aristotle is not extrinsic to things, as it was for Plato, but intrinsic; the acorn contains the pattern for the oak.

Aristotle is not much concerned to discriminate categories or kinds. The modern concept of “lit.” only arose in the 18th c., and the modern conception of rigidly defined genres, which the Ren. attributed to Aristotle, is a misunderstanding of him—in short, a modern invention (Rosenmeyer). The *Poetics* lays down a rudimentary schema of genres at the outset, though the account seems incomplete or mutilated; what the modern reader notices most is that Aristotle gives very little attention to what we think of the lyric. His interest is the chief artform of his time, verse drama. Consequently *mimesis* is for Aristotle “an imitation of actions, shaped into special forms by the techniques of a skilled artisan” (Adams). Had he taken a wider view or had in front of him an extensive lyric trad., he might have framed his definition of *mimesis* more widely, as the portrayal of an external object through the skillful manipulation of a medium—in drama, action, in poetry, rhythmical speech. In either case, features of extrinsic form are not much of interest to Aristotle, who presumably would have approved the modern doctrine of the inseparability of form and content.

Hence Aristotle minimizes the boxes-with-labels approach to literary form: *poiesis* is a making, a process, and the point of the *Poetics* is the artful and successful carrying out of that process, not its ends, which will never emerge in precast or predictable forms. “The forms of the process of making are the various technical ways in which the process of composing can be worked out. What matters is the art,” not the products thereof (Rosenmeyer). In this process, *mimesis* is a means not an end. Aristotle conceives poetry as the making of fictions that achieve verisimilitude (q.v.) through imitation. And the chief means to that end is *structure*, or plot (q.v.), not character, thought, diction, melody, or spectacle. The aim of the *Poetics* is not to copy nature or even, so much, to move audiences but rather, as Howell says, “to discover how a poem, produced by imitation and representing some aspect of a natural object—its form—in the artificial medium of poetry, may so achieve perfection of that form in the medium that the desired aesthetic effect results” (46).

As for the “aesthetic effect,” Aristotle is obviously aware of the issue, since the *Poetics* discusses the effects of tragedy on the emotions of the audience. We can only wish he had framed it more widely. Aristotle’s account of *catharsis* (q.v.), which seems to be taken over

from ancient medical speculation, concerns the arousal of certain emotions in the audience, apparently so as to purge them. But this is not the major issue, and if it were, rhet. would be indistinguishable from poetic. As Howell points out, Aristotle clearly makes a distinction between rhetoric and p., on which subjects he wrote two different treatises: the distinction seems to be essentially that poetic works are mimetic—they create their effect by the telling of a fictional story—whereas rhetorical works are nonmimetic—they affect their audience by presenting factual evidence, logical argument, and persuasive appeals. The orator achieves credibility and acceptance by making statements and offering proofs which his audience sees as directly relevant to the circumstances at hand and based

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on facts, while the poet produces a story which does not pertain, literally, to the situation at hand and is clearly not factual but from which they are to *extract universals by inference* (57; italics added).

In Roman times, lit. declined while forensic rhet. flourished as the vehicle of civic discourse; rhetoricians nevertheless encouraged the study of literary works for figuration (so Quintilian on Homer). Horace follows Aristotelian concepts closely in his letter to the Piso family on the art of poetry (*Ars poetica*), however, he places greater emphasis on craft and revision, and he identifies the ends of verbal art as not merely aesthetic but also didactic: to delight and to instruct. Horace was read and his *Ars poetica* imitated widely throughout the Middle Ages. Aristotle was however lost throughout the Middle Ages, preserved only in Alemanni's mistranslation (1256) of Averroes' Middle Commentary (1147) on an Arabic tr. of the Gr. text. In the early Middle Ages, poetry was treated under the aegis of grammar, though after the 12th-c. Ren., the study of poetry was again taken up under rhet. in the *artes poetriae* of John of Garland, Matthew of Vendome, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf (see RHETORIC AND POETRY). But even here the distinction between rhet. and p. is thin: what is distinctively poetic is prosody. Vernacular treatises on the art of poetry all take their example from Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* (ca. 1303-5), which argued that the range and power of poetry in the vernaculars was equal to that in the Cl. langs., but these are few, esp. in Occitan. In late medieval France, p. is associated once again with music (see VERS MESURES).

With the Ren. came the recovery of texts of Plato (tr. 1484), Aristotle (Lat. trs. 1498 and 1536, Gr. text 1508, It. tr. 1549), Cicero, and Quintilian. The Ciceronian tripartite division of styles (high, middle, low) and the concept of decorum (q.v.) were restored. After Robortelli's commentary (1548), critics mix Aristotelian concepts with Horatian (Herrick). The premises on which Ren. p. (q.v.) proceeds are not foreign to Aristotle: the ends are Horatian—to delight and instruct—and the means are mimetic. The "rules" (q.v.) hardened into prescriptive doctrine, most particularly in the case of the "Dramatic Unities," epitomized in Boileau's *Art of Poetry* (1674). Pope's art of poetry, the *Essay on Crit.* (1711), was inspired by Boileau. The 18th-c. emphasis on "imitation" (q.v.), as in the classicizing crit. of Dr. Johnson, is however not mimetic but formal: "Nature" (q.v.) is now more than the world perceived by the senses. The insistence by Ramus in the Ren. that invention and arrangement belonged to logic left to rhet. only the study of style and delivery. Hence 18th-c. rhetorical treatises on elocution are monuments of a discipline reaching its end. The most powerful thinking about lang. and mind—Locke, Leibnitz, Condillac, Hume, Rousseau—no longer takes place in the domain of

rhet., which is reduced to a confused classification of figures and tropes (see FIGURE, SCHEME, TROPE).

It was not until the turn of the 19th c. that Western p. began to detach itself, fully, from Aristotelian and mimeticist premises. The rise of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy in the 18th c. (A.G. Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, 1735, tr. 1954) had strengthened the objectivist approach to p., but not enough to withstand the effects of Kant and Hegel, who develop a new metaphysics in which the object is conceived in terms of its cognitive representation by the subjective perceiver, making “objective” and “subjective” mutually permeable fields (see ROMANTIC AND POSTROMANTIC POETICS). Romantic p. turns away altogether from the conception of poetry as an imitation of the external world, in favor of a more creative emphasis on the poet’s expression of a vision which transcends the merely personal, based on a creative conception of mental imagination (q.v.). Poems now no longer conform to the neoclassical theory of genres but may each grow organically (see ORGANICISM). The romantics revolted against what they saw as the inert and mechanical formalism of neoclassical rhet., esp. ossifications such as “poetic diction” (see LEXIS), though in their poetry they continued to exploit the resources of verbal figuration. Key romantic accounts of p.: A. W. Schlegel’s Berlin lectures on the theory of art (1801-2), Wordsworth’s “Preface” to the third ed. of *Lyrical Ballads* (1802); Coleridge’s *Biographia literaria*, esp. ch. 13 (1817), Shelley’s *Platonic Defense of Poetry* (1821), and Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics (1820-29; pub. 1835, 1842; tr. T. M. Knox 1975). Romantic p. lasted for over a century, having a late manifestation in the expressionistic theory of Croce (see expression).

In the first half of the 20th c., movements in lit. crit. foregrounded the distinction between literary and nonliterary discourse. Rus. Formalism (1919—30; q.v.) reacted against postromantic vagueness in lit. and against psychology with a return to the word, to the literary device (Sklovskij), and to structural *relations* as opposed to features, making *literariness* the defining characteristic of verbal art. Most of their work consequently came round to verse-theory (see PROSODY). In Am. crit., literary and rhetorical analyses were deeply intertwined: New Critical close reading usually subsumed rhet., and Kenneth Burke treated lit. as explicitly rhetorical, a kind of modeling system for human emotion and action. Aristotle himself is revived in the 20th c. by the critics of the Chicago School (q.v.), inspired by Richard McKeon and R. S. Crane.

These movements were opposed in the second half by movements wherein the distinction between literary works and nonliterary is dissolved, usually in favor of a larger and more synoptic account of discourse. Now discourse was studied as a *system*, and the effort was to discover processes that apply across the board, not merely in lit. Increasingly, the concept of “text” was extended to

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everything: all human artifacts and institutions were textualized. Structuralism (q.v.), which was first Czech then influenced Fr. anthropology before migrating to Am. lit. crit. in the 1960s and ’70s, was developed on the model of linguistics, hoping to discover the underlying rules and conventions which make lit. possible for the members of a culture in the same way that grammatical rules make speech itself possible. Jakobson himself in an influential early study identified two traditional rhetorical figures, metonymy and metaphor (qq.v.), as two fundamental cognitive modes, dysfunctions of which appear in aphasics. Efforts to revivify

traditional rhetorical theory such as that by Group Mu approached the same synthesis from the other direction, also aiming at a larger account of discourse.

Fr. structuralists such as Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, and Tzvetan Todorov make clear that the focus of p. has shifted from the literary work itself as text to the system that makes it possible. "The work is a fragment of substance," says Barthes, but "the Text is a methodological field" (*Image* 156). What is wanted in a structuralist p., says Culler, is not yet another interp. of *Moby Dick* but rather an understanding of how the institution of lit. functions at all. Now it is the "study of the institution rather than participation in it that is the proper business of p." (Seamon). For Barthes, the "science of lit. can never be a science of content, but only of the conditions of content"; its aim is not to discover meanings but "to know how meaning is possible, at what cost and by what means" (*Partisan Rev.* (1967] 87). This work led naturally into theory of signs or semiotics (q.v.), where meaning becomes a system of relations, not a set of entities.

But the analogy from grammar did not work out: the constraints on interp. turn out to be social conventions (see CONVENTION), which are very different from linguistic rules. And it was but a step from meaning-as-relations to Derrida's appropriation of Saussure so as to claim that all meaning is endlessly deferred, never capable of being fixed. Deconstruction (q.v.) aimed to show that literary works do not control their meaning but are in fact partly controlled by forces of which they are unable to speak. In such a condition, critics must therefore revert to rhetorical analysis, which De Man made central, as "rhetorical crit.," to deconstructive praxis. Like its predecessors, deconstruction too foregrounded the nature of figuration in lang., but now to show not design, coherence, or unity of meaning but rather the reverse, incompleteness and incoherence, the generation of meanings other than or antithetical to those intended by a writer. One prominent Yale critic was led into musings on nihilism, and fascist associations by both de Man and Heidegger were discovered. Derrida's original aim, if it was to authorize new voices, ended up authorizing no voices at all. Marxist literary critics watched the swift collapse of virtually all the Soviet-influenced Marxist economies. In the rapid collapse of systems, voices grew shrill.

Still, deconstruction rested on only one model of lang.; and like all theories, and in line with its own tenets, it must necessarily be blind to its own premises. De Man allied it to formalism as but one more type of close reading. From the vantage of the next century, deconstruction may come to seem a mere emetic, a fast-acting purgative for the mimetic excesses and textual fixations of New Critical and structuralist formalism, which excluded all reasonable consideration of persons, situations, history, life as lived. The decade of the 1980s witnessed a reversion in crit. to issues of gender, race, culture, power, ideology, and history. From the vantage of the next century, these movements should be seen as having restored some of the richness of literary experience to an excessively arid, insulated, and theoretical crit. wherein the text became a mere pretext. But in the stimulus of turning away from the word toward culture and history, we must not forget that we have not, thereby, solved the problems of meaning and interp. that have repeatedly been shown to be central to the very nature of lang, and lit.: those problems still remain, still await answers. Too many critics have forgotten what F. R. Leavis once said in his book of the same title: that lit. is a way of knowing; that it is distinct from other ways of knowing and not to be subsumed in any other *modus cogitandi*; and that if we ignore lit., we turn away from not merely our greatest cultural artifacts but from a centrally human mode of recognition, from ourselves.

See now CLASSICAL POETICS; MEDIEVAL POETICS; RENAISSANCE POETICS;
BAROQUE POETICS; NEOCLASSICAL POETICS; ROMANTIC AND POSTROMANTIC
POETICS; TWENTIETH-CENTURY POETICS.