

Literary and Non-Literary Texts from Viewpoint of Formalism as Rudimentary of Other Literary Criticism

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Abstract From the late nineteenth century critics have regularly labeled certain compositions as 'literature', but the criteria for the definition have not always been made explicit. Criteria, implicit and explicit, vary. In definition of literature it could be consider the three areas; function, form and content. With criteria of function, form and content, the modern reader/researcher may locate a composition on a spectrum from least to most self-conscious communication. An awareness of the relative place of communicated words lifts the issue of defining literature from a sterile debate to an act of engagement. The most important activity in receiving a work as literary, and in appreciating a literature, is focusing on Language and its maneuver as widely as possible both in literary and in non-literary writings. Formalism is the first school which regularly put focus on language and its structures of the literary work for distinguishing from non-literary ones. This paper trace the formalism methods for understanding the difference between literary text and non-literary and in the end come to exact definition of literature.

Keywords Formalism, Literature, literariness, Language, Device

1. Introduction

It can begin, then, by raising the question: what is literature? There have been various attempts to define literature. It can define, for example, as 'imaginative' writing in the sense of fiction -writing which is not literally true. But even the briefest reflection on what people commonly include under the heading of literature suggests that this will not do. Seventeenth-century English literature includes Shakespeare, Webster, Marvell and Milton and even Hafez political poem and Molana mystical poetry and Khayyam philosophical poems are Literature.[1] It also stretches to the essays of Francis Bacon, the sermons of John Donne, Bunyan's spiritual autobiography and whatever it was that Sir Thomas Browne wrote. A distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction', then, seems unlikely to get us very far, not least because the distinction itself is often a questionable one.[2]It has been argued, for instance, that our own opposition between 'historical' and 'artistic' truth does not apply at all to the early Icelandic sagas. In the English late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the word 'novel' seems to have been used about both true and fictional events, and even news reports were hardly to be considered factual.[3] Novels and news reports were neither clearly factual nor clearly fictional: our

sharp discriminations between these categories simply did not apply. Gibbon no doubt thought that he was writing historical truth, and so perhaps did the authors of Genesis, but they are now read as 'fact' by some and 'fiction' by others; Newman, certainly thought his theological meditations were true, but they are now for many readers 'literature'. Moreover, if 'literature includes much 'factual' writing, it also excludes quite a lot of fiction. Superman comic and Mills and Boon novels are fiction but not generally regarded as literature, and certainly not Literature.[4]If literature is 'creative' or 'imaginative' writing does this imply that history, philosophy and natural science an uncreative and unimaginative?

2. Literature and Language as an Instrument

Analyzing the literature from non-literature works need a different kind of approach altogether. Perhaps literature is definable not according to whether it is fictional or 'imaginative', but because it uses language in peculiar ways. On this theory, literature is a kind of writing which, in the words of the Russian critic Roman Jakobson, represents an "organized violence committed on ordinary speech". Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech.[5] If you approach me at bus stop and murmur "Thou still unrevised bride of quietness" then I am instantly aware that I am in the presence of the literary. I know this because the texture, rhythm and reso-

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nance of your words are in excess of their abstract able meaning -or as the linguists might more technically put it, there is disproportion between the signifier and the signified. Your language draws attention to itself, flaunts its material being, as statements like 'Don't you know the drivers are on strike?' do not. This, in effect, was the definition of the 'literary' advanced by the Russian formalists, who included in their ranks Viktor Shlovsky, Roman Jakobson, Osip Brik, Yury Tynyanov, Boris Eichenbaum and Boris Tomashevsky. The Formalists emerged in Russia in the years before the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, and flourished throughout the 1920s, until they were effectively silenced by Stalinism.[6] A militant, polemical group of critics and they rejected the quasi-mystical symbolist doctrines which had influenced literary criticism before them, and in a practical, scientific spirit shifted attention to the material reality of the literary text itself. Criticism should dissociate art from mystery and concern itself with how literary texts actually worked. Literature was not pseudo-religion or psychology or sociology but a particular organization of language.[7] It had its own specific laws, structures and devices, which were to be studied in them rather than reduced to something else. The literary work was neither a vehicle for ideas, a reflection of social reality nor the incarnation of some transcendental truth. It was a material fact, whose functioning could be analyzed rather as one could examine a machine. It was made of words, not of objects or feelings, and it was a mistake to see it as the expression of an author's mind. Pushkin's Eugene Onegin, Osip Brik once airily remarked, would have been written even if Pushkin had not lived. Formalism was essentially the application of linguistics to the study of literature; and because the linguistics in question were of a formal kind, concerned with the structures of language rather than with what one might actually say, the Formalists passed over the analysis of literary 'content' where one might always be tempted into psychology or sociology for the study of literary form. Far from seeing form as the expression of content, they stood the relationship on its head: content was merely the 'motivation' of form, an occasion or convenience for a particular kind of formal exercise. Don Quixote is not 'about' the character of that name: the character is just a device for holding together different kinds of narrative technique.[8] Animal Farm for the Formalists would not be an allegory of Stalinism; on the contrary, Stalinism would simply provide a useful opportunity for the construction of an allegory. It was this perverse insistence which won for the Formalists their derogatory name from their antagonists; and though they did not deny that art had a relation to social reality, indeed some of them were closely associated with the Bolsheviks; they provocatively claimed that this relation was not the critic's business.[9] The Formalists started out by seeing the literary work as a more or less arbitrary assemblage of 'devices', and only later came to see these devices as interrelated elements or 'functions' within a total textual system. 'Devices' included sound, imagery, rhythm, syntax, meter, rhyme, narrative techniques, in fact the whole stock of formal literary elements; and what all of these elements had in common was

their 'estrangement?;' or 'defamiliarizing' effect. What was specific to literary language, what distinguished it from other forms of discourse, was that it deformed' ordinary language in various ways. Under the pressure of literary devices, ordinary language was intensified, condensed, twisted, telescoped, drawn out, and turned on its head. It was language 'made strange'; and because of this estrangement, the everyday world was also suddenly made unfamiliar. In the routines of everyday speech, our perceptions of and responses to reality become stale, blunted, or, as the Formalists would say, 'automatized'. Literature, by forcing us into a dramatic awareness of language, refreshes these habitual responses and renders objects more 'perceptible'. By having to grapple with language in a more strenuous, self-conscious way than usual, the world which that language contains is vividly renewed. The poetry of Sohrab Sepehri in contemporary poetry of Persian literature might provide a particularly graphic example of this. Literary discourse estranges or alienates ordinary speech, but in doing so, paradoxically, brings us into a fuller, more intimate possession of experience. Most of the time we breathe in air without being conscious of it: like language, it is the very medium in which we move. But if the air is suddenly thickened or infected we are forced to attend to our breathing with new vigilance, and the effect of this may be a heightened experience of our bodily life, we read a scribbled note from a friend without paying much attention to its narrative structure; but if a story breaks off and begins again, switches constantly from one narrative level to another and delays its climax to keep us in suspense, we become freshly conscious of how it is constructed at the same time as our engagement with it may be intensified. The story, as the Formalists would argue, uses 'impeding' or 'retarding' devices to hold our attention; and in literary language, these devices are laid bare'. It was this which moved Viktor Shlovsky to remark mischievously of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, a novel which impedes its own story-line so much that it hardly gets off the ground, that it was "the most typical novel in world literature".

3. Deviation as Vital Word in Formalism for Definition of Literature

The Formalists saw literary language as a set of deviations from a norm, a kind of linguistic violence: literature is a special' kind of language, in contrast to the 'ordinary' language and commonly use. Any actual language consists of a highly complex range of discourses, differentiated according to class, region, gender, status and so on, which can by no means be neatly unified into a single, homogeneous linguistic community. One person's norm may be another's deviation. Even the most 'prosaic' text of the fifteenth century may sound 'poetic' to us today because of its archaism. "If we were to stumble across an isolated scrap of writing from some long-vanished civilization, we could not tell whether it was 'poetry' or not merely by inspecting it, since we might have no access to that society's 'ordinary' discourses; and

even if further research were to reveal that it was 'deviatory', this would still not prove that it was poetry as not all linguistic deviations are poetic. Slang, for example".[10]We would not be able to tell just by looking at it that it was not a piece of 'realist' literature, without much more information about the way it actually functioned as a piece of writing within the society in question.[11]It is not that the Russian Formalists did not realize all this. They recognized that norms and deviations shifted around from one social or historical context to another -that 'poetry. In this sense depends on where you happen to be standing at the time. The fact that a piece of language was 'estranging' did not guarantee that it was always and everywhere so: it was estranging only against a certain normative linguistic background, and if this altered then the writing might cease to be perceptible as literary. If everyone used phrases like 'unrevised bride of quietness' in ordinary pub conversation, this kind of language might cease to be poetic. For the Formalists, in other words, 'literariness' was a function of the differential relations between one sort of discourse and another; it was not an eternally given property. They were not out to define 'literature', but 'literariness' -special uses of language, which could be found in 'literary' texts but also in many places outside them. Anyone who believes that 'literature' can be defined by such special uses of language has to face the fact that there is more metaphor in Manchester than there is in Marvell. There is no 'literary' device -metonymy, synecdoche, litotes, and chiasmus and so on -which is not quite intensively used in daily discourse.[12]Nevertheless, the Formalists still presumed that 'making strange' was the essence of the literary. It was just that they relativized this use of language; saw it as a matter of contrast between one type of speech and another. To think of literature as the Formalists do is really to think of all literature as poetry. Significantly, when the Formalists came to consider prose writing, they often simply extended to it the kinds of technique they had used with poetry. But literature is usually judged to contain much besides poetry -to include, for example, realist or naturalistic writing which is not linguistically self-conscious or self-exhibiting in any striking way. People sometimes call writing 'fine' precisely because it doesn't draw undue attention to itself: they admire its laconic plainness or low-keyed sobriety. And what about jokes, football chants and slogans, newspaper headlines, advertisements, which are often verbally flamboyant but not generally classified as literature?

There are, however, problems with this way of defining literature too. For one thing, it would probably have come as a surprise to George Orwell to hear that his essays were to be read as though the topics he discussed were less important than the way he discussed them. In much that is classified as literature the truth-value and practical relevance of what is said is considered important to the overall effect. But even if treating discourse 'non-pragmatically' is part of what is meant by literature', then it follows from this 'definition' that literature cannot in fact be 'objectively' defined. It leaves the definition of literature up to how somebody decides to read,

not to the nature of what is written.[13]There are certain kinds of writing -poems, plays, novels -which are fairly obviously intended to be 'non- pragmatic' in this sense, but this does not guarantee that they will actually be read in this way. I might well read Gibbon's account of the Roman empire not because I am misguided enough to believe that it will be reliably informative about ancient Rome but because I enjoy Gibbon's prose style, or revel in images of human corruption whatever their historical source. But I might read Robert Burns' poem because it is not clear to me, as a Japanese horticulturalist, whether or not the red rose flourished in eighteenth-century Britain. This, it will be said, is not reading it 'as literature'; but am I reading Orwell's essays as literature only if I generalize what he says about the Spanish civil war to some cosmic utterance about human life? It is true that many of the works studied as literature in academic institutions were 'constructed' to be read as literature, but it is also true that many of them were not. A piece of writing may start off life as history or philosophy and then come to be ranked as literature; or it may start off as literature and then come to be valued for its archaeological significance. Some texts are born literary, some achieve literariness, and some have literariness thrust upon them. Breeding in this respect may count for a good deal more than birth. What matters may not be where you came from but how people treat you. If they decide that you are literature then it seems that you are, irrespective of what you thought you were.

In this sense, one can think of literature less as some inherent quality or set of qualities displayed by certain kinds of writing all the way from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf, than as a number of ways in which people relate themselves to writing. It would not be easy to isolate, from all that has been variously called 'literature', some constant set of inherent features. In fact it would be as impossible as trying to identify the single distinguishing feature which all games have in common. There is no 'essence' of literature whatsoever. Any bit of writing may be read 'non-pragmatically', if that is what reading a text as literature means, just as any writing may be read 'poetically'. If I pore over the railway timetable not to discover a train connection but to stimulate in myself general reflections on the speed and complexity of modern existence, then I might be said to be reading it as literature. John M. Ellis has argued that the term 'literature' operates rather like the word 'weed': weeds are not particular kinds of plant, but just any kind of plant which for some reason or another gardener does not want around. Perhaps 'literature' means something like the opposite: any kind of writing which for some reason or another somebody values highly.[14]As the philosophers might say, 'literature' and "weed" are functional rather than ontological terms: they tell us about what we do, not about the fixed being of things. They tell us about the role of a text or a thistle in a social context, its relations with and differences from its surroundings, the ways it behaves, the purposes it may be put to and the human practices clustered around it. 'Literature' is in this sense a purely formal, empty sort of definition. Even if we claim that it is a non-pragmatic

treatment of language, we have still not arrived at an 'essence' of literature because this is also so of other linguistic practices such as jokes. In any case, it is far from clear that we can discriminate neatly between 'practical' and 'non-practical' ways of relating ourselves to language. Reading a novel for pleasure obviously differs from reading a road sign for information, but how about reading a biology textbook to improve your mind? Is that a 'pragmatic' treatment of language or not? In many societies, 'literature' has served highly practical functions such as religious ones; distinguishing sharply between 'practical' and 'non-practical' may only be possible in a society like ours, where literature has ceased to have much practical function at all.[15] We may be offering as a general definition a sense of the 'literary' which is in fact historically specific.

4. New Criticism and Value-Judgments

I. A. Richards in his famous study *Practical Criticism* (1929) sought to demonstrate just how whimsical and subjective literary value-judgements could actually be by giving his undergraduates a set of poems, withholding from them the titles and authors' names, and asking them to evaluate them. The resulting judgements, notoriously, were highly variable: time-honoured poets were marked down and obscure authors celebrated. To my mind, however, the most interesting aspect of this project, and one apparently quite invisible to Richards himself, is just how tight a consensus of unconscious valuations underlies these particular differences of opinion.[16] Reading Richards' undergraduates' accounts of literary works one is struck by the habits of perception and interpretation which they spontaneously share - what they expect literature to be, what assumptions they bring to a poem and what fulfillments they anticipate they will derive from it. None of this is really surprising: for all the participants in this experiment were, presumably, young, white, upper- or upper middle- class, privately educated English people of the 1920s, and how they responded to a poem depended on a good deal more than purely 'literary' factors. Their critical responses were deeply entwined with their broader prejudices and beliefs.[17] This is not a matter of blame: there is no critical response which is not so entwined, and thus no such thing as a 'pure' literary critical judgment or interpretation. If anybody is to be blamed it is I. A. Richards himself, who as a young, white, upper-middle-class male Cambridge don was unable to objectify a context of interests which he himself largely shared, and was thus unable to recognize fully that local, 'subjective' differences of evaluation work within a particular, socially structured way of perceiving the world. If it will not do to see literature as an 'objective', descriptive category, neither will it do to say that literature is just what people whimsically choose to call literature.[18] For there is nothing at all whimsical about such kinds of value-judgement: they have their roots in deeper structures of belief which are as apparently unshakeable as the Empire State building. What we have uncovered so far,

then, is not only that literature does not exist in the sense that insects do, and that the value-judgements by which it is constituted are historically variable, but that these value-judgements themselves have a close relation to social ideologies[19].

5. Conclusions

The Russian Formalists were materialists and anti-traditionalists, who tried to reach some rapprochement with social and political concerns. At first their approach was somewhat mechanical, treating literature simply as an assembly of literary devices. Subsequently they investigated the interrelated of parts, an "organic" approach. Finally, in 1928, Tynyanov and Jakobson recast literature as a system where every component had a constructive function, just as the social fabric was a "system of systems." But the short period of comparative tolerance of the early twenties changed as Stalinism tightened its grip, and the Formalists were obliged to recant, turn to novel writing, or flee abroad. That literature should not be subordinated to narrow Marxist concerns is a theme to which Russian authors occasionally returned in the succeeding thirty years, but an aesthetic divorced from socialism remained a heresy in the Soviet Union. The Russian Formalists tried to explain how aesthetic effects were produced by literary devices, and how literary writing differed from nonliterary. Literature, as they saw it, was an autonomous product, and should be studied by appropriate methods, preferably scientific. The literary was not distinguished from the non-literary by subject matter, poetic inspiration, philosophic vision, or sensory quality of the poetic image, but by its verbal art. Tropes, particularly metaphor, were the key, as they shifted objects to a new sphere of perception, making the familiar strange, novel and exciting. But Jakobson deepened the interest. "The distinctive feature of poetry lies in the fact that a word is perceived as a word and not merely a proxy for the denoted object or an outburst of emotion, that words and their arrangement, their meaning, their outward and inward form acquire weight and value of their own". Now if rhythm, euphony and startling word order should converge on a word so as to throw into relief its complex texture, its density of meanings and associations that was nothing unusual. Few conscientious writers would disagree. Words, and the meanings and emotions they carry, are the material assembled into a poem by the usual devices of this art form. Exactly in the same manner, a painter takes the outside world as his raw materials rather than the given "content" which he must faithfully reproduce. But Jakobson and Zirmunsky equated this "material" with the verbal. That was the crucial difference. Words for them drew their meaning from their arrangements within the poem, not their outside referents, an attitude analogous to Saussure's closed system of arbitrary signs.

In the end we can say that literary texts tend to teach the reader some kind of life lesson through the main character evolving and changing as the novel or short

story progresses. It utilizes metaphors and symbols to show and enhance the protagonist's (the main character, usually the hero) adventure throughout the novel. These texts are usually read to teach rather than for entertainment because literary texts range from easy to understand to something that has to be read more than once and analysed. These types of texts always have a reason for being written rather than simply on a whim. Literary texts, such as Shakespeare, Faulkner, Emerson, and Langston Hughes, bring up large issues of society or flaws in human nature that explored and exposed for the problem that they cause and some even go a step beyond this to offer a way to repair them or even futuristic predictions. Literary texts are well constructed and take time to compose creatively and meaningfully. Non-literary texts tend to allow the reader to simply enjoy the texts. Rather than having an intention to teach a person something, its sole purpose is for entertainment. The main character still may change as they go through their "adventure," however it usually lacks in metaphor and symbols. There's no need to reread any of the text, because there are no layers of complication rather it means what it says. There could be lesson in the text, most likely a life lesson that is simple and easy to identify. In other words, it's more than mindless babble, but it lacks in substance to be taught in a classroom.

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