THE USE OF HISTORY IN BISHOP HURD’S LITERARY CRITICISM

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A curious, persistent notion still circulates about literary criticism in the mid-eighteenth century. This is the period, we remember, that brought to public attention the diversified personalities of Richard Hurd, Joseph and Thomas Warton, Samuel Johnson, and Joshua Reynolds. It is a period in which the mainstream of bookish thought seems for a while to alter its course, changing as it were into little whirlpools that gather force as 1798 draws near. The basic problem as so often happens is a difficulty in terms. We run into the labels “preromantic” and “neoclassical,” and depending on our own predilections, we too often fail to observe the simple truth that the word is not the thing. In this paper I shall attempt to show that the really significant critical work of these middle years is not involved in a battle of words; the problem is more subtle. The Augustan critics are still making their presence felt; but the new critics at this time, almost as a justification for the brilliant work of the past, merely serve to broaden and deepen understanding of all English works that would appear to be drowned were it not for the fact of their gigantic intuitive appeal. Richard Hurd shows this deepening of critical appreciation, and we turn to him as a representative figure not because he is the best, but because he is often the least understood. Hurd does not espouse any kind of preromanticism. If we take the English manipulation of “neoclassical” (and the term is dangerous only if we use it as condemnatory), we cannot, except by great stretches of the imagination, call this man a forerunner of the early nineteenth century.

Our first task, then, is to avoid the idea that the middle part of the eighteenth century is not in itself valuable. What posterity does with its ideas is one thing; what the critics of the time attempt to do for themselves is quite another. To treat Hurd, the Wartons, and Bishop Percy only as direct contributors to the following century is ridiculous; the period does, after all, have value in itself. Critics and scholars need to review and to interpret what went on at that time. To be sure, the notion of “preromanticism,” if we look at it in one way, has its own validity: Joseph Warton liked nature; so did Coleridge. But if we are to simplify the character of literary movements, then we must ultimately relinquish their in-

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dividual meaning and importance. No one will argue that Johnson suffers the same kind of dejection as Coleridge. And even disregarding the notable difference of character in these two authors, we can separate out elements in their thinking that are specifically appropriate to the main areas of thought in their time. But the aim of this article is not to prolong a dispute that is unanswerable by means of simple terminology. Rather, we are concerned here with the shape of thinking about various literary ages. This often maligned and frequently neglected middle period of the eighteenth century has a shape of its own, and we can see it clearly in the speculations of Bishop Hurd.

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More than any other work from the mid-eighteenth century, Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) has been hailed as a harbinger of Romantic criticism. Because it has so often been classified as “preromantic,” it has never been analyzed at length except to show its real or supposed affinities with nineteenth-century thought. What has been consistently neglected is the importance that the work may claim in its own right as sound criticism today. Upon a close reading of this work and others by Hurd, the reader immediately meets an odd fact: Hurd’s edition of Horace, published before the *Letters*, and his edition of Addison, published after the *Letters*, are read as perfectly conservative by critics from Saintsbury to the present, whereas the *Letters* has been considered by a great majority to be in advance of its age, if not actually prophetic. And, to be sure, Hurd’s work on Spenser differs widely from that of critics from Dryden through Thomas Warton. The difference does not lie in appreciating Spenser’s “sublimity,” “fancy,” and ability to tell stories, or in explaining the nature of the plot in the *Faerie Queene*. Dryden had already explained that the plot was based upon a way of life which still existed in the court of Elizabeth; Prior had praised Spenser’s plot, imagery, and even his diction and versification. Hughes, taking the lead from Dryden, remarks that the plot of the *Faerie Queene* has a solid basis but, being unfinished, is confused; and Upton praises the fact that Spenser treats unreality consistently—that is, he follows Aristotle’s “probable impossible.” As far as showing that the Romances of Spenser (in addition to those by Chaucer, Tasso, and Ariosto) are based on reality, Warburton expands a hint given by Dryden and Hughes into an eight-page explanation of Cervantes’

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satire in *Don Quixote*. Even fuller accounts of the historical background of the Romances were to be found in two works, the first definitely, the second possibly, a source for Hurd's *Letters: Sainte-Palaye's “Mémoirs sur l'Ancienne Chevalerie” and Chapelain’s “Sur la Lecture des Vieux Romans.”*  

This kind of source-hunting often goes on indefinitely; other writers whom Hurd used for ideas in the *Letters* and Hobbes, Locke, Addison, and the three classical critics that Hurd, like his contemporaries, used constantly, Horace, Aristotle, and Longinus. Saintsbury (more than his followers) realizes that the *Letters* is derivative; he makes a point highly relevant to our study: “Scraps and ords of Hurd’s doctrine may of course be found earlier—in Dryden, in Fontenelle, in Addison, even in Pope; but, though somebody else may know an original for the whole or the bulk of it, I, at least, do not.” Even though the “originality” Saintsbury finds has been proven derivative by later critics, it is perfectly true that something in the *Letters* makes the reader feel that there is something new being said. The main reason for this feeling is the sense of excitement running throughout this treatment of Spenser and the Italians; the critical reaction to Hurd’s tone is that no one can talk so emphatically about the literature of “imagination” without being at least partly “Romantic.” And, after all, in the history of taste such an emphasis upon Spenser, though rare in any age, is especially noteworthy in the eighteenth century, when Spenser was generally praised and criticized in a few lines or paragraphs. Previous to Hurd, extended discussions on Spenser are present only in his editors (Hughes and Upton) and Thomas Warton. 

Yet the extreme nature of Hurd’s praise ought to be balanced against a passage given as epigraph to the edition of Addison containing Hurd’s notes, a passage which saddened Saintsbury:  

I set out, many years ago, with a warm admiration of this admirable writer [Addison]. I then took a surfeit of his natural, easy manner; and

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3 Saintsbury, p. 73. The edition of Addison was published in 1811.
was taken, like my betters, with the raptures and high flights of Shakespeare. My maturer judgment, or lenient age (call it which you will), has now led me back to the favorite of my youth. And, here, I think, I shall stick: for such useful sense, in so charming words, I find not elsewhere. His taste is so pure, and his *Virgilian prose* (as Dr. Young styles it) so exquisite, that I have but now found out, at the close of a critical life, the full value of his writings.

This passage gives us a clue to one of Hurd’s main traits as a critic: he has not given up Shakespeare; he is merely giving Addison as much praise as possible, for he speaks highly of Shakespeare in the edition of Addison itself. The truth is that Hurd gives high praise to any great writer who succeeds completely in any type of writing; in the same way Horace is praised in Hurd’s edition of the *Ars Poetica* and Cowley in Hurd’s edition of his selected works. Others so praised in Hurd’s criticism include Chaucer, Pope, Dryden, Tasso, Ariosto, Richardson, and many classical writers. One modern critic finds such catholicity of praise to be eclectic, but Hurd would not have agreed, for he had a sound theory on which to base his admiration for many types of literature. In Letter X of the *Letters* we find a passage given so disinterestedly that we are apt to pass over it without realizing that it is central to all of his criticism; we refer to the description of three main types of poetry: those appealing to the judgment, to the heart, and to the imagination. Thus Addison, Cowley, and Spenser (or Shakespeare) are all great because each achieved near perfection in following the rules of a particular type of poetry. Such a view based upon empirical psychology may be “eclectic,” but it is not necessarily disorganized, unphilosophical, or romantic.

That the *Letters* is typical of neoclassicism has also been shown clearly by critics who have emphasized Hurd’s use of *a priori* reasoning, of determining rules through psychology, and of applying these rules according to genre. However, such criticism, though it aids to balance the view of Hurd as a romantic, does not show why people differ in interpreting his criticism of Spenser and the Italian poets. It is obvious that Hurd has modified the neoclassical system of his predecessors in such a way as to make the nature of his critical system unclear to modern readers. Hurd’s underlying assump-

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4*René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, I* (New Haven, 1955), p. 130: Hurd “could not escape an unrecognised dualism between head and heart.” We might note that Hurd would not want to escape; his theory of the three types of poetry reflects the best philosophical and psychological thought of his time, especially the work of Hobbes and Locke.

tions have been clearly shown by modern critics, but his unique contribution to the history of critical methods has not. This contribution we may call the recognition of history and its influence on art; he is the first to give a convincing demonstration of how neoclassical rules need modification if the critic is to accept the influence that environment had upon writers of the past. And Hurd presents his case for accepting this modification by basing his criticism upon recent literary, theological, historical, and philosophical developments.

Hurd gives the rationale for his use of the historical method in the opening epistle of the Letters: “Nothing in human nature . . . is without its reasons. The modes and fashions of different times may appear, at first sight, fantastic and unaccountable. But they, who look nearly into them, discover some latent cause of their production.” Hurd then shows that the oddities in Spenser and the Italian poets are results of their historical environment and are not artistic flaws. He maintains that once the surface dissimilarity is removed, a reader may ascertain the rules of their works and judge these poets in their proper standing in relation to classical and modern writers of imaginative poetry. We are now able to see that Hurd is not making a defense of individuality or of the uniqueness of the poet’s vision; rather he is arguing the classical belief that human nature is universal, even though local manners vary. Certainly no preromanticism exists in this view, which is the most typically eighteenth-century attitude in Hurd. Art is universal, but the reader must use two ways to understand the artist’s aim: “Sometimes a close attention to the workings of the human mind is sufficient . . . ; sometimes more than that, the diligent observation of what passes without us, is necessary” (Letter I). The second method, historical, is needed for Spenser and others similar to him, and is important because “the greatest geniuses” of modern poetry—Ariosto, Tasso, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Shakespeare—have been “seduced by these barbarities.” To show why these great poets used material from “Gothic” romance, the critic must explain the “rise, progress, and genius of Gothic chivalry” (Letter I). It is possible, in other words, for an artist to write poetry in accord with the necessary rules for intellectual, emotional, or epic works while following modes, techniques, or subject matter different from that emphasized by earlier French and English critics. Such latitude does represent a change in the literary climate, a transitional element that in the next century permits far greater license than the eighteenth century ever dreamed of. But at the same time, nothing in his theory can possibly be distorted into a case for preromanticism. Hurd is still highly derivative; his rules are relatively strict, though his taste
may be more catholic. It is this change in taste, the emphasis upon a set of poets different from those stressed in the times of Dryden and Pope, that shows a movement towards the nineteenth century. The theory and rules of this criticism by Hurd is totally neoclassical.

The most derivative part of the Letters (II–V) deals with a historical account of chivalry and a proof that chivalric manners are more "sublime" (by which Hurd seems to mean a combination of the pictorial and the terrifying or strange) than classical ones. The critical idea informing these epistles may be conveniently summed up by one comment: "Jerusalem was to the European, what Troy had been to the Grecian heroes" (Letter V). This is Hurd's first defense of the medieval and Renaissance Romance: the material imitated in these works is as valid as that in the works of Homer and Virgil. But not all works dealing with this legitimate material are praiseworthy as art; they merely contain the raw material which must be transformed by a great artist. The quality of "sublimity" (or greatness, a meaning Hurd frequently gives this word) is not automatically in the subject matter but is rather a rhetorical quality gained by the skill of the poet joined to appropriate material. Thus nothing in the medieval Romances is worthy of praise as art; Hurd uses Milton as an authority who praises Chaucer and Spenser, "not the writers of Amadis and Sir Launcelot of the Lake" (Letter VII). The writings of Chaucer and Spenser "may incline us to think with more respect than is commonly done, of the Gothic manners; I mean, as adapted to the uses of the greater [i.e. epic] poetry" (Letter VII). This last comment is important; for Hurd, as for neoclassic critics in general, art is always a process of changing or ordering actuality. In his witty attack on Hobbes (the Letter to Davenant), Hurd shows this belief that greatness in art lies not only in subject matter but also in the ability or genius of the artist:

I readily agree to the lively observation, 'That impenetrable armour, enchanted castles, invulnerable bodies, iron men, flying horses, and other such things, are easily feigned by them that dare.' But, with the observer's leave, not so feigned as we find them in the Italian poets, unless the writer have another quality, besides that of courage (Letter X).

Hurd's main attempt to deal with this other "quality" begins with Letter VIII, the most important section dealing with the Faerie Queen and its unifying elements; here the notion of the Classical–Gothic parallel is carried into literary criticism of a very high order. Hurd finds two types of unity possible in an epic poem: the classical or Aristotelian unity of action and the Gothic unity based upon a "design" of multiple actions. This section of the Letters has received high praise from a recent Spenser critic, John
Arthos, who considers his own book to be a continuation of Hurd’s work: “Bishop Hurd’s discussion of the unity of the *Faerie Queene* is one of the most fruitful that has been offered.” The critic points out that Hurd, by saying that unity of design brings the whole “under one view,” “avoids treating design as a form of unity with an existence of its own.” To illustrate Hurd’s view, Arthos discusses comments by other neoclassical critics on this type of unity, showing that it is “derived . . . from the peculiar interests of the poet, his temperament and his way of imagining or dreaming . . . . Except for a certain sophistication of philosophy . . . all of these ideas appear to have been part of the great debates in Italy in the sixteenth century” and were all considered by Tasso himself.\(^3\) This comment is of great interest in a study of Spenser and the romantic epic, but its applicability to Hurd is at best doubtful.

Actually there are enough English precedents for this use of the word *design*: Hughes uses the word but does not apparently think of the *Faerie Queene* as being unified.\(^4\) The use of the word that is closest to Hurd’s is that of William Warburton in his discussion of the unity of the *Aeneid*: he finds a lack of unity in the action, but a unity of design in political allegory.\(^5\) Warburton does not give a “picture” of the design, however, as does Cinthio, who claims that the epics of Tasso and Ariosto have a unity shaped like a human figure. Hurd’s picture of the structure of Spenser’s poem is more like a wheel than Cinthio’s figure, but the two ideas are otherwise similar:

This Gothic method of design in poetry may be, in some sort, illustrated by what is called the Gothic method of design in gardening. A wood or grove cut out into many separate avenues or glades was among the most favorite of the works of art, which our fathers attempted in this species of cultivation. These walks were distinct from each other, had, each, their several distinction, and terminated on their own proper objects. Yet the whole was brought together and considered under one view, by the relation which these various openings had, not to each other, but to their common and concurrent center. You and I are, perhaps, agreed that this sort of gardening is not of so true a taste as that which Kent and Nature have brought us acquainted with; where the supreme art of the designer consists in disposing his ground and objects into an *entire landscape*; and grouping them, if I may use the term, in so easy a manner, that the careless observer, though he be taken with the symmetry of the whole, discovers no art in the combination (Letter VIII).

The picture of the *Faerie Queene* is of a wheel: the spokes are the adventures of the twelve knights; the hub is the feast of the

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\(^4\)Hughes, I. III–Illi.

\(^5\)William Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated* (London, 1755), I, 251 (on types of unity other than that of action), 276 (on “design” as opposed to unity of action).
Queen. Arthos is wrong, however, in claiming that Hurd's notion of Gothic unity is based on a sense of the individual nature of an artist's vision. Hurd's notion is far simpler and more concrete: the unity of the poem "consists in the relation of its several adventures to one common original, the appointment of the Fairy Queen; and to one common end, the completion of the Fairy Queen's injunctions" (Letter VIII). The unity of the poem lies solely in the fact that its twelve stories were meant to begin and end together; Hurd seems to have taken into account Spenser's interest in the unity of the whole, not Spenser's talent in individualized stories and peculiar method of story-telling. The traditional nature of Hurd's critical system here is shown by another aspect of his gardening metaphor: Kent's method "may be the truest taste in gardening, because the simplest." In other words, Homer's classical unity of action is the truest although the Gothic unity of design has an inferior beauty which can at times be highly successful.  

This judgment that classical and simple unity supercedes the Gothic and complex is highly revealing. For one thing, it shows Hurd remaining true to his neoclassical standards. But, more importantly, it shows his method, an approach characteristic of many critics who follow him. The historical method is used to arrive at a point where one can put the traditional rules into practice. Unlike Lord Kames, who uses the new empiricism to arrive at rules for art, or Dr. Johnson, who uses his awareness of "nature," Hurd (like Thomas Warton and Bishop Percy) uses his knowledge of history to arrive at rules and value judgments, and he uses it in his theological writings in addition to his critical ones. As a matter of fact, it is possible that the traditional form of Anglican sermons has influenced this entire historical movement in the eighteenth century; three of the most important historical critics were bishops: Hurd, Percy, and Warburton. An example of this theological method is seen in one of Hurd's sermons when Hurd is discussing the text for the day: "If there be any difficulty in these words, it will be removed by considering the manners of that time, in which Jesus lived, and the ideas of those persons, to whom he addressed himself" (VI, 1). To develop this passage, Hurd has to discuss the primarily agricultural nature of life at that time, the monetary distresses that resulted from such a system, and the nature of the various textual references that were obscure to his listeners; like a good preacher of any age, Hurd makes the passage specifically applicable to his listeners: "We, of this nation, have

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"Hurd goes on to criticize Spenser for weakening his 'Gothic' unity by using three other devices: the adaptation of Ariosto's method of interwoven stories; the use of Prince Arthur in an attempt to gain classical unity of action; the didactic use of allegory. The result is "a perplexity and confusion, which is the proper, and only considerable defect of this extraordinary poem" (Letter VIII)."
not been so happy as to want examples of such distresses” (VI, 16). He then explains the character of a particularly horrible type of Antinomianism which caused trouble about the time of the Restoration and the nature of the “Popery” and “Atheism” which reigned after the former menace had been dispelled.

This sermon is an example in little of the same method Hurd uses in the Letters and in many other works of criticism, especially his editions of Horace and Cowley, the Preface of his Dialogues, and many passages in his theoretical essays and letters to friends. The shape of Hurd’s thought may perhaps best be described with an equation: as post-Restoration heresy is to disorders in Biblical times, so supposed defects in Spenser’s poetry are to supposed beauties in Homer’s. We might put this another way and say that merely because a passage in the Bible is obscure, we are not to decide that the Bible does not follow the rules of writing; the fault lies in our imperfect knowledge. The relevance to literary criticism is clear and shows Hurd’s method of thought: Spenser, Tasso, medieval Romances, and Chaucer all seem strange to eighteenth-century readers, but it is the latter who are in error owing to their lack of historical information. Hurd has used his knowledge of historical theology well in his writing of historical criticism.

So far we have seen Hurd using history to show that Spenser and the Italian poets based their fictions, even many of their supposed miracles (see the first half of Letter X), upon actual happenings of their age. But his argument changes in the middle of Letter X to a discussion of the poems as art rather than as reflections of history: “this is not the sort of defence I mean chiefly to insist on. Let others explain away these wonders, so offensive to certain philosophical critics [he is thinking especially of Hobbes, whom he mentions twice in this letter]. They are welcome to me in their own proper form, and with all the extravagance commonly imputed to them.” After quoting Addison on “the Fairy way of writing,” Hurd sums up his argument about the poetic use of the supernatural; this passage is generally given as one of the most “romantic” in the Letters:

So little account does this wicked poetry make of philosophical or historical truth: all she allows us to look for, is poetical truth: a very slender thing indeed, and which the poet’s eye, when rolling in a fine frenzy, can but just lay hold of. To speak in the philosophic language of

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88 The edition of Horace (London, 1749) uses the method to show that the Ars Poetica was intended as a work of drama; the Preface to the edition of Cowley (1772, 1777) explains Cowley’s false wit in terms of its age. The essays on imitation show the historical learning requisite to distinguish imitations of nature from imitations of other writers. One of his letters shows his knowledge of the historical method in his denial of the authenticity of Ossian: the letter is addressed to Warburton (December 25, 1761) in William Warburton, Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to One of his Friends (New York, 1809), pp. 247–248.
Mr. Hobbes, it is something much beyond the actual bounds, and only within the conceived possibility of nature (Letter X).

To understand this quotation, we ought to give another in the same Letter; this following passage is generally ignored by those who emphasize Hurd’s “Romanticism”:

We must distinguish between the popular belief, and that of the reader. The fictions of poetry do, in some degree at least, require the first (they would, otherwise, deservedly pass for dreams indeed): but when the poet has this advantage on his side, and his fancies have, or may be supposed to have, a countenance from the current superstitions of the age in which he writes, he dispenses with the last, and gives his reader leave to be as sceptical and as incredulous, as he pleases (Letter X).^24

This limitation upon the poet’s ability to “create” is central to Hurd’s criticism and shows his agreement with the majority of French and Italian critics of the epic. The first quotation above, in addition, shows a revealing use of the comment by Hobbes. First of all, Hurd characteristically adds much to intensify the idea; if the poet is to go “beyond the actual bounds,” then he should go as far as possible; Hurd never advocates half measures. Secondly, he misuses Hobbes’s comment, which originally meant that the poet ought to use idealized creations, a principle closer to Reynolds’s “general nature” than to the Gothic use of supernatural beings. Hurd shows by the order of argument in Letter X that he knows what Hobbes’s comment means; here he enjoys turning the great philosopher’s words against himself.

Hurd continues his argument about the supernatural when he claims that the epic poet is not restricted to “the known and experienced course of affairs in the world” but “has a world of his own, where experience has less to do than consistent imagination” (Letter X). “Experience” for Hurd is always treated as material to be changed by the poet; as Hurd says in an essay written in the same year as the Letters, poetry “assembles, combines, or corrects its ideas, at pleasure; in short, prefers not only the agreeable, and the graceful, but, as occasion calls upon her, the vast, the incredible. I had almost said, the impossible, to the obvious truth and nature of things” (II, 9). Such poetry must be “consistent,” must be tied well together with suitable images which are

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^24This quotation can raise an interesting question in view of Hurd’s ironic reference to fiction which “would... pass for dreams indeed.” We can ask what he would have thought of Coleridge’s poetry of the supernatural. A poem like Kubla Khan would be beyond his ken because Hurd assumes that only the known world is ever a fit subject for art. This limitation upon the use of the supernatural is discussed in H. T. Swendenberg, Jr., The Theory of the Epic in England, 1550–1800, in University of California Publications in English, XV (Berkeley, 1944), 116, 139n.; also see Trowbridge, p. 460.
not contradictory. This kind of criticism may well appear revolutionary if compared to the Preface by Pope to the 1717 edition of his works, but the comparison would be false, for Hurd is not here discussing pastorals and imitations but the epic. The similarity of idea in Pope and Hurd is much closer when we recall Pope's Preface and notes to the Iliad, especially the stress in the Preface upon Homer's matchless "invention." Neither critic, however, has in mind anything like Coleridge's notion of the imagination; the two eighteenth-century critics think of "invention" as a new mirroring of actuality (if we can consider superstitions and exaggerations as being "actual"), not as a uniquely personal response to, or creation of reality.

Possibly the finest touch in the Letters is Hurd's casual introduction of the three types of poetry; this passage in Letter X, seemingly unconnected to the rest of the Letters, is actually the rationale behind the entire defense of Spenser and the Italians. He divides all poetry into the poetry of "men and manners," the poetry that addresses itself to the heart "through the passions," and the poetry of the imagination. The first two are restricted to the believable (the first must be true historically, the second true of human nature), but the third is not because the imagination permits "fanciful exhibitions." Just as imitations of historical and social fact and representations of emotion have their own rules, so the imagination, which does not represent things directly to the eyes (as the drama does), has rules based upon what the reader is able to feign to himself. This leads Hurd to his belief that imaginative art must be based upon beliefs or superstitions of the poet's age. He is thus able to conclude his argument in a suitably traditional manner by claiming that no epic can succeed without "admiration"; this quality "cannot be affected but by the marvellous of celestial intervention, I mean, the agency of superior beings really existing, or by the illusion of the fancy taken to be so." As proof of his assertion he gives the failure of two epics which attempt to reach greatness without using the supernatural: 

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\(55\) What Hurd means by "consistent imagination" is clarified by a remark by Upton in his Preface to Spenser: "It is required that the fable should be probable. A story will have probability, if it hangs well together, and is consistent: And provided the tales are speciously told, the probability of them will not be destroyed, though they are tales of wizards or witches, monstrous men and monstrous women; for who, but downright miscreants, question wonderful tales": Mueller, p. 42.

\(56\) One difficulty we find in analyzing the Letters is the lack of systematic thought displayed throughout; Hurd is writing differently from what is usual in a critic who is generally over-systematized. But Hurd, always respectful of genre, is writing in the "Epistolary mode of writing," which has three rules: there must be "an unity in the subject"; there must also be "a connexion in the method"; it is imperative "that such connexion be easy" (I, 24). This passage is from the edition of Horace; the Preface contains elaborate rules for the epistle, all of which are relevant for Hurd's style and organization in the Letters, including his casual organization, familiar style, and ironic or mocking comments. Hurd, in other words, looked upon this defense of imaginative poetry as more than literary criticism; it was to be a work of art itself.
taire's *Henriade* and Davenant's *Gondibert.* This breakdown of all poetry into types which correspond to the empirical division of the human faculties (judgment, imagination, and passion) is the most admirable theoretical doctrine in the *Letters*; by a consistent application of his theory of the three types of poetry Hurd is able to clarify many neoclassic confusions over the relation of judgment and fancy.

Finally, this defense of imaginative poetry shows what might be considered Hurd's most classical attribute as a critic—his insistence that each work of art achieve its proper effect and no other. This attitude permeates Hurd's criticism (we have seen it operate in the discussion of conflicting unities in the *Faerie Queene*), but it is stated most bluntly, even obsessively, in his essay "On the Provinces of the Drama": "though mixed dramas [tragedies using persons of low estate, comedy with those of high estate] may give us pleasure, yet the pleasure, in either kind, will be LESS in proportion to the mixture. And the end of each will be then attained MOST PERFECTLY when its character, according to the ancient practice, is observed" (II, 84). Such a desire for purity, for simplicity of one type of means leading to one end, besides being part of Hurd's personality, is an essential part of the classical view of art. Even though English art has rarely attempted this kind of unity, it is a high ideal as the dramas of the Greeks and Racine testify, and it is the only ideal that Hurd, at least in theory, ever accepted despite his love of Shakespear, Spenser, and Chaucer: Hurd always claims that the great poets of English literature would have been even greater if they had strictly observed unity.

We are now able to make one generalization that seems to cover Hurd's position on literary criticism: that is, the rules are rules only when they take into account all the relevant literature that has been found to be effective. This is a doctrine very important to the future development of practical criticism because it opens a critic's eyes to what is actually in a work of art before the critic decides what should be there. Thomas Warton does not subscribe to this kind of latitude; he finds pleasure in Spenser, but he also believes that the *Faerie Queene* is corrupt because it does not adhere strictly to the form found in classical writers. Warton would say that if the reader is satisfied, the rules have been followed to

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37The notion that a successful epic must contain the "marvellous" was common in the period; Pope attacked Voltaire's epic for this reason; see Austin Warren, *Alexander Pope as Critic and Humanist* (Princeton, 1929), p. 219.

38Warton's inability to make his taste and rules consistent is discussed fully by Raymond D. Havens, "Thomas Warton and the Eighteenth-Century Dilemma," *SP.* XXXV (1928), 36-50. We should note, however, that Havens's thesis does not apply to the entire period; as we have seen, Hurd refuses to admit a conflict between theory and effect.
the extent of the poet’s success with the reader; it is impossible to
please in spite of the rules because Hurd claims that only rules
followed correctly create pleasure. Suppose a reader were to find
some literary work to which the so-called rules do not apply; Hurd
would find that such a judgment means the rules in question either
are not rules or are not interpreted well by the critic. Directly
owing to this flexible attitude toward the rules, Hurd is able to
make his main contribution to the development of literary criti-
cism: his successful use of the historical method in the form which
is basically the same as that which is used today. It is not his actual
rules that are in any way original, for these are typical of neo-
classicism in England; most critics of Hurd’s century would find
nothing odd in his notions of genre; of the ordering of a story; of
the purpose of imagery, description, and versification. These rules
are all deduced and all apply to all poetry. Hurd’s importance lies
in his realization that the specific application of these rules always
depends upon the work being discussed. In this manner Hurd finds
that much art of the past, which had previously been poorly ana-
lyzed by critics, follows the essence of neoclassical rules. His criti-
cism is not romantic because his view of art is the same as that
found in Dryden, Pope, and the other English Augustans. Hurd’s
difference lies in his full discovery of how to use history as an im-
portant adjunct to criticism.