

Preface to the Second Edition

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*Style*

But the critics of thirty years ago were apt sometimes to go wrong by not recognizing the complexity of the problem before them, and trying by means of language to determine the comparative date of particular books as wholes, or of the two poems as wholes. It is true that there are differences of style; slight but decided differences, which every good scholar, however he may explain them, feels. But it is impossible to cut out any large section of the poems clean and say: 'Every line of this is written in language of a particular date.' On the hypothesis which I follow, of course, any such expectation would be unscientific. The mixture of old and new is all-pervasive. The oldest parts have passed through the lips of scores of later poets; the latest parts - even the most confessedly apocryphat additions of the 'wild papyri' - are largely made up of old lines and phrases, and are always composed in the old convention.