

A New Historicist Vein in British Romanticism

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ABSTRACT

The Romanticism the was the very important period after the Shakespearian time/ Elizabethan period was full of trauma and guilt as well as commodification. The poems and other genres of literature attempted about that time and critics explain about the literary atmosphere. After 1960s, a new trend in literature got entrance that has made the miracle in this field that is quite scientific.

KEYWORDS

Romanticism, Remapping, Singularity, Plurality, Deconstructive, Materialism, Cultural conflict

INTRODUCTION

Frances Ferguson begins the new map of Romantic studies by assessing the appropriateness of the popularly used word "Romanticism," a term loosely applied to include all the Romantic writers. In this connection, she refers to the debate between Lovejoy and Wellek about the nomenclature "Romanticism." Lovejoy finds plurality in "Romanticism". He sees that Romantic writers differ in their style as well as in their subject-matter. He would rather prefer to call this movement "Romanticisms". The movement comprises of those writers who have embraced primitivism and also those who have rejected it. Some of the Romantics move away from tradition and culture as it is apparent from their slogan "Back to Nature", while some others canonize the ancient Greek culture. What the absolute contradictions suggest is that the singularity of Romanticism cannot address its diversity. For Lovejoy, the tendency of generalizing the particularity, the peculiarity and the idiosyncrasy of the writer is an injustice to him and the practice of huddling all the Romantic writers under a single nomenclature "Romanticism" is wrong.

New critic Rene Wellek, however, finds the differences pointed by Lovejoy as simply variations rather than contradictions. According to him, the only way of achieving unity is to look to the systems of norms. A reader can reconcile the contradictions in Romanticism. Wellek exemplifies Macaulay as the reader who recognizes that Romanticism has altered what counts as difference to what adds up as unity. The substantive difference between Byron and Wordsworth as indicated by Lovejoy is reduced by Macaulay to the public and private faces of the same movement. For Macaulay, while Byron is a man of the world, Wordsworth is a private man. Wellek triumphantly cites Macaulay for his recognition of the unity of the Romantic Movement. Wellek defines Romanticism as a singular movement which shares the system of

norms that dominate literature. He believes that all the Romantic writers share some commonalities, the same common denominator. He finds unity amongst the diverse literary texts of Romanticism. Contradictions are not inherent, but they are variants which are resolvable. He performs the high new critical gesture of finding a reader who reconciles the contradictions. Wellek's effort draws on typical Richardsian, new critical vocabularies such as "resolution" and "synthesis." M. H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp*, similarly configured after Richardsian privileging of organicism, dismisses Lovejoy's criticism of the plurality of Romanticism with a single expressive orientation attributed to the poet.

Both Abrams and Wellek draw fire from Jerome McGann who believes in plurality like Lovejoy. He wants such a Romantic criticism which accounts for individual authors rather than sacrificing their individuality for certain general tendencies. Thus McGann criticizes Abrams for generalizing all the Romantic writers and imposing homogeneity in heterogeneity. McGann also attacks Abrams for seeing radical political emotion into the seemingly apolitical poems and finding political implications even in the lyric of the most personal nature. He accuses Abrams of being an almost a Romantic poet while trying to seek the spirit of that age. He finds Abrams and critics like him themselves to be thoroughly Romanticized. McGann charges these academic Romanticists of losing their scholarly objectivity by over identifying themselves with their subject. They might be very good propagandists of Romantic art but they are, in McGann's view, insufficiently critical. Though Wellek and Abrams try to show the spirit of the Romantic age that binds the entire individual writers together, this is an injustice inadvertently dispensed to them. The idea of the spirit of the age uniting disparate writers is unacceptable to McGann because the period is notable for many ideological formations.

For McGann, Romantic ethos achieves dominance through sharp cultural conflicts. So he makes a strong plea for an end to Romantic criticism dominated by a Romantic ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations which refuse to apply to all Romantic texts. According to him, Romantic poetry typically skirts its socio-historical contexts which it replaces with the idealized universe of Romantic ideology. For example, Wordsworth's imagination in "Tintern Abbey" represses the failure of the French Revolution and erases the poverty in the Wye valley. McGann invokes Lovejoy and adds that the new critical prescription of the resolution of contradiction through paradox and irony within a text and the Kantian notion of sublime cumulatively highlight the ideology of Romantic poets in their tendency to make the sublime surrounding a particular landscape hide the ugly reality which is the false consciousness of Romanticism. McGann recognizes that deconstruction too subverts the sublime as it dehierarchizes its dialectic of fall, but he believes that poststructuralist formalism excludes the politics of Romanticism. McGann's political reading of Romanticism is well taken and acceptable to Frances Ferguson, but she rejects his ruling that Romantic formalism, most notably deconstruction, excludes politics. She believes that politics remains embedded in Romantic formalism.

Objectives

The concept of the sublime is central to Kantian notion of aesthetics. By the use of the terminology, the German philosopher refers to a poet's action of investing a natural object with vastness and awe. Kant believes that objective subpretion is present in the beautiful but absent in the sublime. Objective subpretion is an inevitably mistaken gesture of attributing qualities

to the beautiful. When objective subpretion is not present in an object, it becomes unimportant, thereby bringing into prominence the imagination of the poet. The poet's imagination is his narcissistic self which is employed in the understanding of the sublimity attributed to the object. As Nature represents the collective in contrast to the singularity of the narcissistic imagination, the concept of the sublime carries within itself the contradictory relation between the collective and individual. But Frances Ferguson resolves the contradiction by arguing that the narcissistic reflex "I" is actually part of the collective "We", a social group with all its politics. For her, the egotistical "I" and the collective "We" join hands like individuality and concert. She, therefore, asserts that transcendentalism does not shy away from the social and the political but it rather concerns itself with establishing the possibility of the socio-political.

METHODOLOGY

British Romanticism has got the new way of thinking about the study on the basis of intellectuals history through the study of literature and cultural contexts which is called New Historicist method. Ferguson similarly sees the socio-political embedding new criticism. She takes up irony, privileged as critical monad in new criticism, to prove her point. She argues that the interpretation of irony requires the reader to focus on the pragmatic context—the social norms and politics shared between him or her and the writer. It is the sharing of the norms, i.e., politics which helps the reader figure out the intended irony. Thus, it is quite clear to Ferguson that even new criticism establishes a possibility of the social and the political.

Materialism underlines Yale deconstructive view of Romantic formalism. When Yale deconstruction revises the new critical vein of Romantic formalism, the possibility of materialism emerges. For example, in *The Anxiety of Influence* Harold Bloom comes up with the notions of misreading and misprision. Misreading occurs because every text is a misinterpretation of the parent text. For Bloom, the poetic tradition which functions as a conduit to the poetic imagination makes the individual psychology of the poet both blend and conflict with the collective "We". This condition of consonance and divergence is what he calls a misprision, which produces an intertextuality that verges on the materialistic.

Just as Ferguson sees politics embedding Bloom's valorization of individual psychology, she similarly sees Geoffrey Hartman's phenomenology of Romanticism embracing the possibility of the materialistic. The dynamic of Romanticism is the conflict between subject-object relationships. The conflict is in subject or poet's mind wherein self-consciousness encounters anti-self consciousness (consciousness of the object). Hartman dwells on the relational aspects of the subject-object dynamic. The phenomenological encounter between Nature and the human consciousness is resolved by imagination. Nature and individual consciousness are integrated by imagination. As Hartman put it, "Things may be lost in each other, but they are not lost to each other". Imagination, for him, absorbs all the elements of division and represents both consciousness and anti-self consciousness. The oscillation between consciousness and anti-self-consciousness makes romantic literature a depiction of the ways in which human consciousness can imitate an object. The imitation recognizes the divisive elements of materiality even as it remains associated with the poet's individual consciousness. This is why Hartman's version of Romantic formalism does not privilege transcendence. Instead, it underscores the importance of immanence which does not rule out the possibility of politics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Along with Harman and Bloom, Paul De Man also discusses the materiality of Romantic formalism. De Manian Romantic formalism, however, does not see the conflict between the subject and the object. De Man sees the conflict existing rather in the rhetoric of temporality. The rhetoric of temporality constitutes a system of signs—a system which opposes the view those linguistic objects carry the subjectivity of the speaker. The effacing of subjectivity leads to a moment of absolute irony which renders language itself insane. What then the de Manian deconstruction suggests is that language tends to be agitated rather than relaxed in meaning. Because of the slippery tendency of language, literary meaning moves from phenomenology to materiality. The movement contests formalism by suggesting that the representational systems which comprehend the world formally become as material as the world they conceive and, therefore, just as comprehensible. Thus Kant's reference to the heaven seen as a vault by the poets as an example of sublimity turns out an instance of flatness. To de Man, the Kantian sublime denotes a type of formal materiality which undermines the transcendental in order to establish the primacy of the surface.

De Man's deconstructive materialism provokes a certain unexpected convergence with Terry Eagleton's Marxist materialism. Agreeing with the notion of a language's tendency to be flat, Eagleton sees the ideological in de Man's formal move. Paul de Man's deconstructive materialism, for him, becomes political as it reveals that formalism contains such sequences which are themselves versions of mastery and servitude. Such a kind of Marxist reading of de Manian deconstruction makes perfect sense to Ferguson because both de Man and Eagleton Nature is actually culture.

The breaking of the boundary between nature and culture serves as the repository of the negative sublime. Thus, Ferguson makes the point that de Man is no less political than McGann since both of them valorize surface over depth. It is from the perspective of the convergence between deconstructive materialism of de Man and the historical materialism of McGann that Ferguson draws a new map of Romantic studies.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, Frances Ferguson tries to show her preference for deconstructive materialism even as she agrees with McGann's remapping of the boundary of Romantic studies from the perspective of historical materialism.

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