THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

BRITISH ROMANTICISM

英国浪漫主义

STUART CURRAN 编

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出版前言

《剑桥文学指南》是上海外语教育出版社从海外引进的一套研究、介绍外国文学的丛书，内容涉及作家、作品、文学流派、文学史等诸多方面。作者均为在该领域有着较深造诣的专家、学者。

《英国浪漫主义》是该丛书中的一本。

从1785年到1825年的40年，在英国文学史上被称为浪漫主义时期。这一时期介乎启蒙运动和现代工业社会之间。这是一个充满动荡和激情的时代。法国大革命废除了封建制度，发表了人权和公民权利宣言，其影响席卷整个欧洲；以法国的圣西门和傅立叶以及英国的欧文为代表的空想社会主义思潮广为流传；产业革命引起了尖锐的阶级矛盾和激烈的社会动荡。所有这些，都深刻地影响着当时的欧洲。英国浪漫主义文学就是在这样的背景下产生的。当时人们在文学理念上开始抛弃先前的教条先验主义，而转向珍视创造性思维，并引入竞争性、辩论性观念。在这一时期，人们的思维格外活跃，针对政治、社会、宗教、文学等永恒话题进行全新的思考和辩论。浪漫主义便成为这一时期的一个文学趋势。浪漫主义主要表现在诗歌方面。英国诗人华兹华斯在《抒情歌谣集》的再版序言中将诗歌看作“强烈感情的自然流露”，这篇序言后来成

为英国浪漫主义诗人的宣言。这一运动涌现出一大批才华横溢的诗人：华兹华斯、柯尔律治、骚塞、拜伦、雪莱、济慈等似群星灿烂互相辉映，为英国诗歌的繁荣和发展作出了重大的贡献。

本书是一部专门研究英国浪漫主义的论文集，收录了英美当代知名学者撰写的11篇论文。这些论文代表着西方学者的最新思考，为读者提供了了解英国浪漫主义的历史渊源、思想背景和文化内涵的清晰而权威的途径。全书以“浪漫主义：批评与理论”、“浪漫主义与启蒙运动”、“革命时代的诗歌”、“浪漫主义和希腊文化”、“浪漫主义小说”、“浪漫主义诗歌”、“英国浪漫主义的姐妹艺术”等多个标题对英国浪漫主义文学进行了全方位的考察。书后还列有从1749年到1830年的大事年表，其中包括浪漫主义文学的主要作品的发表及重大事件的年表，为读者提供丰富的史料。最后还附有一份按“作家作品”、“批评和理论”、“哲学导向”、“历史背景”、“小说”、“诗歌”、“妇女作家”等分类的参考书目，对于浪漫主义的研究极具参考价值。

本书的读者对象为大学外语教师，外国文学研究人员，外国文学专业的研究生、博士生，以及具备了较高英语阅读能力的外国文学爱好者。

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Preface

The forty years in Great Britain from 1785 to 1825, the period generally construed as the age of Romanticism, saw a crucial transition between an Enlightenment world view and the values of modern, industrial society. So different to a contemporary apprehension are those two cultures that we might resort to Shelley's claims for Dante, as a "bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modern and ancient world," to characterize this age that spanned them. It was a turbulent period at whose center lies the longest experience of warfare – twenty-two years – in modern history, warfare conducted on a world scale. Although the counterrevolutionary and Napoleonic wars were all too real, leaving Europe exhausted and (except for Great Britain) bankrupt, they might stand as well as a metaphor for an age of conflict, stress, and tumult.

There was a day when scholars of the literature of this period sought for safe categories to resolve its instabilities, even when, like Arthur Lovejoy, they had to resort to a patent stretching of terms that would allow for conjoining "Romanticisms" rather than rely on a singular definition for the age. But as the currents of traditional literary criticism and scholarship in recent years have drawn increasing sophistication from new philosophical and historical inquiries, the problem of contemporary definition has been exacerbated – or perhaps rendered obsolete. The convenient labels by which critics sought to untrouble the roiling waters of actuality have grown more and more irrelevant to the true historical situation, or (which is to say much the same thing) they have seemed rather a falsification than explanation of the nature of the age.

The present volume affords an opportunity not for a consolidation of outmoded categories but a reassessment, a rethinking, of essential terms. If the aesthetics and history of the time reveal a similar preoccupation with process rather than completion, of skeptical explorations over dogmatic assurances, of multivalent instead of unitary modes of thought, then it follows that a criticism representing the main concerns of the age needs to be

conducted along dialectical lines that honor rather than resolve into simple formula the tensions responsible for its dynamic energies. This volume is a collaborative effort of an international panel of distinguished scholars who have sought to give English-speaking students, whatever their culture or level of training, a coherent access to the historical roots, the intellectual ferment, and the cultural range of the Romantic age without sacrificing its diversity and even its salutary contradictions. At the intersection of competing philosophical traditions, of political and class divisions, of emergent gender distinctions, of high and low and sacred and profane cultures, of battles of the books (prose and poetry, fiction and history), and contested claims among the arts, the literature of this age – the incomparable literature of Romanticism – reflects the tensions that attend and often empower its creation. The authors recognize that this book will most often be turned to by students of the six great poets who dominate the modern canon (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats); but they are also well aware that newer voices, novelists and women authors particularly, are increasingly resonant in our classrooms as in our historical perspective. By giving space to those relatively unregarded now the volume at once testifies to the literary riches of the age and encourages readers to explore them further on their own.

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Illustrations

1 Romanticism, criticism and theory

THE terms of my title will probably seem to some readers rather bland, to others inevitably contentious. *Romanticism* has functioned as a period term, with somewhat different limits in different countries, and its use has led to a tradition of attempts at defining what it is, or what is most central to it. *Criticism* tends to pass us by as an unassuming description of what we do if we teach or study literature in universities, while *theory* is one of those terms that has caused arguments in seminars and tantrums at dinner parties. But criticism is by no means an innocent term, nor need theory always bite in the way that its bark has seemed to promise, if indeed it bite at all.

So it may be as well to begin with some working definitions – not trenchant specifications of exclusive or exact definitions of these terms, but loose explanations of what I mean by them, and of how they will function in the following pages. By *Romanticism* I mean, very roughly, the writings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sharing a general historical situation but not necessarily held together by any essential or prescriptive characteristics. Literary critics and historians have traditionally posited such characteristics in a manner allowing them to distinguish between what is more or less "romantic," early and late romantic, pre- and postromantic, highly or antiromantic. Such usages are seldom consistent, and have mostly been employed to justify one set of preferences over others according to some standard or other of exemplary historicality.

By *criticism* I mean the practice of writing about literature, which became gradually professionalized, and professionalized in different ways, between the publication of *The Spectator* and that of *PMLA*. Eighteenth-century critics like Addison and Johnson were commonly men of letters or journalists. Their modern successors tend to hold jobs as university and college teachers. But "criticism" has never lost its associations of gifted amateurism and spontaneity, so that its exponents have largely not adhered to explicit or self-imposed standards of logical and philosophical coherence or methodological self-consciousness. Some criticism does indeed do this, and

when it does, it takes on some of the characteristics commonly associated with *theory*. Hence we get literary or critical theory, which attempts either to do or to discuss criticism or literature according to a clear set of principles or general categories. The theorist will usually and reasonably make the claim that all criticism functions by way of some theory or other, some set of principles, whether or not it recognizes or admits them. The critics, reciprocally, may espouse or disavow the claims and aspirations of theory. And theory may also claim to be an activity unto itself, a form of argument and inquiry that need not be referred "back" to literature or to criticism, because it maintains its own rules and its own particular ambitions, whether formal or referential.

The coexistence within modern English departments of criticism and theory, and of their various subdivisions – criticism against theory, literary theory, theories of criticism and of literature, and so on – helps to explain some of the powerful passions that arise around questions of theory in relation to the teaching of literature. And the role of the various constructions of Romanticism in the articulation of these relations has been significant. Generally speaking, until relatively recently, Romanticism has served literary criticism as an ally in its disciplinary habit of downplaying or denying the usefulness of theory. This tradition has been stronger in Britain than in America, as we shall see. But it has a lively existence throughout the anglophone cultures, where the Romantic poets (along with Shakespeare) have done yeoman's service as recycled opponents of rational thought, analytical precision, and systematic speculation – all those habits we think of as described by "theory." Alternatively, they have been proffered as exponents of the opposite virtues of passionate sensibility, human and humanitarian warmth, and lifelike confusion; of nature over culture, country over city, and spontaneity over premeditation.

It is easy to argue that this is merely an uninformed understanding of Romantic writing, a reductive "Romanticism," but it is one which has been powerfully legitimated by some of the most influential twentieth-century literary critics, and it continues to play its part in the hostilities that commence at regular intervals over the place of theory in the humanities. And there were indeed important emphases within Romantic writing itself arguing against the aspirations of systematic or speculative thought, and thus against theory. Even before the French Revolution, the British tradition had for a century and a half been belligerently empiricist. The Restoration of 1660 brought with it a visible increase in the rhetoric of national identity, wherein being properly British involved a commitment to common sense, to an ethic of compromise, and to a respect for special circumstances rather

than an adherence to general rules. France was the historic enemy throughout the eighteenth century, in both military and cultural terms, so that the French were commonly demonized as the bearers of an adverse national character, one typified by a schizophrenic and unpredictable oscillation between extremes of passionate sensibility and cold-hearted logicality. Frenchmen were either inhumane philosophers or all-too-human libertines. They lacked the British disposition to sail comfortably with the winds of change, making up rules only as they were needed and discarding them as soon as they got in the way.

The events of 1789 and after only emphasized the already dominant ideology of the British national character in its happy contradiction of the French. Descartes had not sent people to the guillotine; he was, in the standard British mythology, merely a misguided intellectual with an obsessive respect for simplicity. Robespierre and his kind were much more dangerous; backed by a falsely propositional series of constitutions, they used theory for tyranny and murder and invented a logic for sheer cruelty. In perceived contrast, the glory of the British constitution came to consist in its having no theory, in its being the gradual and patient accumulation of practice and precedent, in its being, above all, unwritten. This is the "constitution" that Edmund Burke championed as peculiarly and fortunately British. To most undecided observers Tom Paine and the radicals, with their liking for propositions and for written laws, must have looked all too French. Arthur Young, in remarkably prescient phrasing, was quite typical of the British mainstream in his condemnation of "French theory" and his reliance "merely on experience."[1]

It is within this context of nationalist rhetoric, wherein those associated with a belief in the powers of theory (the radicals and the democrats) were unable to compete successfully for recognition as "patriots," that we must understand the profile that students and historians of literature have taken to be typically Romantic. For those involved in the profession of literature generally chose not to align themselves with theory, even when they sought alliances with radical politics. That is, if they placed themselves in opposition to the ruling interests, as many of them did, they yet tended to stay away from the kinds of affirmations of theory that would have marked them as in some obvious way "unEnglish." Even a visibly radical poet like Blake had little time for what we would now recognize as theory. In the largely negative figure of Urizen he critiques the overestimation of system and stability as

[1] Arthur Young, *The Example of France a Warning to Britain* (Dublin, 1793), pp. 79, 3. For an extended account of the British disposition against theory, see my *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

inhibitions on the free expression of bodily and spiritual energy. Regularity, symmetry and predictability are not virtues in Blake's bible, but the tools of tyrants and oppressors. Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats and their contemporaries take quite complicated positions on the status and implications of systematic thought, but the general drift of their respective evaluations of theory, in the sense here intended, is negative. So, just as Blake tells us that exuberance and not formality is beauty, so Wordsworth tells us that we murder to dissect, and Keats that philosophy will clip an angel's wings. Cobbett, who did successfully identify himself as a patriotic radical, began his career as a violent francophobe; and John Clare, who certainly felt the value of the rights of man, had no faith in grand theory or French constitutions. Byron and the mature Shelley, who did not hate the French, were not rationalists. Only Coleridge, among those writers who remain familiar to us today, dabbled much in what we now call theory. But he did so with explicitly conservative intentions, and the complexity of his attempt to establish a theory for the existing conventions of church and state and for a Christian rather than a rationalist culture results not a little from its going against the grain of a tradition whereby the theoretical mode had been generally recognized as the dialect of a radical-democratic philosophy.

The resulting myth of theory in nineteenth-century Britain was, then, that it was either pernicious, in the manner of Paine, or incomprehensible, in the manner of Coleridge. The other major example of visibly theoretical work, that instanced by Bentham and the Utilitarians, was variously felt by its opponents to be *both* pernicious and incomprehensible. Moreover the liberal reformers who did find in Benthamism a critical articulation of their ideals and concerns were social scientists and civil servants rather than men or women of letters. The Benthamites were generally hostile to the language of fiction and fantasy, which they saw (as had some of the French philosophers) as the rhetoric of a mystified social discipline; thus they were not kind to the claims of literature.

For these reasons, among others, the most authentically "English" literature (and this was the preferred term, rather than "British") came to be more and more defined as that which was most resistant to theoretical epitome and to the language of theory in general. Shakespeare was, as he has often remained, the titan of the national literature, and his qualities were felt most of all to consist in particularity of characterization and faithfulness to human variety – precisely the things that "theory" must fail to acknowledge in its search for common principles and general truths. Even Milton, a doctrinally saturated and even occasionally dogmatic genius, had been reconstructed by a tradition of eighteenth-century criticism as the exponent

of a very British sublime. *Paradise Lost* was denarrativized, doctrinally deprogrammed, and depoliticized, and made provocative simply of a heightened reader response. According to Addison and others like him, we tremble but do not think too hard as we read or hear the poem's great passages; they overpower us emotionally but do not exercise us intellectually.

This consensus about the national literary character was already in place before the French had their revolution and the Romantics wrote their poems. Those professing to write literature thus found themselves with a readership already predisposed against the French and against any positive estimation of systematic analysis. This readership, furthermore, was less and less dominated by university-trained men of letters, and more and more tenanted by women and by men of the middle ranks. Correspondingly, more and more women writers were appearing in the literary marketplace. The demographic feminization of that marketplace only served to reinforce the discursive feminization already represented by literature's refusal of logicality and system, traditionally masculinized attributes though disputed as such by Mary Wollstonecraft among others. The familiar and traditional view of Romanticism as privileging emotion, intuition and spontaneity should be understood as a gendered as well as a literary-political construction. Reciprocally, the attempts made by Wordsworth and others to restrain the power of spontaneity (always, remember, best recollected in *tranquillity*), must also be read as attempts at the partial remasculinization of literature.

But not, of course, to the point of *theory*. The identification of literature the Romantics inherited and in which they themselves participated was both extended and further simplified by their successors, the critics and commentators who looked to literature for inspiration and, more and more, for solace, for an emotionally gratifying respite from the rigors of a mechanized world. John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* provides a classic statement of the revolt (stimulated indeed by a reading of Wordsworth) against utilitarian mental discipline and the ethic of use-value. Mill, writing in 1869–70, recalls his reading of Wordsworth (in 1828) as commencing casually, with no expectation of "mental relief." He had found nothing appealing in Byron, whose cynical and worldly temperament seemed too close to the very side of himself he was trying to escape, and indeed nothing in Wordsworth's own *Excursion* (a judgment shared by most subsequent readers). But in the lyric and miscellaneous poems of Wordsworth, Mill felt himself aroused by "the power of rural beauty" and by a synthesis of "thought coloured by feeling." He found here a literature which, he thought, had "no connexion with struggle or imperfection" and demonstrated a "permanent happiness in

tranquil contemplation," a happiness sufficiently powerful to affect even those trained in "the most confirmed habit of analysis."[2]

Mill professed to admire Wordsworth's synthesis of thought and feeling, rather than any displacement of the one by the other. But Matthew Arnold's rewriting of this relation was to prove much more typical of the critical tradition that grew up around Romanticism. Arnold wanted to encourage the reading of poetry as "in itself it really is," without the contamination of either a "historic" or a "personal estimate." For him, it is a mistake to value a poem because of its historically informative qualities and merely because of its place in some sequence of writers and writings, as it is also a mistake to derive critical estimations from what we each happen to like. A test of quality must be applied, but it cannot be a theoretically deduced or formulated standard: we must rely, instead, on "tact," which is an intuitive faculty developed by the habitual contemplation of the best passages in the best writings.[3] This is Arnold's famous "touchstone" method, which is never explained in terms other than those of self-evidence: if we are properly trained and attuned, we know quality when we see it.

The passages offered for the cultivation of this tact are always short, often just a line or two. Unsurprisingly, then, the preface to his edition of Wordsworth declares a clear preference for the "shorter pieces" over the longer poems, which are often "flat and dull." Arnold finds that the "philosophy" in Wordsworth is mostly an "illusion"; Wordsworth is not the poet of the intellect but, once again, of nature and of the feelings (*Essays*, pp. 96, 105). Where Mill admired thought *and* feeling, Arnold places feeling over thought. In distinguishing the good in Wordsworth from the bad and the boring, Arnold rewrites the poet's own editorial categories. His three categories of "Lyrical Poems," "Sonnets," and "Reflective and Elegiac Poems" include all but thirty-one of the one hundred and sixty-eight poems in the 1879 edition. Wordsworth, who declared himself (in the preface to the 1807 *Poems*) ashamed to have no substantial long poem to publish, thus became for Arnold the genius of the short lyric.

But Arnold may here have been responding to as much as creating the popular taste. F. T. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* had been immensely popular, going through twenty-three printings and editions (four printings in the first year) between 1861 and 1888. Palgrave offered the Romantics as the summation of English poetry, and the lyrics as the essence of Romanticism. He

[2] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. John M. Robson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), pp. 120–2.

[3] Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry," in *Essays in Criticism, Second Series* (1888; reprinted, London: Macmillan, 1935), pp. 5, 14; hereafter cited as *Essays*.