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Satire and Romanticism (review)

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Satire and Romanticism by Steven E. Jones. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. Pp. x + 262. \$49.95 cloth.

Steven Jones's *Satire and Romanticism* is "a study of the constructive and ultimately canon-forming relationship between satiric and Romantic modes of writing" during the Romantic period (1). Announcing his intention to delineate the crucial pressure satire exerted on the literary mode that has come to be identified as "Romantic" and on the process of selection and evaluation that eventually gave Romanticism its central position in literary history, Jones argues that Romanticism is "countersatiric" through and through. The generic absence of satire from the Romantic canon and the denigration of satire by its theorists are determinate, not merely accidental, features of its self-understanding. It is to a significant degree by the negation of the "socially encoded, public, profane, and tendentious rhetoric" of satire that Romantic poetry takes its familiar shape, "vatic or prophetic, inward-turning, sentimental, idealizing, sublime, and reaching for transcendence" (3).

The vigorous and pervasive presence of satire in the Romantic period, once obscured by several generations of comparative neglect, has been firmly reestablished in the last twenty years by the work of Ian McCalman and a number of others, including Steven Jones in *Shelley's Satire* (1994). Recognizing that satire could not have exerted significant pressure on the eventually dominant Romantic mode unless it were also widely practiced and highly esteemed during the period, Jones draws upon this fund of scholarship frequently in his current book. *Satire and Romanticism* moves beyond the project of reclaiming the period's satire from neglect, however, in order to tackle the necessary question of assessing the relationship between the extensive satiric archive and the long-familiar Romantic canon. Given the depth and complexity of the satiric archive, the alternatives of inclusion or exclusion from the canon can no longer be acceptably understood as the straightforward results of aesthetic quality or as the proven durability of universal themes over merely local and ephemeral ones. Thus the object of this study is ultimately neither the meaning and value of the texts themselves nor even the generic qualities of the satiric and Romantic modes, but rather the dynamics of the "literary field" within which the practice, theory, history, and canon of Romanticism were produced. Jones understands "the making of the 'Romantic' in relation to the 'satiric'" (1) as a series of negotiations that takes place in what Pierre Bourdieu calls the market of symbolic goods, and Bourdieu's theoretical work on the production and exchange of symbolic capital guides Jones's analysis throughout.

Working from these scholarly and theoretical bases, Jones has produced a wide-ranging, unfailingly intelligent, and admirably clear essay that indeed helps to resituate the embattled term "Romanticism" within our contemporary

critical terrain. Five of the six Major Figures are treated at length: Wordsworth and Coleridge each form the focus of a chapter, Byron takes up two, and Shelley and Keats get major attention in two more. The most unambiguously posed of these figures turns out to be Wordsworth, whom Jones presents as the anti-satirical theorist and practitioner *par excellence*. Coleridge and Keats are far more ambivalent. Jones argues that parodies of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* emerge from the heart of the enterprise itself, and that Coleridge himself is in a strong sense the primary parodist. Keats's "The Jealousies" similarly sits uneasily on the fence between satire and sincerity. The inclusion of Shelley and Byron in this study is of course no surprise, yet the attention they receive is far from routine. All of these readings proceed not only from the presence or absence of satiric impulses within the Romantic poets' writing, but also by way of dialogue with some of the major contemporary practitioners of satire, like Gifford, Wooler, and Crabbe. Beyond that, Jones extends the interaction—primarily the struggle for prestige—between the romantic and the satiric farther into the marketplace of symbolic goods by looking at the culture of the reviewers and the literary salons, the pressure of political controversy, the way the technology of representation insinuates itself into practice and theory, and the way popular or carnivalesque modes, especially the pantomime, influence literary practice.

The chapter on Wordsworth typifies Jones's de-idealizing and historicizing approach. One of the most striking moments in the chapter is the persuasive suggestion that Wordsworth's famous comments in the *Essay on Epitaphs* on the dangers of language becoming a "counter-spirit" are, in context, not a metaphysical or metalinguistic meditation but rather a quite concrete attack on the tradition of Pope: a "deliberate and serious satire upon satire" (23). Jones emphasizes the degree to which George Crabbe was a serious competitor for reputation with Wordsworth at the time the passage was written, and contends that Crabbe stood behind Pope as an unnamed but crucial target of criticism throughout the Pope controversy. A critical juxtaposition of Peter Bell and Peter Grimes brings the point home to Wordsworth's poetic practice, as Jones argues that the Wordsworthian pastoral is recognizably Romantic to us precisely in its "desire to produce countersatire," that is, to studiously avoid the satire the figure of Peter Bell would have led an audience to expect and offer instead "an apotheosis of the sympathetic imagination" (33).

Jones maintains, *contra* Wordsworth, that "the comparison of Crabbe and Wordsworth refuses to yield absolute or clear-cut binary oppositions" (39). The following two chapters explore this claim more fully from different directions. First, Jones examines a number of parodies of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in order to support his claim that "the possibility of parody . . . is anticipated and subsumed in the structure of Coleridge's dialogic text of 1817"

(53). But the point is that this possibility itself simply realizes the tension already present in the earliest version between the Gothic ballad tradition and the literary mode that tries to raise it into something of a higher kind. The parodies of the *Rime* thus draw attention to the symbolic violence by which Romanticism fashions itself out of “romantic” elements of popular literature. Jones follows this with an account of Thomas J. Wooler’s *The Black Dwarf* that concentrates on the way “the conflict of modes and the conflicted situation of the editor . . . inscribe in the text of the journal the heterogeneity of its expected reception” (79). Jones describes at some length the dialectical interaction of satire and sentimentality in Wooler’s writing and its basis in class positions and political struggles. The description is brought to bear upon the overarching thesis by moving to Keats (briefly) and Shelley (at more length) to show that on occasion their “strategic destabilizing mix of satire and sentiment” (107) is very like Wooler’s. There is “nothing inherently Romantic about Shelley’s satire—or un-Romantic about Wooler’s” (107).

The next two chapters turn more explicitly to the politics of literary reputation. In the first, a canny reading of Shelley’s “Adonais” serves as the centerpiece for an argument that stretches from Gifford’s attack on the Della Cruscan in *The Baviad* to Leigh Hunt’s 1823 satire on Gifford, *Ultra-Crepidarius*. The attacks on the Della Cruscan in the politico-cultural wars of the 1790s establish a basic structure of conflict between “sensitive, otherworldly poets at one pole and worldly, violent satirists at the other” (123) that survives in Shelley’s elegy as well as the negative reviews of *Endymion* and “Adonais.” Shelley manages to transform this structure into a vehicle of martyrdom and apotheosis, and when Hunt follows suit in the *Ultra-Crepidarius*, he begins to produce Romanticism as a school of victimized but ultimately triumphant poets—a move that eventually obscures not only the Romantics’ Della Cruscan predecessors but their satirical enemies as well.

Jones takes up the opposition between aggressively masculinist reviewers and feminized literary coteries in the next chapter by way of charting Byron’s ambivalent relations with both the reviewers and the Bluestockings. Jones reads Byron’s portraits of himself and Thomas Moore as exemplary professional men of letters in his satiric skit, “The Blues,” as a defensive reaction constructing a “homosocial mirror” (152) of the feminized realm of tastemaking centered in the literary salons. Byron’s satirical attacks on the Blues stem from his real anxiety about being attacked by them, and this, Jones argues, is true of the review culture in general. Yet beneath this (partly fantastic) struggle between alternate coteries lie the emergent commercial forces and the nascent mass audience that were mostly decisively shaping the literary profession.

The penultimate chapter, on *Don Juan*, romantic irony, and the pantomime, gives us Jones at his de-idealizing and historicizing best. His purpose is to take the narrator’s apparently offhand comment that “We have all seen [Don

Juan] in the pantomime” for all it is worth—and, Jones insists, it is worth considerably more than previous commentary has realized. Not only does the pantomime, with its central transformative moment that moves “from serious to burlesque, folktale to farce, romance to satire” (176) provide an important formal model for Shelley’s practice and Hunt’s theory of satire, it also turns out to be central to the notion of “performative buffoonery” (186) that characterizes Friedrich Schlegel’s notion of Romantic irony and the ideal modern artist. In fact, Jones argues, Byron’s irony has far more to do with the popular pantomime than with German metaphysics. The poem’s anti-philosophical, skeptical, and self-reflexive qualities are all “pantomimic. . . . This amounts to the same thing as saying it exemplifies Romantic irony: but in a way that is actually closer to Schlegel’s *commedia*-inspired theory than most twentieth-century criticism has yet realized” (192).

The final chapter forms a coda on the previous arguments by mediating on the disappearance of Ebenezer Elliott from the canon. By the 1830s, Elliott’s political satire had become antithetical to the dominant literary culture to the extent that Carlyle’s efforts to praise Elliott must depoliticize him, make him “classless and sincere” (216), make him, in short, “anything but what he was: a satirist” (217). This is the literary culture within which the Romantics assume their dominant position in literary history. The success of Jones’s remarkably readable and lucid book is to suggest persuasively that purging satire from the scene of Romantic writing was a crucial, constitutive element of Romantic canonization, and to gauge the degree to which this repressed genre had already shaped the triumphant mode.

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The Cast of Characters: A Reading of Ulysses by Paul Schwaber. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999. Pp. xix + 236. \$27.50 cloth.

As he prepares to explore Molly Bloom’s daytime behavior and her nighttime thoughts, thereby laying a foundation for speculations about the sources of her anxiety, Paul Schwaber says he intends to focus on Molly’s “living image” rather than her meaning within a theoretical framework. He will do this, he says, “by staying close to the text and remaining hospitable to other perspectives” (207). This simple formula neatly summarizes Schwaber’s strategy in his eminently readable and humane study of *Ulysses*. Basing his analysis not only on his dual roles as psychoanalyst and literary critic but also on years