



Strange Bedfellows: Alexander Pope and William Wordsworth

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Abstract:

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850) are two giants in the history of English literature. They are the leading figures of Neo-classicism and Romanticism respectively. In writing literary history, the paper claims, the contrast between Neo-classicism and Romanticism is gendered. It is one in which Neo-classicism is male, Romanticism is female. Associating Neo-classicism with reason, order, logic, rationality, and adherence to social conventions casts it in the age-old attributes of masculinity. Romanticism, on the other hand, is generally represented in terms such as feelings, intuition, nature, and focus on the personal. These are attributes which have for long been socially and culturally constructed as feminine. Clearly, the contrast applies to the prominent writers of the two periods: Pope (male) and Wordsworth (female).

The paper, nevertheless, brings forward one aspect of the two poets that usually goes unnoticed. Both writers share a demeaning vision of criticism and critics. Criticism, in other words, makes of Pope and Wordsworth strange bedfellows. Both writers contrast poets with critics, and both privilege the former. Poets are inventive points of origin, critics are parasitical dependents. This contrast, the paper claims, is also engendered. It is a contrast in which poets are male, critics are female. Ironically, the paper concludes, this engendered contrast can reflect on Pope and Wordsworth – they are critics as well as poets. As poets, they are masculine, but as critics, they are feminine. Their dismissal of criticism as parasitical is an attempt to deny the female side of/in themselves.

Keywords: Alexander Pope; Neo-classicism; William Wordsworth; Romanticism; literary criticism and history; gender; periodization.

At present, we tend to regard periods as necessary fictions.
They are necessary because ... one cannot write history or
literary history without periodizing. (Perkins 65)

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850) are two giant figures in the history of English literature. Their canonical status is so secure that their names are synonymous with the literary periods they are associated with. To talk or write about English Neo-classicism or Romanticism is first and foremost to discuss Pope and Wordsworth respectively. Also, it is not uncommon to come across chapters such as "The Age of Pope," and "The Age of Wordsworth" in some accounts of the history of English literature. This speaks volumes about the stature of both writers in their respective times. Like political history where eras are named after ruling monarchs, i.e., The Age of Elizabeth, it is a resounding testimony to the achievement of both writers. And it is even more admirable in their case when a whole age is reduced to be called after their names. For in the case of a monarch, it is a birthright. With Pope and Wordsworth, assuming the literary throne is merit-bound.

Thus, although the writing of literary history entails, as David Perkins stresses, "selection," and "generalization," no serious account of the long and rich history of English literature can afford not to select Pope or Wordsworth (29). In other words, in any account of a given national literature, some writers are remembered while others are inevitably left out. Pope and Wordsworth are so highly regarded that literary historians cannot exclude them. Therefore, if "The aim of a good literary history," as Malcolm Bradbury argues, "is to take readers ... back to the most important books and writers, to signal their values, and place them in useful relation to each other," it is fair to say that Pope and Wordsworth and their texts do firmly fall within the scope of the most important books and writers category (xix).

As the greatness of Pope and Wordsworth is unanimously acknowledged, it is also important to establish their relation to each other. Like Bradbury in the above-mentioned extract, René Wellek and Austin Warren assert that "the establishment of literary relationships between authors is obviously a most important preparation for the writing of such literary history" (269). This establishment of relationships between authors can take either the shape of excessive emphasis on similarities and the suppression of disagreements on the one hand or the foregrounding of differences and the omission of possible agreements on the other. In other words, literary history tends to divide literature into periods, each with its distinct worldview, its theory of the nature of literature, and definition of appropriate poetic language. Within each period, similarities among representative authors are highly emphasized whereas infightings are rarely publicized.

For example, everyone will remember William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge as the leading Romantics whose co-authored

Lyrical Ballads (1798) heralds the beginning of Romanticism in English literature. But few will know about the disagreements between the two writers which led to estrangement from each other. Coleridge, who at one point claimed that "separating his contributions from those of Wordsworth was impossible, and that the *Preface* was 'half a child' of his own brain," would later change his mind and write critically of the *Preface* in *Biographia Literaria*, published in 1817 (Orel 2). Wordsworth reacted angrily and it was reported that "his friends observed him trying to avoid Coleridge on at least two social occasions"(Orel 2). Again, while Alexander Pope was belittled by Wordsworth, he "earned the vehement support of Byron," a later Romantic (Rogers 1). The point is that as literary historians bring authors and their texts together, they give much more time and space to explaining their shared aesthetics. "When we group texts together," Perkins argues, "we emphasize the qualities they have in common and ignore, to some degree, those that differentiate them" (62). As similarities among writers within one period are brought forward and emphasized, divergences and contradictions between distinct periods are highlighted and magnified. And this is certainly the case in writing the literary history of Neo-classicism, of which Pope stands as formidable representative, and Romanticism which hails Wordsworth as its founding bard. The two periods are very often approached as the very opposite of each other.

Neo-classicism vs. Romanticism: A Gender-Sensitive Reading

In *The Routledge History of Literature in English* (1997), Ronald Carter and John McRae argue that:

The Romantic age in literature is often contrasted with the Classical or Augustan age which preceded it. The comparison is valuable, for it is not simply two different attitudes to literature which are being compared but two different ways of seeing and experiencing life. The Classical or Augustan age of the early and mid-eighteenth century stressed the importance of reason and order. Strong feelings and flights of the imagination had to be controlled.... The classical temperament trusts reason, intellect, and the head. The Romantic temperament prefers feelings, intuition, and the heart. (220-21)

Here, Carter and McRae state that the contrast between Neo-classicism and Romanticism is not new. Other literary historians did this before them. On one level, thus, they repeat what has already been pointed out by others. But it is noteworthy that the contrast between these two periods is not limited to their distinct visions of literature. The difference is overstretched and overemphasized: the two periods are spectacularly polarized. Each represents a distinctly different way of seeing and experiencing life. More interestingly still is the way in which this contrast is fleshed out. The terms

in which Carter and McRae present the contrast between the Neo-classical and the Romantic periods are subtly constructed in gender terms. The contrast rings eerily familiar. Indeed, it is so familiar that as one reads, it feels like a *déjà vu*, i.e., one has heard something exactly similar before. Such intuition is right. The terms in which Neo-classicism and Romanticism are contrasted are almost identical with those used to distinguish men from women. In fact, Neo-classicism and Romanticism can be replaced with men and women respectively, and the paragraph will still make perfect sense. As the two periods experience and see life differently, so is the dominant view of men and women in Western as well as many other cultures:

Historically, there has been considerable consensus that women typically think differently from men. Aristotle, Kant, Rousseau, Freud, and more recently, Lawrence Kohlberg, are just a few of the long list of influential scholars who have seen women's thinking as tending to be more personal, more emotional, less abstract, and less objective than men's. (Simson 1)

What the long list of influential scholars including such founding luminaries of Western culture as Aristotle, Kant, Rousseau, and Freud identify as feminine is obviously similar to, if not exactly the same as, what Carter and McRae attribute to Romanticism. In literary history, Romanticism is feminized through association with the age-old assumption of feminine privileging of feelings, intuition, and the heart. The Neo-classical period, on the other hand, is associated with traditionally masculine attributes: reason, intellect, and the head among many others. The gendered contrast can be further gleaned from the following extract where the comparison moves from the overall views of the two periods in general into a detailed analysis of the representation of these two periods in gendered binary oppositional terms:

The two ages may be contrasted in other ways: the Classical writer looks outward to society, Romantic writers look inward to their own soul and to the life of the imagination; the Classical writer concentrates on what can be logically measured and rationally understood, Romantic writers are attracted to the irrational mystical and supernatural world; the Classical writer is attracted to a social order in which everyone knows their place, Romantic writers celebrate the freedom of nature and of individual human experience. In fact, the writings of the Augustan age stress the way societies improve under careful regulation; Romantic literature is generally more critical of society and its injustices, questioning rather than affirming, exploring rather than defining. (Carter and McRae 221)

Here, Generalization, as pointed out earlier, is at the heart of periodizing.

Even when Carter and McRae say "the Classical writer," they implicitly mean all Classical writers. The usage is generic. In this light, all Classical writers, on the one hand, see things and understand them the same way; they concentrate on and are attracted to the same things. On the other hand, all Romantic writers (here Carter and McRae use the plural) share the same vision, attitude, and experience towards things. Each group has everything in common within itself, and nothing in common with the other. One is male, the other female. One manifestation of this gendered representation is the great divide between the public and the private spheres. The manly Neo-classical writer is outward looking; HE is very much concerned with the public sphere: the privileged world of politics and economy. The (SHE) Romantic is a withdrawn, inward-looking individual. Like a woman, the Romantic is confined to the personal and the private realm, the house.

Moreover, the Neo-classical writer stands for reason and rationality vis-à-vis the Romantic who is more keen on the irrational and the supernatural. Clearly, the former attributes are traditionally male, the latter female. "In Greek thought," Genevieve Lloyd argues, "femaleness was symbolically associated with the non-rational, the disorderly, the unknowable—with what must be set aside in the cultivation of knowledge" (11). Like man, again, the Neo-classical writer, making use of intellect and reason, stands for culture, whereas the Romantic, by giving priority to feelings and natural intuition, goes for nature which is generally associated with woman (Ortner 21). "The early Greeks saw women's capacity to conceive as connecting them with the fertility of Nature" (Lloyd 2).

Furthermore, the masculine Neo-classicist adheres to order and the laws of society whereas the feminine Romantic is subversive of social conventions. And if they disagree on how they see the world, Neo-classicists and Romantics also disagree on the style in which they express their distinct views. Each group hatches its own language:

The language and form of the literature of the two ages also shows these two different ways of seeing. The Augustans developed a formal and ordered way of writing characterised by the balance and symmetry of the heroic couplet in poetry and by adherence to the conventions of a special poetic diction. The Romantics developed ways of writing which tried to capture the ebb and flow of individual experience in forms and language which were intended to be closer to everyday speech and more accessible to the general reader. (Carter and McRae 221-22)

The masculine as opposed to the feminine contrast between Neo-classical writers and their Romantic counterparts covers the language aspect as well. The masculinized Augustans advocate formal, which their attackers (Wordsworth, for example) prefer to call artificial or un-natural, diction;

their language is marked by balance and symmetry. They follow the rules of acceptable language in poetry, the language deemed fit for the purpose of poetic composition. Like maleness which has been "associated with a clear, determinate mode of thought," the Neo-classical heroic couplet is precise and clearly formed (Lloyd 3). In contrast, Romantic writers are feminized in their use of language. Like women who are thought to be much more interested in personal matters than men, they adopt more humble language, a mode of expression proposed to be more suitable for reflecting the concerns of ordinary people. Unlike the Neo-classicists who adhere to conventional diction, the Romantics' language, in their attempt to capture the ebbs and flows of individual experience, can be seen as unpredictable or unstable, both attributes generally constructed as feminine.

Now, the contrast between these two periods is best represented in the contrast between their two major writers, Alexander Pope and William Wordsworth. Pope is noted for the use of formal, elevated, or "artificial diction," which will be at the receiving end of some sharp and pointed attack by Wordsworth as I will show later in this paper. Wordsworth champions the language of ordinary people, that of everyday speech. In keeping with the gendered reading of the contrast between Neo-classicism and Romanticism, Pope's formal and artificial language invokes the masculine association with culture. Wordsworth's everyday speech is more ordinary; it is natural. It is, in this sense, feminine speech:

Wordsworth's language frequently moves towards the language of everyday speech and the lives of ordinary people. It breaks with the artificial diction of the previous century, creating a more open and democratic world of poetry. (Carter and McRae 228)

More generally, the Romantic revolt led by Wordsworth against the dominance of the artificial diction imposed by Pope is similar to feminist rebellion against the, far from natural, dominance of patriarchal ideology which is an artificial social construction. Like the emancipatory pursuits of the women's movement and feminism, the goal of the Romantic poet is making poetry more democratic by taking the interests and the language of ordinary men and women into account. "The theory of poetic language that it [the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*] puts forward," Patrick Parrinder argues, "seems to promise a complete emancipation of poetry from the tyranny of literature and its conventions" (48). It is interesting to note Parrinder's insistence on describing Romanticism as a revolution whose underlying goal is emancipation from the tyranny of literary conventions. This vocabulary is reminiscent of feminist language where revolution, emancipation, tyranny are keywords:

Nothing is more widely accepted in literary history than that the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 heralded a revolution in English poetry. Some modern scholars have

attacked this reading of history, but without much success.
(Parrinder 44)

However, the contradictions and disagreements between the Romantics and their predecessors, the Neo-classicists, were not left for literary historians to infer and document. They were pronounced by the Romantics themselves long before they were pointed to by literary critics and commentators. While Dryden and Pope both lived and died before Wordsworth was even born, so we can never know what they would have thought of Wordsworth and his fellow Romantics, Wordsworth had Dryden and Pope and their literary output before him to study and reflect on and, eventually, to like or loathe. And loathe he did. "It is mortifying," William Hazlitt exclaims, "to hear him [Wordsworth] speak of Dryden and Pope whom, because they have been supposed to have all the possible excellences of poetry, he will allow to have none" (126). But for Wordsworth, this was much more than showing lack of respect for some great forerunners. It was a fight for his existence as a poet. The poor reception which met the *Lyrical Ballads* when it was first published made it clear that Pope still dominated poetic taste. And the signs did not look promising for him in the beginning. Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885), the poet's nephew, in the first volume of his *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, blames the Neo-classicists (with Pope most likely in mind) for the hostility that first met the *Lyrical Ballads*:

Doubtless the popular taste was then in an unhealthy and vicious state. It had been corrupted by an artificial literature, tricked out in gaudy finery, and speaking in unnatural language. The world was dazzled by tinsel imagery, and deluded by a pompous phraseology. It was not to be expected that the public in general would listen with patience, or with any other feelings than of derision and disdain, to the artless accents of the 'Lyrical Ballads.' (125-27)

Unlike Hazlitt's agony over hearing Wordsworth's opinion of Dryden and Pope, other observers find no great difficulty in explaining why Wordsworth attacked them, and particularly Pope, in such a fashion: "Wordsworth's motive in attacking Pope, of course, was not disinterested. If Wordsworth was to create the taste by which he was to be enjoyed, he had simultaneously to subvert the prevailing taste, which at least as late as 1815 still enjoyed Pope" (Griffin 696). With this understanding clearly on his mind, Wordsworth tried to undermine Pope through different means. At one point, he seems to accuse the young Pope of plagiarism from Milton:

Nine years before the death of Shakespeare, Milton was born; and early in life he published several small poems, which, though on their first appearance they were praised by a few of the judicious, were afterwards neglected to that

degree that Pope, in his youth, could pilfer from them without danger of detection. ("Essay Supplementary" 353)

Pope, however, cannot be brushed aside as a mere plagiarist. His enduring reputation must rest on something original, something which has to do with a great mind. And indeed, Wordsworth acknowledges Pope's "native genius." But, the compliment, as will be clear from the following extract, is undermined. It comes late in a relatively lengthy paragraph that piles much negativity on Pope. The admission is parenthetical; it is not given the dignity of standing comfortably in an independent sentence. Pope, it emerges, betrayed his genius by not nourishing it to fulfill its potential. Instead, he, Wordsworth alleges, built his reputation through dubious means. It was largely built on deception. This can be discerned from Wordsworth's choice of words in evaluating Pope's achievement. Arts, contrive, procure, bewitch, and dazzle are the words which dominate the description, and they leave the impression that Pope's name was based on something un-natural, some dark powers which are closer to black magic or witchcraft:

The arts by which Pope, soon afterwards, contrived to procure to himself a more general and a higher reputation than perhaps any English Poet ever attained during his life-time, are known to the judicious. And as well known is it to them, that the undue exertion of these arts, is the cause why Pope has for some time held a rank in literature, to which, if he had not been seduced by an over-love of immediate popularity, and had confided more in his native genius, he never could have descended. He bewitched the nation by his melody, and dazzled it by his polished style, and was himself blinded by his own success. ("Essay Supplementary" 356)

Wordsworth then attacks both Dryden's and Pope's mode of writing. He finds them deeply deficient in style, lacking in accuracy and truthfulness. Their descriptions are distortions of the things they write about. Dryden is "vague, bombastic, and senseless," whereas Pope is "false and contradictory" ("Essay Supplementary" 358-59). And it is this kind of writing that Wordsworth rejects and tries to avoid in his poetry. This is what he affirms in his celebrated "Preface": "I hope it will be found that there is in these Poems little falsehood of description, and that my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance" (241). What he proposes is what he finds missing in Dryden and Pope.

Pope and Wordsworth: The Critic as Other/Woman

Despite the widely studied and publicized differences between Pope and Wordsworth, both writers agree on one thing: distrust of criticism and hostility against critics. Both distinguish poets from critics and clearly side with and privilege the former. Alexander Pope, "the supreme poet of his day," realized very early the need to warn critics not to take him lightly

(Clay 35). At an early age, he suspected and attacked critics. "We hear how the 16-year-old Pope, performing his poetic tricks for superannuated men of letters like William Wycherley, was already learning to behave like a poet—adopting the poet's disdain for the mere critic" (Mullan ix). Two points prevail here. Poets' "disdain" for critics is not natural; it is acquired. But this attitude is so prevalent that any would-be poet learns to "adopt" and make it part of his/her behavior. It is also important to point out that the contempt is for the "mere" critic. Being critic is not a good enough job. The contempt, it can be inferred, is directed at what T. S. Eliot called "the Professional critic—the writer whose literary criticism is his chief, perhaps his only title to fame." This type of critic, Eliot suspects, is "a *failed* creative writer" ("To Criticize the Critic" 11-12; italics original). In the same vein, some, Geoffrey Hartman opines, may charge critics as "frustrated poets" ("Literary Commentary" 350). The critic, here, is defined by a certain deficiency, a minus, a lack. What marks a critic out is the inability to become a poet. Having tried to become a poet and failed, one turns to the baser purpose and settle for "the mere" critic. Failure and frustration most probably beget envy, and, as Joseph Addison warns, "it is very natural for such as have not succeeded in it [poetry] to depreciate the Works of those who have. For since they cannot raise themselves to the Reputation of their Fellow-Writers, they must endeavour to sink it to their own Pitch" (71). These attributes of lack and envy which characterize the critic's relation to the poet are also said, particularly in Freudian psychoanalysis, to define woman's relation to man.

Pope's disdain for critics is further reinforced by Samuel Johnson who finds it "pleasant to remark how soon Pope learned the cant of an author, and began to treat criticks with contempt, though he had yet suffered nothing from them" (351). Again, attacking critics is something "learned" by "authors" (on many occasions author and writer are used synonymously with poet, critics are marked as critics as if they were not authors or writers). Johnson's point makes it clear that while it is not natural for aspiring poets to disdain and attack critics, it becomes natural for them once they are poets. Equally interesting is the pleasure Johnson gets from witnessing Pope's contempt for critics. Why does Johnson find it "pleasant" to note Pope's contempt for critics? One is left to wonder if his "pleasure" is induced by Pope's quick learning, or his behavior itself, or the unexpectedness of the behavior. What is clear, however, is that Pope learned quickly to despise critics, and this contempt was unprovoked. It is also clear that Johnson's remarks about Pope's attitude towards critics materialize in the latter's famous "Essay on Criticism," about which Austin Warren says: "It is an essay (that is, a tentative effort) at outlining the principles a good *critic* ought to follow" (5; italics original). The same view is held by Patrick Parrinder who stresses that "Pope's poem ["Essay on Criticism"] is in fact a

series of versified instructions to young critics" (14). In other words, the "Essay" is written by Pope-as-poet to educate critics. Having identified himself as a poet, part of which includes showing contempt for critics, Pope displays a superior attitude towards critics and embarks on a mission to teach them how to do their job.

"Essay on Criticism," Johnson argues, is "a work which displays such extent of comprehension, such nicety of distinction, such acquaintance with mankind, and such knowledge both of ancient and modern learning, as are not often attained by the maturest age and longest experience" (352). In this essay, Pope makes a distinction between poets and critics. He shows more sympathy for poets. He finds critics more dangerous because they can mislead our judgment. A bad poet's effect is that he bores us. Critics are more likely to make mistakes and that is why there are many bad critics. On the other hand, there are few bad poets. For one bad poet, there are ten bad critics:

'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But, of the two, less dangerous is the offence
To tire our patience, than mislead our sense:
Some few in that, but numbers err in this,
Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss;
A fool might once himself alone expose,
Now one in verse makes many more in prose. ("EC" 36)

Later in the "Essay," the distinction between poets and critics is represented in gender terms. It is one in which poets are masculinized. They are husbands. Critics, on the other hand, are feminized. They are their helpful wives whom, we imagine, Pope would not view as equal partners. As wife is expected to occupy a subservient role next to her husband, a critic is expected to play a similar role for the poet. Pope laments the conflict between the two. Poets and critics, he suggests, should lead a harmonious life in which they come to each other's aid in the manner a man and his wife lead a normal way of living:

For Wit and Judgment often are at strife,
Tho' meant each other's Aid, like Man and Wife. ("EC" 38)

Like Pope, Wordsworth thinks of criticism and critics as subordinate to poets. It is a view in which criticism emerges as poetry's other. While Pope moved quickly to attack critics before he suffered any harm from them and later, in "Essay on Criticism," went on to write a systematic prescription for critics to adhere to in order to become good critics, Wordsworth's dismissal of criticism and critics came as a reaction to the harsh reviews of his poetry. Clearly, Wordsworth suffered more than Pope from critics. Pope suffered nothing similar to the lash against the *Lyrical Ballads*. "The Augustans," Parrinder argues, "were not faced with concerted opposition in the way that the romantics were, and so theirs was not a literary revolution

on the modern pattern" (8). And that is why Wordsworth's battle against his contemporary critics was more heated and more pronounced than that of Pope's.

Although the "Advertisement" which prefaced the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* shows that Wordsworth is concerned about the critical reception of the collection, his antagonism would come in full swing later after critics' hostility became remarkably ferocious. On publication, as has been explained earlier in the essay, the *Lyrical Ballads* was met with vicious hostility. The new mode of writing poetry and the new language Wordsworth espoused were attacked and demonized by contemporary critics to the point that "its progress to oblivion seemed to be certain" (C. Wordsworth *Memoirs I*. 124). Like many other creative writers who, early in their careers, are at best underestimated or at worst banned, Wordsworth's sin was the breaking away from poetic conventions of the time. Advocating a new mode of poetry, and using novel writing style were not hailed as innovative and welcome experimentation. Rather, they were looked down on and dismissed as an aberration and, therefore, corrupting of the taste of poetry readership. This, Wordsworth thought, was a distortion of his poetry: a more serious offence than ignoring it completely. "For to be mis-taught," he believed, "is worse than to be untaught" ("Essay Supplementary" 348). For example, one of the most vicious attacks came from the respected critic Francis Jeffrey who dismissed the Romantics as a sect of poets who should be condemned for transgressing the conventions of poetic composition: "that they are *dissenters* from the established systems in poetry and criticism, is admitted, and proved indeed, by the whole tenor of their compositions" (153; italics original). The major crime, it is clear, is dissent. It is the Romantics' refusal to abide by the established rules for poetic composition that incites the wrath of Jeffrey and others. In this respect, this attack on Romanticism (which, as pointed out earlier in this article, is feminized in literary historiography) sounds similar to the attack on women who dare question the dominant rules in a patriarchal society. Such women are condemned as "deviant" (Spender 7).

This dissent by the Romantics, Jeffrey asserts, should not be confused for originality. The Romantics, he goes on, are heretics and conspirators bent on corrupting the established taste of poetry readers. Though the poets are not denied talent (worth remembering that Wordsworth did not deny Pope's genius), it is deployed for dangerous ends. Their breaking away from poetic conventions is not a sign of creativity and originality, rather it is something that should be warned against and censored. Jeffrey's pointed critique, it should be obvious, is constrained by accepted poetic convention handed down by old masters. The conflict between him and Wordsworth is one between the burden of the past (Jeffrey's position), and dissatisfaction with this past and the attempt to

travel a different path (Wordsworth's):

The disciples of this school boast much of its originality, and seem to value themselves very highly, for having broken loose from the bondage of ancient authority, and re-asserted the independence of genius. Originality, however, we are persuaded, is rarer than mere alteration; and a man may change a good master for a bad one, without finding himself at all nearer to independence. That our new poets have abandoned the old models, may certainly be admitted; but we have not been able to discover that they have yet created any models of their own; and are very much inclined to call in question the worthiness of those to which they have transferred their admiration. The productions of this school, we conceive, are so far from being entitled to the praise of originality. (Jeffrey 154)

The feminizing of the Romantics is also evident in Jeffrey's characterization of their influence on readers. Like a beautiful woman, the Romantic poet uses his talent to "seduce" readers in the way a woman uses her beauty to tempt and manipulate a gullible man. The danger of beautiful women to corrupt men is widely warned against in the popular imagination. This is obviously one of the most recurrent images of demonizing women since Eve, the first temptress:

The authors, of whom we are now speaking, have, among them, unquestionably, a very considerable portion of poetical talent, and have, consequently, been enabled to seduce many into an admiration of the false taste (as it appears to us) in which most of their productions are composed. They constitute, at present, the most formidable conspiracy that has lately been formed against sound judgment in matters poetical; and are entitled to a larger share of our censorial notice, than could be spared for an individual delinquent. (154)

From attacking the Romantics in general, Jeffrey then launches a sharp attack on Wordsworth – although he does not mention him by name. He finds the latter's project as explained in the "Preface" unacceptable. Again, the attack is based on Wordsworth's deviation from earlier poetic conventions. The *Ballads* is seen as an act of hostility (though Jeffrey does not specify hostility against what, one assumes it is against prevalent conventions). Jeffrey denies the language of ordinary people the dignity and worthiness of being appropriate for poetic composition. He is biased against the lower orders of society:

One of their own authors [Wordsworth], indeed, has very ingeniously set forth, (in a kind of manifesto that preceded one of their most flagrant acts of hostility), that it was their

capital object 'to adapt to the uses of poetry, the ordinary language of conversation among the middling and lower orders of the people.' What advantages are to be gained by the success of this project, we confess ourselves unable to conjecture. The language of the higher and more cultivated orders may fairly be presumed to be better than that of their inferiors: at any rate, it has all those associations in its favour, by means of which, a style can never appear beautiful or exalted, and is adapted to the purposes of poetry, by having been long consecrated to its use. The language of the vulgar, on the other hand, has all the opposite associations to contend with; and must seem unfit for poetry, (if there were no other reason), merely because it has scarcely ever been employed in it. (156)

Jeffrey's submission to the burden of poetic tradition reaches its climax here. In addition to his elevation of the language of the higher classes of society, and his denigration of that of their counterparts, the lower orders, he concludes by affirming that the language of the latter is unfit because it was rarely used for such a purpose, and that of the former is the appropriate one because it has been deemed so by ancestry. The past is, in Jeffrey's word, "consecrated"; it has acquired sanctity. In this logic, those who deviate are, again the word is Jeffrey's, "dissenters," or heretics. The critic, Geoffrey Hartman explains, "compares authors, and judges them by their conformity (nonconformity) to tradition, school, or internalized norms" ("The Interpreter" 219). In Jeffrey's account, no room is left for thinking and trying something other than that which has been thought and tried by predecessors. And this is exactly what Wordsworth does not do. Unlike Jeffrey whose judgments are dictated from the lens of the past, Wordsworth is moved by a forward-looking vision. While Jeffrey sees the ballads as "flagrant act of hostility" that should be condemned and censored, Wordsworth proposes the poems as "experiments," which, by definition, means a procedure carried out to discover, test, or demonstrate the validity of something. These poems, thus, are meant to present a new kind of poetry in both subject matter and style. Aware of the burden of poetic conventions on contemporary taste, Wordsworth warns readers against approaching the *Ballads* with orthodox notions of poetry in mind. Readers, Wordsworth hopes, will come to read his poetry afresh, without being subject to pre-determined ideas about poetry and its appropriate language:

The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and

inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. It is desirable that such readers, for their own sakes, should not suffer the solitary word Poetry, a word of very disputed meaning, to stand in the way of their gratification; but that, while they are perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents; and if the answer be favourable to the author's wishes, that they should consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision. ("Advertisement" 7)

Here, Wordsworth foresees the kind of reception poems of "experimental" nature like his may meet, and he addresses this issue fairly briefly. He understands that the novelty of his poetry is unusual for his contemporary audience who are influenced by Neo-classical taste. Judged by prevalent standards, his poems lie beyond the boundary of poetry. He attempts to take readers away from their traditional beliefs about poetry in an effort to carve a space for his novel compositions. Acknowledging the weight of traditions on public expectations of what poetry is, he adds:

Readers of superior judgment may disapprove of the style in which many of these pieces are executed it must be expected that many lines and phrases will not exactly suit their taste. It will perhaps appear to them, that wishing to avoid the prevalent fault of the day, the author has sometimes descended too low, and that many of his expressions are too familiar, and not of sufficient dignity. ("Advertisement" 7-8)

It is also in the "Advertisement" where Wordsworth's distrust of critics can be detected. There, he tries to reach directly to readers. Whenever critics are mentioned, they are suspected of misleading the wider public into rejecting his poetry. And in this regard he is in agreement with Pope who made a similar accusation against critics in "Essay on Criticism." Wordsworth hopes that readers can do without critics and judge for themselves the merit of his poetry. He appeals to readers not to rely on the opinions of critics, but to decide for themselves the value of the *Ballads*. He tries to get rid of the intermediary role of critics who stand in the way between poet and reader. He suspects that critics may distort the impression of his poetry on readers. Unsuspecting readers may be led astray by the corrupting tastes of critics. In this respect, he insists that appreciation of poetry "is to be sought, not in the writings of Critics, but in those of Poets themselves" ("Advertisement" 7).

The same plea is made in the celebrated "Preface" which replaced the "Advertisement" in subsequent editions of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and which Wordsworth felt compelled to write in order to, in the words of T. S. Eliot in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, "defend his own manner of writing poetry" (70). Although he addressed these issues in the "Advertisement," it seems that it was not enough, and he felt obliged to offer a more generous explanation of his project. In the "Preface," again, he urges readers to rely on themselves, rather than critics, for evaluating his poetry:

I have one request to make of my Reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others. ("Preface" 256)

But much to Wordsworth's displeasure, critics were not convinced by his justifications, and continued their attacks. Wordsworth, in his turn, mistook criticism for personal attack and considered critics his enemies:

Hazlitt's lengthy and carefully balanced review of *The Excursion*, published in *The Examiner* in 1814, irritated Wordsworth because it stressed his solipsism ('He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought', and much more to the same effect). Wordsworth regarded the review not merely as a literary critique, but took it as a personal attack. He had counted on the ability of favorable reviews to generate and accelerate sales, and Hazlitt had disappointed him. But he was to be stunned by an even more severe judgment, rendered by a magisterial Francis Jeffrey in the December 1814 issue of the *Edinburgh Review*: 'This will never do.' It is difficult to think of a more crushing single sentence written in an influential periodical by a highly respected critic, and published during the nineteenth century; Wordsworth soon thought of both Hazlitt and Jeffrey as his personal enemies. (Orel 51)

This shows Wordsworth's sensitivity towards critical reviews, which he thinks of as "personal attacks." He is angered by what is even deemed a "balanced" review by Hazlitt. If it is understandable that he gets bitter at Jeffrey who dismissed him entirely, it is telling that he does not like Hazlitt's balanced criticism. Even at some point, Hazlitt shows understanding of Wordsworth's anger. Negative reception of his poetry, Hazlitt suggests, must have its toll on the psychology of Wordsworth:

But the sense of injustice and of undeserved ridicule sours the temper and narrows the views. To have produced great works of genius, and to find them neglected or treated with scorn, is one of the heaviest trials of human patience. ... [I]n

mere self-defence we turn against the world when it turns against us, brood over the undeserved slights we receive; and thus the genial current of the soul is stopped, or vents itself in effusions of petulance and self-conceit (128-29).

But Wordsworth, Hazlitt reiterates, overreacted. He blames Wordsworth for having thought too much of the opinions of critics. Instead, he should have focused more on those who admired him and future generations who would undoubtedly appreciate the value of his work. Immediate popularity, he explains, requires conformity to established doctrines. And since Wordsworth was critical of these established doctrines, it was expected that his genius would not be appreciated instantly:

Mr. Wordsworth has thought too much of contemporary critics and criticism, and less than he ought of the award of posterity and of the opinion, we do not say of private friends, but of those who were made so by admiration of his genius. He did not court popularity by a conformity to established models, and he ought not to have been surprised that his originality was not understood as a matter of course. (Hazlitt 129)

T. S. Eliot agrees with Hazlitt that Wordsworth paid much undue attention to critics. Wordsworth, Eliot proposes, should have anticipated what was coming his way. The scorn and ridicule he received seems only natural in light of the novel ideas he was advocating regarding poetic themes and language: "Wordsworth's poems had met with no worse reception than verse of such novelty is accustomed to receive" (*UP* 70-71).

But though conscious of the novelty of his ideas, Wordsworth did not expect such ferocious attacks. And he went from just warning readers against relying on the judgments of critics into a sustained attack on his critics. He listened carefully to what critics said about him and his work, and responded angrily. "The 1815 Preface," Patrick Parrinder argues, "was followed by the supplementary 'Essay' which constitutes his most embattled piece of literary propaganda. Here at last he let fly at Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review* and at the other critics whose hostility had galled him for years" (58). In this "Essay," Wordsworth does not shy away from using strong language against his abusers. He explicitly labels them "adversaries," and what they do is not criticism but "senseless outcry, hostility, impudent falsehoods and base artifices" ("Essay Supplementary" 341). He adds:

But the ignorance of those who have chosen to stand forth as my enemies, as far as I am acquainted with their enmity, has unfortunately been still more gross than their disingenuousness, and their incompetence more flagrant than their malice. The effect in the eyes of the discerning is indeed ludicrous: yet, contemptible as such men are, in return for the forced compliment paid me by their long-continued notice

(which, as I have appeared so rarely before the public, no one can say has been solicited) I entreat them to spare themselves. The lash, which they are aiming at my productions, does, in fact, only fall on phantoms of their own brain; which, I grant, I am innocently instrumental in raising. —By what fatality the orb of my genius (for genius none of them seem to deny me) acts upon these men like the moon upon a certain description of patients, it would be irksome to inquire; nor would it consist with the respect which I owe myself to take further notice of opponents whom I internally despise. ("Essay, Supplementary" 341-42)

It is ironical that Wordsworth, in this "Essay," comes to the same understanding which both Hazlitt and Eliot offer in explaining the hostility against him. He justifies the attack on his productions on the basis that his poems offer something new. In order to be accepted and achieve instant popularity, an author "must adapt himself to the taste of the Audience, or they will not endure him." To prove this, he cites the example of Shakespeare whom he thinks suffered from lack of appreciation in his time: "Had there been a formal contest for superiority among dramatic Writers, that Shakespeare, like his predecessors Sophocles and Euripides, would have often been subject to the mortification of seeing the prize adjudged to sorry competitors" ("Essay Supplementary" 350). Then, Wordsworth concludes by admitting that every original writer, the one who does not conform to the popular taste, should establish his path and he should work very hard to convert the public to enjoy him:

If there be one conclusion more forcibly pressed upon us than another by the review which has been given of the fortunes and fate of Poetical Works, it is this,—that every Author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so has it been, so will it continue to be. ("Essay Supplementary" 368; italics original)

Nevertheless, Wordsworth did not take the lack of appreciation for his work kindly. In addition to what he says about his critics in his own writing, which I discussed above, he is reported to have dismissed the critical vocation entirely. In his well-known essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Matthew Arnold highlights Wordsworth's hostile view of critics:

Wordsworth says in one of his letters:- "The writers in these publications" (the reviews), "while they prosecute their inglorious employment, cannot be supposed to be in a state of mind very favourable for being affected by the finer influences of a thing so pure as genuine poetry." (2)

Arnold then quotes "a trustworthy reporter" of Wordsworth's conversation on criticism. In this report, Wordsworth passes the judgment that criticism is lower than poetry. The relationship between poetry and criticism is clearly hierarchical. He equates poetry with inventiveness and originality. Because it relies on the works of others, criticism emerges as parasitical and secondary. It preys on original composition, i.e. poetry. The critic, in this view, is an uninvited guest whereas the poet is an unwelcoming host. Wordsworth even travels the extra mile and suggests that those who write criticism should stop doing so altogether and employ whatever powers they have in writing poetry. Finally, he echoes Pope when he compares between the effect of bad criticism and that of bad poetry. While bad criticism does "much injury to the minds of others," bad poetry "is quite harmless." This comes very close to Pope's distinction in his "Essay on Criticism." In the following extract, Wordsworth's view of criticism and critics becomes even clearer:

And a trustworthy reporter of his conversation quotes a more elaborate judgment to the same effect:- "Wordsworth holds the critical power very low, infinitely lower than the inventive; and he said to-day that if the quantity of time consumed in writing critiques on the works of others were given to original composition of whatever kind it might be, it would be much better employed; it would make a man find sooner his own level, and would do infinitely less mischief. A false or malicious criticism may do much injury to the minds of others; a stupid invention, either in prose or verse, is quite harmless." (Arnold 2-3)

Wordsworth's contempt for criticism is in line with a tradition that has always haunted criticism. It is not uncommon to accuse literary criticism of "irrelevance, and self-promotion" (Fish 353). It is obviously ironical for Wordsworth to hold such a view of criticism, especially when we read Arnold saying: "Wordsworth was himself a great critic, and it is to be sincerely regretted that he has not left us more criticism" (3). His "Preface" in particular is widely celebrated as a great piece of criticism:

The Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) is Wordsworth's most far-reaching act of self-justification. The result is a critical document of an entirely new kind: a poetic manifesto offering a trenchant statement of universal principles designed to supersede all existing theory and tradition. (Parrinder 47)

Even those, who are willing to acknowledge the value of criticism, concede that the critical faculty is far lower than the inventive one. Although defending the value of criticism, Arnold agrees with Pope and Wordsworth that "The critical power is of lower rank than the creative" (4). He, however, does not go so far as calling for writers to abandon writing criticism

altogether.

T. S. Eliot, to give another example, makes it clear that the poet is superior to the critic. Criticism, he opines in *The Sacred Wood*, can be done by men of lower abilities: "the great bulk of the work of criticism could be done by minds of the second order" (SW xiv). Implicitly, the noble task of creative writing is assigned to minds of the first order. This classification is upheld when criticism is allowed to exist on its own. But Eliot has other plans for criticism. He stipulates that the greater value of the critical faculty is when it is married to the inventive one. In other words, the poet and the critic should be one: "It is to be expected that the critic and the creative artist should frequently be the same person" (SW 16). Although this vision apparently brings a happy ending to the conflict through the sacred union of, metaphorically speaking, marriage, on closer inspection, it is deeply biased against criticism. It calls for marriage between poet and critic only to help the former become better. The critic will no longer exist; s/he will be swallowed up by the poet: "When one creative mind is better than another," Eliot concludes, "the reason often is that the better is the more critical" (SW xiv). The poet here colonizes the critic. It is in this way that the poet can define the critic in the best image s/he wants, and gets rid of all that is unwanted in criticism. Drawing on the metaphor of marriage, as it is said that behind every successful man there is a woman, Eliot's vision suggests that inside-as-behind every successful poet there is a critic. It is as if better poetry can only be written by effacing the independence of criticism altogether.

Conclusion

In writing the literary history of Neo-classicism and Romanticism, the two periods are often contrasted with each other. This contrast is constructed in gender terms. Neo-classicism is masculinized; Romanticism is wrapped in feminine attributes. The former is generally associated with reason, order, conformity, and culture – all of which are socially and culturally constructed to define masculinity. Romanticism, on the other hand, is figured as espousing personal feelings, nature, spontaneity, revolt against conventions. These are widely popularized as feminine hallmarks. When T. S. Eliot argues that "the difference [between Classicism and Romanticism] seems to me rather the difference between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic," he is articulating the distinction in deeply ingrained gender terms ("The Function of Criticism" 26). Classicism is on the side of positivity; it is the complete, the adult, and the orderly. It is male. Romanticism is on the side of negativity. It is female: the fragmentary (Eve is a fragment of Adam-his rib), the immature, and the chaotic. This gendered representation applies to the periods' prominent representatives: Alexander Pope and William Wordsworth.

The contrast between Pope and Wordsworth cannot be overstated.

While admitting the popularity of his predecessor, Wordsworth's attack on Pope is well-documented. Wordsworth criticized the lofty themes and the artificial language mastered by his towering predecessor, and proposed humble subjects and ordinary language instead. But it is ironical that both writers share a similar vision of the relationship between creative writing and criticism. In this sense, although Pope and Wordsworth are strangers in their poetic visions, criticism makes of them bedfellows.

Both Pope and Wordsworth think highly of the inventive faculty. Unmistakably, they place creative writers above critics. They are clear that the harm done by an inferior poet is less than the damage done by a bad critic. Criticism, both Pope and Wordsworth agree, can only exist because of creative writing. It is secondary; it is subordinate. Without literature, there can be no criticism. Both writers cannot imagine criticism as an independent effort on the part of independent fellow writers. The relationship between poets and critics is also represented in gender terms. The view held by both writers that criticism relies on poetry to exist is reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "woman has always been man's dependent" (19). Thus, in both writers' representations, poets are men, critics are women. In his "Essay on Criticism," Alexander Pope makes this analogy clear when he says that writers and critics are like man and wife. On the metaphorical level, creative writers are imaged as the center of the relationship; they are the independent providers who are origin and authors of what they write. Critics, on the other hand, are feminized. They are dependents; they rely on inventive writers for sustenance. They are, as a professor of medicine once put it to Stanley Fish, "a parasite on the carcass of literature" (353). Repeating the same parasite metaphor, Geoffrey Hartman travels a step further in describing the prevalent perception of critics: "The interpreter knows there are those who consider him a parasite. He is said to live off his authors like a pimp or to cannibalize them with affection ("The Interpreter" 219).

This, however, does not come without some telling ironies. The gendered relationship between Pope and Wordsworth is not straightforwardly one in which one is masculinized while the other is clearly feminized. Each occupies the masculine/feminine position at some point. First, in the contrast between Pope the Neoclassicist and Wordsworth the Romantic, it is fairly obvious that the former occupies the man position whereas the latter holds the other end of the spectrum, that of a woman. As poets, both Pope and Wordsworth are masculinized. While Pope remains the same, the status of Wordsworth changes from feminine (when thought of as Romantic) into masculine (when looked on as poet regardless of attachment to a specific period).

But both Pope and Wordsworth are also critics. And in this sense, they are feminized according to their own engendering of the relationship between poets and critics. While this may bring nothing new to Wordsworth

who experienced feminization as a Romantic, it is Pope who suffers most. As a critic, he becomes feminized. Thus, to read Pope and Wordsworth in gender terms, the lines between the masculine and the feminine become blurred and are rendered indefinite. Depending on the vantage point from which one looks, Pope and Wordsworth subvert the gender lines. They are both masculine and feminine. Pope, on the one hand, emerges twice as masculine (as poet, and as Neo-classicist), and once as feminine (as a critic). Wordsworth, on the other hand, is figured masculine once (as poet), and feminine twice (as Romantic, and as critic). The careers of Pope and Wordsworth, however, attest to the far from convincing penchant of some, particularly poets, for contrasting creative writing with criticism. In them, both poet and critic co-exist. This is not unusual in the long and rich history of English literature and criticism where, as Parrinder stresses, "The major critics have been major, or at least important poets" (3). In fact, Pope's "Essay on Criticism" brings both poetry and criticism together in one work. It blurs the division between criticism and poetry: "after all," Paul Baines explains, it is "an essay on criticism delivered in verse, and thus acting also as poetry and offering itself *for* criticism" (49; italics original).

الملخص**صحبة الغرباء: ألكسندر بوب وويليم وردزورث
سمير أحمد عبدالنعم أبو الحسن**

تشير الدراسة إلى إلحاح مؤرخي الأدب المتكرر على التناقض الكبير بين المدرستين الكلاسيكية الجديدة والرومانسية وأبرز ممثلي المذهبين: ألكسندر بوب (1744-1688) وويليم وردزورث (1850-1770) في الأدب الإنجليزي. تقدم الدراسة قراءة من منظور الجندر لهذا التناقض بين المذهبين. في هذه القراءة، تقوم الدراسة بتحليل ومقارنة كيف تبدو الكلاسيكية الجديدة في صورة المذكر (العقل، النظام، النظرة للخارج أو المجال العام)، في حين يتم تقديم المرحلة الرومانسية في صورة المؤنث (المشاعر، الطبيعة، التمرد، الانسحاب إلى الفضاء الخاص). وهذا التناقض بين المذهبين ينسحب بالتبعية على رائديهما الكبيرين: بوب ووردزورث.

ولكن على الرغم من التباينات الشديدة بين الشعاعين الكبيرين، ترصد الدراسة أحد الجوانب التي تجمع بينهما. هذا الجانب يتمثل في تبنيهما وجهة نظر سلبية تجاه النقد والنقاد. كلاهما يرى أن النقد هو آخر الأدب: النقد أقل شأنًا من الكتابة الإبداعية، وهو عمل طفيلي يعتمد على الأدب لكي يوجد. وهذه العلاقة يمكن قراءتها من منظور الجندر أيضاً. في حالة بوب تبدو العلاقة جندرية صريحة، حيث يتم تصوير الشاعر في صورة الرجل (الزوج) والناقد في صورة المرأة (الزوجة). كما تبدو هذه العلاقة الجندرية أيضاً في صورة مجازية: تبعية النقد واعتماده على الأدب (كما أن تبعية المرأة للرجل واعتمادها عليه هي أحد تجليات التشكل الاجتماعي والثقافي للعلاقة الجندرية). وتبين الدراسة المفارقة في هذه الرؤية. حيث يتضح أن كلا من بوب ووردزورث (كلاهما شاعر وناقد) ينتصر للأديب (الرجل) على الناقد (المرأة) في ذاته. وبذلك يبدو أن كلا منهما يريد أن يقدم نفسه كشاعر لا كناقد.

كلمات أساسية: ألكسندر بوب - الكلاسيكية الجديدة؛ وليم وردزورث - الرومانسية؛ النقد وكتابة التاريخ الأدبي؛ قراءة من منظور الجندر.

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