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The Romantic Assertion: A Study of the Language of Nineteenth Century Poetry by R. A. Foakes

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ress) forms a central motif in the novel" (p. 171). This obviously should mean that when clothes or nudity are mentioned, the central theme of the novel is given symbolic reinforcement. But chasing the clothes-nudity motif soon becomes absurd when incidents such as Bramble's giving a widow forty shillings to clothe her children, Win Jenkins' dropping her petticoat in the waters of Bath, or Bramble's being seen naked on the beach at Scarborough are proposed as elements in the "persistent contrast between nakedness and clothes" (p. 175). If Goldberg is right in seeing a pattern in the catastrophes of *Roderick Random* and a clothes-nudity motif in *Humphry Clinker*, then Smollett can be dismissed at once as an unskilled and unsuccessful novelist whose basic intentions were so clumsily realized that they only vaguely begin to be perceived after two hundred years.

In matters of style and accuracy, *Smollett and the Scottish School* may be generally commended, although treating Smollett as though he were a disciple of James Joyce involves an occasional lapse into dissertation jargon such as "crucial changes, effected attitudinally by Aurelia, and effected situationally and dramatically by Sycamore" (p. 131). (See also the rather overdone musical metaphor used for part of the discussion of *Sir Launcelot Greaves* [pp. 121-22] and the mythological terms used in outlining the organization of *Roderick Random* [pp. 36-37].) A minor inaccuracy when discussing *Humphry Clinker* places Dr. L[inde]n at Bath (p. 162), even though he had been placed correctly at Hot Well a few pages earlier (p. 146). Only carelessness in copying could transport the fortress of York to Harrowgate in the same novel (p. 164).

It is to be hoped that Goldberg's work will stimulate further investigation into the intellectual and social background of Smollett's novels. That he has opened the way to an appraisal of Smollett as a man of ideas and has made readers cognizant of some of those ideas is to his credit. But it is safe to say that, in spite of his ingenious analyses, *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and *Sir Launcelot Greaves* will continue

to be generally neglected because of their sterile form; *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle* will continue to be read as standard examples of the English picaresque novel; and *Humphry Clinker* will continue to be praised as (to quote Hazlitt's remark to which Goldberg takes exception) "the most pleasant gossiping novel that ever was written."

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*The Romantic Assertion: A Study of the Language of Nineteenth Century Poetry.* By R. A. FOAKES. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1958. Pp. 186.

This book is in some respects a companion volume to *Romantic Image*, by Frank Kermode (1957). The relevance of Foakes's title is found in his statement (p. 112) that "this poetry of assertion inevitably employs rhetoric in order to persuade us that the poet's vision is real, and to make us believe in its power and value."

Foakes develops this point steadily and argues (pp. 137-38) that "the rhetoric of assertion is appropriate only to the true visionary utterance. . . . But the rhetorical vocabulary used in the discussion of general problems now seems empty and barren, for it is unsupported by the central imagery or the central theme of the poem, and is not subsumed, as Tennyson wanted it to be, in a total vision." In the same part of his discussion Foakes raises a parallel point from *The Poetry of Experience*, by Robert Langbaum. I think that between Frank Kermode, Robert Langbaum, and Foakes it is possible to make a useful new formulation of the poetic development.

Langbaum is cited by Foakes in relation to the Browning limitations in order to parallel Tennyson's deficiencies. For apropos of Browning's use of monologue, Langbaum comments that in the modern world "there is no valid moral principle for connecting the events, where we are left with perspectives toward the events." Moreover, we "can adopt the perspective of only one character at a time."

The theme of *Romantic Image* by Kermode is that the quest for the means of an inclusive consciousness drove artists away from discourse of reason and even from language. These three authors would seem to be approaching a common ground—namely, that Romantic poetry developed a one-thing-at-a-time kind of vision and awareness which had succeeded an all-at-once sort of auditory and simultaneous order: “The decline of the aristocratic world of the eighteenth century with its hierarchy of ordered values had sent the Romantic poets scurrying into their own souls in search of a new scale of values. . . . Each created his own order, in terms usually of the vision of love or the journey of life, and each was able to oppose to the flux of a world of broken values, to the anarchy of individualism, symbols of that order in the beauty and permanence of the natural world” (p. 166).

Foakes here reminds us that the image of order that became dominant in the age of Newton was visual. Poetry, too, succeeded in achieving a new visual order based on the correspondence between the inner faculties and the natural scene outside. But this new order was exclusive rather than inclusive in its very nature.

It had to deal with one emotion at a time and one level of experience at a time. It could not include erudition and accumulated past experience in the single perspectives of visual space that were devised in order to isolate and to control single emotions. But, above all, it could not fulfil the human craving for an inclusive auditory organization of many-layered and interpenetrating experiences.

The quest for the Romantic Image, as seen in Kermode’s book, becomes simply translatable into the quest for auditory order and for auditory space. For we hear from all directions at once, creating a field of simultaneous relations with which the artist must always reckon.

Thus even though the technological and social arrangements of an age should become predominantly visual and segmental, the poets will all the more accept the challenge to compensate such a world by fostering alternative auditory images. Perhaps nobody is prepared

to hold that the rhetoric of poetic assertion is an adequate substitute for images of an inclusive order.

Personally, I am grateful to Foakes for having raised the right issues at the right time.

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*The Ethical Idealism of Matthew Arnold.* By WILLIAM ROBBINS. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959. Pp. xi+259.

The greatest virtue of Mr. Robbins’ book is its most obvious characteristic: short as it is, it is a *work*, the product of wide reading and ripe thought, not—like so many literary studies that now present themselves—a post-graduate research project or a thin exercise in exegesis. In his prefatory apologia the author explains that it is “becoming difficult to deal adequately with the whole of Arnold in one book”; that though a definitive study may some day be expected, this book may in the meantime have some use as an examination of the nature and sources of Arnold’s moral and religious ideas. This modesty is excessive. Any writer whose thought is significant and alive needs to be reinterpreted for every intellectual generation, for every twenty-year period at least. Consequently, though a critic of Arnold’s prose may feel Lionel Trilling’s brilliant and imposing book loom over him, that work, in its reflection of the socialized humanism of the 1930’s, has already something a little old fashioned about it. I would not do Robbins the disservice of calling him up-to-date, but *The Ethical Idealism of Matthew Arnold* is important as the product of an intelligence notably sensitive to the forms of post-war English and American thought.

As an essay in intellectual history this book offers no new methods or provocative theories; its procedures are not straightforward so much as eminently simple. Though he turns at times to the poems or critical essays, Robbins’ business is with Arnold’s religious books, *St. Paul and Protestantism*, *Literature and Dogma*, *God and the Bible*, and *Last Essays on Church and*