



The Perversity of Poetry: Romantic Ideology and the Popular Male Poet of Genius

Dino Franco Felluga

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Explains why poetry gave way to the realist novel as the dominant literary form in nineteenth-century England.

Once the dominant literary form, poetry was gradually eclipsed by the realist novel; indeed, by 1940 W. H. Auden was able to note, "Poetry makes nothing happen." In *The Perversity of Poetry*, Dino Franco Felluga explores the cultural background of poetry's marginalization by examining nineteenth-century reactions to Romantic poetry and ideology. Focusing on the work of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, as well as periodical reviews, student manuals, and contemporary medical journals, the book details the period's two contending (and equally outrageous) claims regarding poetry. Scott's poetry, on the one hand, was continually represented as a panacea for a modern world overtaken by new principles of utilitarianism, capitalism, industrialism, and democracy. Byron's, by contrast, was represented either as a cancer in the heart of the social order or as a contagious pandemic leading to various pathological symptoms. The book concludes with a coda on Alfred Lord Tennyson, which illustrates how the Victorian reception of Scott and Byron affected the most popular poetic genius of midcentury. Ultimately, *The Perversity of Poetry* uncovers how the shift to a rhetoric of health allowed critics to oppose what they perceived as a potent and potentially dangerous influence on the age, the very thing that would over the course of the century be marginalized into such obscurity: poetry, thanks to its perverse insistence on making something happen.

Dino Franco Felluga is Associate Professor of English at Purdue University.

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