

**Jonathan Crimmins, *The Romantic Historicism to Come*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 180. £91.80. ISBN 9781501326974.**

Thinking about the ways in which history embeds literature defines the conundrum of historicism. Among many scholars, Alan Liu's suggestive argument that history is universally a loss for which we mourn retrospectively is emblematic of the dilemma of historicism. As we pay tribute to the deceased through a retrospective look at a past life, so the historicist critic assesses, dialectically, the place of the past in the present. Such a dialectic of past and present leaves, however, the question of *what is to come* unanswered. Quoting Virgil's *Georgics*, an enigmatic key question that Jonathan Crimmins's book asks himself and his readers is: 'scilicet et tempus veniet' (10), how do we truly know of what is to come? This reference to Virgil's opus reflects Crimmins's general intention to solve the historicist conundrum by revising our idea of history. He contends that history should not be seen as 'that which is no longer', like a deceased love one, but as 'that which persists in the future' (3).

Recalling Derrida's idea of *living on*, Crimmins's redefinition of history as that which persists into the future frees history from the prison of 'the present-tense solipsism' (11). Thinking beyond this temporal solipsism illuminates a new understanding of history as participant 'in the new conditions' (11). The preclusion, for Crimmins, of such a reconceptualization of history stems from those theories of mediation, which have lastingly offered a vision of the past or reality as an 'unmediated', 'unaltered thing or experience' (5). It follows, as Crimmins contends, that mediation is symptomatic of our misconception of history as a transcendently lost time. Re-assessing these theories, Crimmins's redefinition of history demonstrates how the past is unequivocally 'the material conditions that persist in the future' (15).

Throughout the five chapters of the book, Crimmins explores varied façades of history's material conditions to persist in the future. Of *Frankenstein*, Crimmins stresses Mary Shelley's intention to depict her two Gothic heroes 'as fallen angels of conflicting values' (31), namely the Gothicized sentimental and the Gothicized Romantic. For Crimmins, Shelley's duality of the sentimental and Romantic translates into her interest in exploring those tensions between matter and spirit, the psychological vector of bodily impulses and the ideological vector of individual experience – an 'unresolved duality' (47) that emblemizes the fall of Frankenstein and the Creature.

Reading Mary Wollstonecraft and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Crimmins remarks that both philosophers use the metaphor of history-as-body to suggest historical development compares with the growth of human bodies. Thus, Crimmins contends that 'past, present, and future hold together like an individual's existence' (59): historical teleology now becomes a deterministic account of the laws of causation. Crimmins's subsequent reading of William Godwin's 'Essay of History and Romance' reprises Wollstonecraft's determinism. Crimmins's account of Godwin's essay demonstrates, in fact, that his choice of romance provides Godwin with an intellectual platform to consider how the past 'offers futures that break with the repressive conditions of the present' (68).

The third chapter offers a refined philosophical account of history's persistence into the future. Crimmins's configurations of the intellectual interactions among Immanuel Kant, G.W. Hegel and Friedrich Kittler illustrate the book's central thesis that history is not an irretrievably lost time. Extrapolating from these interactions, Crimmins concludes that the relation between history and freedom in terms of Subject and Substance introduces the idea of historical freedom, which opposes traditional notions of temporal fixity.

Illustrative examples of historical freedom are derived from his reading of Walter Scott's antiquarianism in the *Waverley* novels and P.B. Shelley's solution to love and

revolution in *Prometheus Unbound*. Crimmins observes that Scott's antiquarianism is emblematic of an asynchronous entity or randomness of the interaction among semi-determinist systems (past, present and future), which challenges historical teleology and addresses the problem of futurity. In a final account of *Prometheus Unbound*, read through the lens of queer theory, Crimmins shows how Shelley's treatment of freedom and futurity, as well as entanglement of love (and intermingling of means and ends), opens up possibilities for political and social change. Crimmins's acute engagement with complex philosophical theories both provides insightful and original readings of familiar Romantic texts and offers an ingenious revisionist account of the role of historicism within Romantic studies.

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