

# 《重划疆界-英美文学研究的变革》

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# 《重划疆界-英美文学研究的变革》

## 内容概要

本书是一本探讨当今英美文学研究变革的文集，审视了最近几十年来日益拓展的相关研究域内的一系列变革和发展，回顾了各主要历史时期有价值的学术研究，包括中世纪研究、17世纪研究、18世纪研究、浪漫主义研究和维多利亚时代研究等带有明显断代特征的传统文学研究领域，并就当今一些新理论思潮和方法论对这些传统领域的“侵入”和所导致的革新作了恰如其分的评价，是一部研究英美文学必读的经典性著作。

本书由新历史主义代表人物、哈佛大学教授Stephen Greenblatt和在比较文学、文学理论界卓有成就的Giles Gunn教授担当主编，应邀为本书撰文的各位学者大多是美国高校英美文学研究某一分支领域内公认的权威或后起之秀，原出版机构是蜚声英语文学研究界的美国现代语言学会(MLA)。

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## 精彩短评

1、有机会还有重读

1、 In the chapter titled “ Medieval Studies ” , Anne Middleton has reviewed in details the changing trends of medieval studies (as a relatively “ new ” field within English literary studies), during the twenty-five years since its “ invention ” in the 1960s, in objective, methodology, focus of concerns and interaction with related non-literary disciplines. Almost twenty years have passed since its publication as the opening chapter of “Redrawing the Boundaries”, despite the time-dependent nature of this kind of study, Middleton ’ s acute observation of the past and insightful proposal of a possible future remains as thought-provoking and inspiring today. At the beginning of this chapter, Middleton proposes two major reasons for the earlier selection and studying of texts of Old and Middle English literature at universities that: for one, these texts preserve the vocabulary and grammar of the earlier phrases of the national language, for another, they document the customs and beliefs of the medieval Englishmen—both essentially having nothing to do with “literature as a disciplinary object or civilizing objective”. The first function would naturally lead us to believe that medieval studies is intrinsically linked with modern language studies, while the second would suggest a close interdependence between medieval studies and related disciplines such as social and intellectual history. The actual situation, however, is strangely not so. On the contrary, medieval studies has become for many outsiders “ the most steeped in traditional research agendas and critical practices ” on one hand, at the same time “ the most isolated from, and unchanged by, recent developments within a radically revised and expanded definition of what constitutes literary studies ” on the other. Considering the intellectual context of early 1990s when Middleton published this article, it ’ s not difficult for us to understand her paying great attention to this “ double deviance ” of medieval studies. This was the last phase of a time when critical theories of literature thrived and blossomed in full by profiting bountifully from the rich recent theoretical heritages of such disciplines as linguistics, semiotics and anthropology, as well as of the structuralist and deconstructionist movements. Consider, for instance, how little has medieval studies been influenced by the deconstructionist approach, by Neo-historicism, or by the broad adoption of anthropological paradigms, compared to its chronological neighbor, namely the Renaissance—the latter has now adopted the name of “ early modern studies ” , which further manifests or mystifies the “ otherness ” of medieval studies. This otherness must have appeared more startling and uncalled for to Middleton when she was writing this article than it appears to us now. After summarizing the dilemma of medieval studies in recent years as a “ conceptual asceticism ” that has greatly diverted from its original ambition as a “ new supradisciplinary field ” at the time of its launching in the mid-1960s, Middleton proceeds to investigate a major conflict in terms of methodology within medieval studies: that between New Criticism and exegetics. Headed by D. W. Robertson, the exegetists, inheriting the method adopted by early church father and medieval patristic authors in the interpretation of the Bible, endeavor to interpret a text in three or four levels of meaning, i.e. the literal level, the allegorical level, the moral/ tropological level, with the occasional addition of a fourth level of the anagogical/ typical. From my own experience when researching on Chaucer ’ s contemporary, the 14th century Gawain-poet, I find that there is a general trend against the interpretive method of patristic exegesis after the 1950s, particularly to its allegorical level, and the allegorical interpretations by W. H. Schofield and R. M. Garret, among others, have been satirized as “ wooden allegory ” . It is true that when figurative materials are interpreted into narrow, case-hardened stock allegories, the whole business becomes dangerous and misleading—excellent patristic authors like Augustine and Hugh of St. Victor themselves wouldn ’ t have approved of this. Nevertheless, anyone seriously concerned with the reception of medieval poetry among its immediate audience cannot possibly dismiss the literary significance of allegorical exegesis. Middleton has also taken a conciliating position in this “ central intellectual agon ” of the study of medieval texts, calling it “ less a fundamental conflict about goals and means than a ‘ sibling rivalry ’ . ” This “ sibling ” relationship, according to her argument, lies in the New Critic and exegetist ’ s shared premise that principles of artifice, instead of laws of nature, should be the central objects of criticism and interpretation, that man plays an active role in constituting, rather than reflecting, reality. Moreover, both New Critical and exegetical scholars set out to depict “ medieval artistic practice as conscious and rational within explicable canons of purposive behavior, as the product of representative choices of artisans in confrontation with their cultural matter, and hence as critical rather than determined ” , to the extent that the New Critical and the exegetical methods become mutual-inclusive, the

latter disclosing a “ formalist mediation ” in spite of its “ professed historicist ambitions. ” This becomes particularly true if we remember that exegesis needs not work on a single level. An exegetical interpretation doesn ’ t have to give up the literal level when putting emphasis upon the allegorical, typical or moral level (the last two occasionally overlapping with the allegorical), and as a result doesn ’ t have to exclude the New Critical approach. Another thing Middleton noticed in postwar medieval studies is the “ undiscovered modernity of the Middle Ages ” : the “ conceptual, abstract, non-naturalistic, and disjunctive techniques of representation ” of medieval art that is shared by the majority of high modernist art. From a formalist point of view, these styles that serve to defamiliarize and abstract recur in art history as an estranging technique that brings artistic convention back to conscious attention, that makes acute again man ’ s blunted perception of artifice. There has been a consistent effort on the part of scholars of literary medieval studies to reposition the representative techniques of medieval literature in relation to those of modern arts. This appears to me to be a highly interesting direction of research, for despite the many difficulties that come with all cross-disciplinary studies, medieval studies of literature is innately interwoven with, as well as came into existence through the mediation of, scholarship in art history. A Gothic cathedral is every bit as significant as a manuscript of dream vision for someone who wants to comprehend medieval texts in its immediate intellectual milieu. Middleton didn ’ t fail to recognize a potential danger in the application of art-historical analogies in the interpretation of medieval literature: that “ the differences between syntax and genres of each medium and representative mode, and the special circumstances of each distinct occasion or performance, were usually ignored ” . Awareness of this danger has led recent medieval studies to a turn of ultimate interest from gauging out the “ meaning ” to a kind of “ commentary ” —the manifestation of the interplay between different systems of significance at one time instead of dictating a single dominant artistic medium is becoming more and more the interpreter ’ s goal. What I find most useful in Middleton ’ s reviewing of the 25-year-old history of modern medieval studies is her summarization of the two major narrative forms of most endeavors to interpret medieval literature historically. On the one hand, there has been punctilious searching for origins and sources, and great pains have been taken to identify a text ’ s meaning with its antecedence; on the other, the perceived fissures or inconsistencies within the text are often explained in relation to a series of polarized forces “ in contest for the future Europe ” ; illiterate vs. literate, popular vs. learned, oral vs. written, lay vs. clerical, heathen vs. Christian, sacred vs. profane, heretical vs. orthodox, magical vs. science, secular vs. religious, urban, vs. agrarian, feudal vs. commercial (or capitalistic), traditional vs. modern (or rational), etc. These pairs of terms, once situated along vertical axes of value as high vs. low, can and should also be placed along a horizontal axis which allows the absence of an artificially imposed dominant design or direction of development, and as a result makes it possible for us to view literary works as sites of battles and loci of contending powers. Medieval literature in the making is a process of historical construction in itself, a place of conflicting actions. The problem of text production remains even today one of the most inevitable issues when we intend to deal with medieval literary works on a historical level. Not unaware of the nature of medieval text (often lacking a determined form, existing in variants in different manuscripts, lacking punctuation, countless possibilities of misinterpretation), Middleton has proposed near the end of her article a “ new philology ” grounded in the manuscript matrix of texts, a place of uncertainty and “ radical contingencies ” , rather than on a rationally edited and codified textual form that were the imagination of earlier humanist philologists, an imagination sustained by the technology of printing. Middleton is hopeful that this “ new philology ” will bring about the long-deferred response of medieval literary studies to the challenge of New Historicism, which as a critical method has long made itself heard, even in Middleton ’ s time, in areas of literary study such as the Renaissance. In the last section, Middleton proposed a shared intellectual interest between scholars of medieval studies and scholars of ethnic and colonial literatures on the ground of similar multilingual cultural circumstances within which texts are conceived and the unclassifiable verbal and formal results produced by such circumstances, and consequently suggested a comparative cultural poetics in these areas. Such a proposal seems to me to be too broad, too intangible and lacking methodological antecedence for the current still immature state of medieval studies. Nevertheless, Middleton ’ s calling for a literary history that emerges from within cultural history through endeavors to understand social forces as articulated in textual forms is beyond doubt what we are most urgently in need of today, and not just in the field of medieval studies. blavatsky, 2010/12/17



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