

The McGraw-Hill Guide to

ENGLISH
LITERATURE

Volume Two

William Blake to D. H. Lawrence

By

Karen Lawrence, Betsy Seifter,
and Lois Ratner



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KAREN LAWRENCE
BETSY SEIFTER
LOIS RATNER

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This book is dedicated to our three supportive husbands, Peter Lawrence, Julian Seifter, and Stephen Ratner, and to the children who came into being during the seven years of its composition: Andrew and Jeffrey, Andrew and Charles, and Philip and Peter.

PREFACE

Like guides who lead their companions through unfamiliar terrain, making sense of the territory, this book attempts to illuminate some of the vast expanse of English literature. The uniqueness of *The McGraw-Hill Guide to English Literature* lies in its format and completeness. It provides questions and answers on works by almost all the major authors of English literature from medieval to modern times. By example rather than prescription, the guide attempts to teach students fruitful ways to think and write about different kinds of literature, including fiction, poetry, drama, and the essay. The dual purpose of the guide is to demonstrate general approaches to literature and to give useful analyses of specific texts that college students are likely to encounter in their classes. This book certainly is not meant to replace the study of the texts themselves but is intended to serve as a useful supplement to them. Without sacrificing the richness, complexity, or variety of English literature, we attempt to cover the most significant aspects of these texts.

The guide appears in two volumes, corresponding to the division in most year-long survey courses and anthologies. Volume 1 includes Old English through eighteenth-century literature and is divided into seven parts: Old English literature, Middle English literature, the Renaissance, the seventeenth century, the Restoration, the neoclassical age, and the emergence of the novel. Volume 2 includes nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and has five parts: the romantic age, Victorian poetry and prose, the Victorian novel, modern poetry, and the modern novel and drama. To provide a context for the discussions of individual texts, each part is introduced with a timeline which charts important political and literary events of the period. Chapters are divided according to individual authors (except, of course, in the case of anonymous texts), and a short chronology is provided for each author, listing the important dates and events in his or her life. In addition, each chapter includes a list of suggested

readings for further study. The initials at the end of each chapter indicate the writer responsible for the material in that chapter.

This book has been written primarily for the college student who desires help in the study of English literature. Although some students may want to read through the guide, most will dip into it for help on particular writers being studied. It may prove especially useful in preparing students for the type of essay exams one is likely to encounter in literature courses. The guide should also be a valuable resource for the teacher of literature, who will find it a repository of significant questions on, as well as helpful analyses of, individual texts. As teachers of literature, we have tried to provide material that is beneficial to class preparation.

No other guide of this kind and comprehensiveness exists today. We hope that students and teachers will find *The McGraw-Hill Guide to English Literature* a helpful and stimulating companion in their study of literature.

K.L.

B.S.

L.R.

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Finally, we would like to thank Dr. John V. Antush of Fordham University, who contributed the chronologies in Volume 2.

K.L.
B.S.
L.R.

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Part One

THE ROMANTIC AGE





T I M E L I N E

The Age

- 1750: Founding of Methodism by John Wesley
- 1755: Publication of Johnson's *Dictionary*
- 1756: Outbreak of Seven Years' War
- 1757: Victory by Clive at Plassey secures English control of India
- 1760: Death of George II; accession of George III
- 1763: Treaty of Paris
- 1765: Publication of Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*
- 1775: Outbreak of American War of Independence
- 1783: American independence won
- 1789: French Revolution
- 1799: Napoleon takes control of French government
- 1801: Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*
- 1804: Napoleon named emperor of France; war throughout Europe
- 1810: George III insane; the Regency
- 1815: Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo
- 1820: Accession of George IV
- 1825: First English railway opened
- 1830: Death of George IV; accession of William IV
- 1832: Passage of Reform Bill
- 1837: Death of William IV; accession of Queen Victoria
- 1845: Great Famine in Ireland
- 1848: Revolutions in France, Italy, Austria; publication of *Communist Manifesto*

The Authors

1750

William Blake (1757–1827)

1760

Robert Burns (1759–1796)

1770

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

S. T. Coleridge (1772–1834)

1780

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824)

1790

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

John Keats (1795–1821)

1800

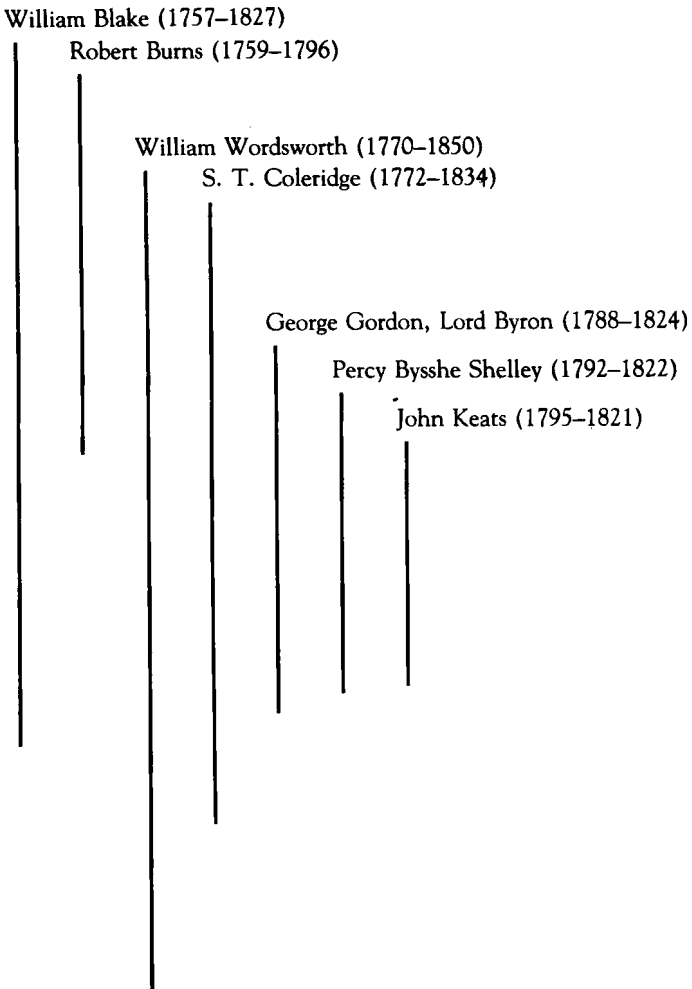
1810

1820

1830

1840

1850





WILLIAM BLAKE

C H R O N O L O G Y

- 1757 Born in London. Son of James Blake, a shopkeeper, and Catherine Harmitage Blake, both probably religious dissenters.
- 1761 Sees God “put his head against the window”; first of many religious visions he will experience.
- 1767 Is sent to a drawing school conducted by Henry Pars; will receive no regular schooling, though he educates himself through reading and study.
- 1772 Is apprenticed to engraver James Basire, engraving being a practical means of earning a living through artistic talent. Around this time begins writing plays and poems and composes music for his own lyrics.
- 1774 Basire assigns Blake the task of sketching the memorials in Westminster Abbey, a job commissioned by the Society of Antiquaries; it provides valuable artistic experience.
- 1779 Enters the Royal Academy of Arts, where he meets some of the leading artists of the day, including Sir Joshua Reynolds, who advises him to improve his drawing (a “slight” resented by the proud Blake).
- 1780 Meets the Swiss artist Henry Fuseli and the sculptor John Flaxman, who become his longtime friends. Exhibits a watercolor at the Royal Academy.
- 1782 Marries Catherine Boucher. Although she was uneducated—it is not certain whether she was literate—their marriage was by all accounts an unusually happy one and highly supportive for Blake as artist and poet. Mrs. Blake

shared her husband's religious beliefs and helped him in the production of his books.

- 1783 Printing of *Poetical Sketches*, a collection of early poems, arranged by several friends. The book apparently is not publicly sold.
- 1784 Death of Blake's father. With his small inheritance, Blake opens a printshop in partnership with James Parker; it soon fails. Blake exhibits more drawings at the Royal Academy and writes the prose satire *An Island in the Moon*.
- 1787 Blake's brother Robert, age 19, dies; Blake sees Robert's spirit ascend to heaven, "clapping its hands for joy." Blake later has a dream in which Robert teaches him the method of printing, called illuminated printing, that Blake will use for his own works.
- 1788 Blake publishes two small books, *There Is No Natural Religion* and *All Religions Are One*, by illuminated printing. (Words and illustrations are engraved; the printed pages are colored by hand, with each copy slightly different from the others.)
- 1789 Blake and his wife take part in the founding of a new church based on the writings of Swedish mystic and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg; within a few years, however, Blake apparently breaks with this group. Publishes *Songs of Innocence* and *The Book of Thel*, one of the earliest of his so-called prophetic poems.
- 1790 Around this time Blake begins a long career as an engraver of illustrations to books by others. This supports him and his wife while he continues to work on poetry and illuminated editions of his own works. Writes *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, setting forth his heretical religious views.
- 1791 Blake meets advanced democratic thinkers Thomas Paine and William Godwin; writes his prophetic poem *The French Revolution*, which is typeset but never published.
- 1792 Laws limiting freedom of speech in Britain passed; Blake's revolutionary religious and political ideas become increasingly dangerous.
- 1793 Publishes *Songs of Experience*. This collection of lyrics forms a counterpoint to the earlier *Songs of Innocence*, and from this time on the two are printed together by Blake. Also publishes prophetic poem *America* and the emblem book *The Gates of Paradise*.
- 1794 Publishes *Europe* and *The Book of Urizen*. Begins receiving commissions from Thomas Butts, a longtime patron, for various works of art.
- 1796 Illustrates Edward Young's book of poems *Night Thoughts*. Exhibits a painting of *The Last Supper* at the Royal Academy.