

BRITISH LITERATURE 1780 – 1830

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BY ANNE K. MELLOR



Dedicated to the memory of Richard H. Rodino
BY RICHARD E. MATLAK

PREFACE

In recent years, our understanding of the "Romantic Period" in English literature has changed dramatically. The rediscovery of forgotten women writers and of neglected working-class and regional writers, together with a clearer recognition of the many ways in which all the literary works written in England between 1780 and 1830 responded to the political and social movements of the time, has led many scholars to question the sufficiency of traditional aesthetic definitions of "Romanticism." This is the first anthology of the "Romantic" period to take into account the major role that women played in the production of literature at this time, as well as the wide range of social and political debates to which both canonical and noncanonical writers responded in their writings. By including as many women writers as men, by devoting half of this volume to women and hitherto neglected male writers, and by prefacing all their works with historical documents that help to locate and define the major intellectual and political debates of this period, we hope to make it possible for both teachers and students to pursue these interrogations of English literary Romanticism in the classroom.

Our General Introduction indicates the working principles that guided the selection of specific authors and works for this volume. We have included a wide range of literary genres—poetry, prose, fiction, drama, letters, journals—both because we believe that each genre has its own literary merits and because we believe that such generic variety more accurately reflects the literary culture of this period. By doing so, we also draw attention to the ways in which women excelled in those forms—drama, prose, fiction, letters, and journals—not usually included in anthologies of "Romantic poetry."

Since we believe that authors are influenced by their generational allegiances, we have arranged authors according to birth date. Under each author, works are given in order of publication, rather than composition, because we wish to highlight the ways in which literary works functioned within a public literary sphere. The dates of publication and composition (when known) of individual works of literature included in this volume are given both in the Table of Contents and at the beginning of each work. A Comprehensive Chronology appears as an appendix and includes important historical dates that will help to locate specific literary works in relation to major political, intellectual, and social events occurring at the same times. We have provided extensive annotations for each work (many of these works have not previously been edited or annotated for classroom use), as well as introductory headnotes for each author that give essential biographical and literary information. At the back of the volume we have included a selective bibliography, listing a few of the major critical works on each writer so that students who wish to pursue further investigation of an individual writer or literary movement may do so.

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As coeditors, we collaborated closely on the conceptualization and structure of this anthology, and are jointly responsible for the General Introduction and the working principles of selection and presentation. We divided the actual labor of compiling this anthology roughly in half. Richard Matlak takes responsibility for selecting, annotating, and writing the Headnotes for the Historical Context sections on The French Revolution and Rights of Man, on Science and Nature, and on Society and Political Economy, for Dorothy Wordsworth and all the male writers except William Blake and Olaudah Equiano, and for the Comprehensive Chronology. Anne Mellor takes responsibility for selecting, annotating, and writing the Headnotes for the Historical Context sections on the Rights of Woman, on Slavery, the Slave-Trade, and Abolition in Britain, and on Aesthetic Theory and Literary Criticism, for all the women writers except Dorothy Wordsworth, and for William Blake and Olaudah Equiano. Richard Matlak thanks Zaneta Gaul for clerical and administrative assistance and his colleague, Josh Gidding, for assistance with annotations. For invaluable help with the annotating of previously unedited texts, Anne Mellor thanks Hilary Weeks, Chris Hamilton, and especially Hal Gladfelder.

We particularly wish to thank the editorial staff at Harcourt Brace for their unfailing support of this project: Stephen T. Jordan, former Acquisitions Editor in English, who had the foresight to commission this anthology at a time when few editors would have done so, Michael Rosenberg, Executive Editor in English, and John Meyers, Acquisitions Editor in English, who at the last moment generously allotted us the additional pages we needed to include all the material we considered essential, and above all, Tia Black, our Developmental Editor, whose unfailing courtesy, good humor, efficiency, determination, and belief in the value of this project kept us on track during several trying years.

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