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浪漫主义

ROMANTICISM

Sharon Ruston 著

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出版说明

对于我国英语语言文学专业的学生和广大外国文学爱好者来说，市场上真正可选的高质量的英美文学书籍并不是很多。为了弥补这个缺憾，外教社从多家国际上知名的专业出版社精选了一批关于英美文学流派、文学理论、文学批评及其代表人物的书，组成“外教社原版文学入门丛书”。这些书勾勒出英美文学发展的概貌，介绍了各种小说类型、重要文学运动及相应的社会文化背景等。

丛书作者均是国际上英美文学界声名卓著的学者；丛书文字简练，语言生动，对我国的外国文学及理论研究者、在校学生及其他文学爱好者都是不可多得的珍品。

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Note on the text:

Quotations are taken from the eighth edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (2006). If the text being referred to is not in this volume I have quoted from the third edition of *Romanticism: An Anthology*, edited by Duncan Wu (2006).

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Introduction

What is Romanticism? It is a notoriously difficult term to define, made more complex by the amount of recent critical work which has discovered new dimensions to Romanticism, many of which seem to contradict each other. 'Romanticism' is not a term that was used by the writers whom we now designate as Romantic; it is a label that has been applied posthumously and with hindsight. It is doubtful whether writers at the time would have felt that they had much in common with each other in terms of their politics, religious beliefs and aesthetic theories. Yet, P. B. Shelley (1792-1822), William Hazlitt and John Stuart Mill all spoke with confidence of a 'spirit of the age', something they felt distinguished their times from others.

Romanticism is often defined in terms of its historical period but the exact dating of this period is a matter of some dispute. The sense the Romantics had of themselves as different from their predecessors was in large part due to the events that they witnessed, events which themselves did not seem to have a precedent. The ideals of the American and French Revolutions, enshrined in their declarations of independence and the rights of man, spoke of the equality of all men, something we now, perhaps, take for granted but which was not always the case. Indeed, even then, when the equality of 'man' was argued for, many writers argued for more than this, for equal rights for black people (slavery was not abolished until the end of this period in 1833) and for women. There is an argument, therefore, for defining Romanticism by

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its origins. In this book, I consider the effect of the American and French Revolutions but also earlier works and events that might be considered influential in bringing these Revolutions about, such as the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Another way to limit or define Romanticism chronologically would be to look to the end of the period; the reform acts of the 1830s are often considered to reflect a shift in government. These reforms may well have saved Britain from its own revolution, which at different points during the Romantic period had seemed imminent. In the 1790s and 1810s, in particular, Britain had been ruled by oppressive forces, with 'Gagging Acts' passed to silence the radical press, the setting up of spy networks to inform on and even instigate revolutionary activity, which would then be punished harshly with transportation or execution, and acts passed to stop people meeting to discuss the economic hardships they were suffering under. Despite this, there were marches to demand that the Government take action, petitions to Parliament and riots. The events of 16 August 1819, which were given the name of 'Peterloo', demonstrate the way that Lord Liverpool's Government dealt with those who were asking for reform: a peaceful demonstration of unarmed men, women and children at St Peter's Fields, Manchester was broken up by horsemen with sabres who killed at least ten people and injured hundreds of others. The attackers were publicly thanked by the Home Secretary when he was informed about what had happened. The name Peterloo made reference to the country's recent triumph against Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo, and clearly suggested that the Government was waging war on its own people. During the Romantic period Britain was at war almost continually, first with revolutionary France and then with Napoleonic France. These years are characterized by economic depression, poverty, food riots, machine breaking, paranoia and repression. Another way to think of Romanticism, then, is as a period of political polarization, with politically radical writers such as William Godwin

(1756–1836), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) and others living in fear of imprisonment, their writings represented in the Tory press as unpatriotic, immoral, blasphemous and seditious.

The writing produced within this time can be seen as revolutionary. The term Romanticism, rather than explicitly referring to a historical period, such as eighteenth-century or Victorian literature, suggests a literary or artistic movement. Joanna Baillie (1762–1851), a dramatist, argued for naturalness in literary language in her ‘Introductory Discourse’ to *Plays of the Passions* (1798), and this call was taken up by Wordsworth (1770–1850) and S. T. Coleridge (1772–1834) in the ‘Preface’ to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. There is the distinct sense among these writers that they are doing something new; the air of excitement is palpable. Romanticism can be thought of as an attempt at sincerity and genuine feeling, writing about emotion in the ‘real language of men’, as Wordsworth put it (Norton 2006, vol. 2, 262). The conversation poems of Coleridge or Anna Barbauld (1743–1825), the confessional mode of Wollstonecraft’s *A Short Residence in Sweden*, and the strong attachment of John Clare (1793–1864) to his home, all offer examples of both ‘real language’ and ‘powerful feeling’ (Norton 2006, vol. 2: 262, 265). This can be contrasted, though, with another prominent strain in Romantic writing – the witty, urbane voice of Byron (1788–1824), for example, who uses satire and irony to convey his cynicism towards the world. Not all writers of the period considered the line broken between their eighteenth-century predecessors and themselves; where Wordsworth railed against the neo-classical ideas of art, Byron greatly admired the poetry of Alexander Pope and John Dryden.

It has been also argued that Romanticism can be divided along gender lines. Masculine Romanticism is seen as typified by Wordsworth, represented as concerned with nature rather than society, introspective, and looking beyond the material world to something transcendent. Feminine Romanticism, on the other hand, it has been argued, celebrates the domestic affections, family and social bonds. Wordsworth is often

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prominent in definitions of Romanticism; for many he is the archetypal Romantic, although this ascendancy is largely the effect of a later period's canonization of his poetry. The myths of Romanticism still exist today, with the idea of the Romantic poet as a 'romantic' in the sense of someone who idealizes the past or present, who is not socially engaged with his contemporary world, who communes with nature to the detriment of any political responsibility. The historicist research that has been done in the previous decades (discussed in Chapter 3 of this book) has revealed that this is a myth, even in the case of John Keats (1795–1821), a poet who has been considered as merely 'escapist'.

The centrality of poetry in a definition of Romanticism has also been debunked. In fact, Romantic drama was vibrant during the time, and even those writers known primarily for their poetry wished that they could write a successful play to be performed at Drury Lane or Covent Garden. Again, historicist research has given us a more accurate picture of which writers were most successful at the time, not Shelley or Keats, but Baillie and Felicia Hemans (1793–1835). Women were prominent in all genres, but it is indicative of the sexist and hierarchical criteria upon which writers of the past have been judged that the popular genres of the novel and drama have been neglected and their importance only recently recovered. The novel became very popular during this period, and was a form written and read by women in particular; the consumption of novels was encouraged by an increase in literacy, circulating libraries and new printing technologies. Many more books were published than in previous ages. The Gothic novel was one form that emerged in this period and which continues to this day. Aiming to invoke a 'pleasing horror' in its audience, these books tapped into the fears and concerns of the reading public, with stories of ignorance, superstition, repression and tyranny. In the past, Romantic poetry was privileged above other genres as the product of six white male geniuses, who were appreciated precisely because they were believed to exist somehow outside their historical moment and were inspired by other-worldly

forces. Today, Romantic literature is a term which is used far more inclusively, and which can be seen to reflect the political events of the period.

One role that literature played, as part of Romantic culture, was to encourage and challenge a sense of national identity and nationhood. Indeed, the concept of nation, as we now understand it, is one that emerged around this time. A nation has been described as an 'imagined community', often defined by imaginary rather than real geographical borders. During almost continual war with France, when Britain was seriously afraid of an invasion, whether from France itself or from French allies in Ireland, and when the Act of Union formed the 'United Kingdom' as we now know it, the idea of Britain as a nation was formed. The Union Jack flag was first used in 1801 to symbolize this new nation, and stereotyped characters representing the English and the French in political cartoons were instrumental in developing a national identity.

Tory publications, such as the *Anti-Jacobin*, campaigned against those it labelled '**Jacobins**'* who supported the ideals of the French Revolution, liberty, fraternity and equality, accusing writers of unpatriotic feelings towards Britain. There were also anti-Jacobin novels that continued this propaganda, promoting ideals of tradition, hierarchy and property. Competing ideas of nationhood emerged in the novels about Ireland of Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth and the novels about Scotland of Walter Scott. The losses and gains of the British Empire during this period, with Britain acquiring colonies across Asia and Africa by the end of the Napoleonic wars, were also a part of this nation formation. Literature in this period can be found that either reflects or challenges the nation's dominant ideologies, either celebrating the Empire or criticizing the imperialist agenda. Anna Barbauld's poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, written in that year, prophesies that eventually Britain's power will fail

* Terms in bold indicate that they can be found in the glossary, p. 131.

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and be lost. She imagines a time when England will be only 'grey ruin and mouldering stone' and draws a direct comparison with the colonies, England will then 'sit in dust, as Asia now' (Wu 2006: 46–7). This poem received such vitriolic criticism that Barbauld stopped writing poetry. For the first time, in these decades, the marginalized voices of former slaves are heard, as well as other disenfranchised groups, arguing for their rights. Religious dissenters and Catholics fought and finally won battles for toleration, and the animal rights movement began.

As long ago as 1924, A. O. Lovejoy wrote that we should use the plural term 'Romanticisms' rather than refer to a singular Romanticism:

The word 'romantic' has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign. When a man is asked [. . .] to discuss romanticism, it is impossible to know what tendencies he is to talk about, when they are supposed to have flourished, or in whom they are supposed to be chiefly exemplified. (Lovejoy 1970: 66–7)

I hope in this book to give some idea of the many Romanticisms that are available to us, to show the points at which Romantic writers come together and where they diverge. If there is any coherence to be found among these writers, it is in their own belief that what they were doing was new, whether this is referring to their new sense of the need for equality and enfranchisement, a new understanding of the role of the poet, a belief in the limitlessness of science's potential achievements, a new interest in the forgotten and neglected people of society, a new fascination with the dark, unexplored regions of the psychological, mysterious and supernatural. Of course, as *we* change so does our perception of the Romantics, but right now issues of human rights, religious toleration, nationalism, social responsibility and the role of art in society seem very contemporary indeed.

Historical, Cultural and Intellectual Context

Politics and Economics
Philosophy and Religion
Science and Technology
Arts and Culture

POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

Beginning with reference to the American War of Independence, and moving on to a discussion of the French Revolution and war between Britain and France, this section considers the new language of 'rights' that this period created. The rights of men, women, slaves and even animals are discussed within this context of political upheaval and uncertainty, tracing the idea back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of primitive man. This section examines events in the colonies of Britain, in the West Indies and India particularly, rebellion in Ireland, the threat of invasion from France and the Act of Union (1801), leading up to the Abolition of Colonial Slavery in 1833. The work of Adam Smith, *Enquiry into the Wealth of Nations* (1776) was extremely influential in this period, beginning the trend in free-market economics which has continued to this day, while Thomas Malthus's predictions for the geometric rise in populations fed conservative hysteria. This section briefly considers the cost of living for those in the labouring classes during this time of Industrial Revolution, times of bad and good harvest, looking at the

Luddite and machine-breaking movements leading up to political reform and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1845.

The American Revolution

Depending on the political views of those involved, the years of the Romantic period were considered either times of great optimism when liberty spread across America and Europe and human rights were being openly discussed and enshrined in the constitutions of fledgling democracies, or as dark days in which the threat of revolution was always present to challenge status, property, traditional hierarchies and security. The American Revolution and War of Independence (1775–83) was viewed in many different ways: applauded by some who encouraged America to throw off the yoke of its British oppressor but condemned by others who regarded it as a lessening of British power, trade and world reputation. In Thomas Paine's book *Common Sense* (1776), he called for America to free itself from Britain, arguing that a government based on inheritance (in which power is passed down from generation to generation, as it is in the case of the English monarch or the House of Lords) was tyrannous, and that the claim that it was fair was 'farcical' (Paine 1995: 8).

The result of the American rebellion was the loss of the American colonies – and this hit Britain hard. The deciding factor had been the taxes that the British Government demanded of the 13 states, and the question of how to control colonies elsewhere after the War of Independence had been lost was one with which Britain continued to have difficulties. America, though, was depicted as the land of the free, and for this reason was the place that Joseph Priestley fled to when he was attacked by the so-called Church and King mobs in 1791. For similar reasons, the poets Coleridge and Robert Southey planned a scheme to emigrate to the Susquehanna river in Pennsylvania, near Priestley, that they called 'pantisocracy'. They imagined a commune-style life based on principles of equality, with the community equally sharing wealth and property. In the early 1780s, the situation

in America led people to look again at the British constitution and to ask for parliamentary reform, though this abated after Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger's moderate reforms seemed to mollify such calls and to restore confidence in the Government.

The French Revolution

There were tangible links between the events that unfolded in America and the events of the French Revolution, not least in the person of Thomas Paine, whose *Rights of Man* (1791–2) defended the revolution in France. Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, also had firm political links with France, serving there as the American Minister. The overthrow of the *ancien régime* in France, a political system that encouraged decadence and luxury legitimated by the absolute rule of the king, was almost universally heralded in Britain. News of the fall of the Bastille, a prison in Paris, on 14 July 1789 was greeted with enthusiasm and approbation. Britain regarded itself as possessing a fairer constitution than France, with its three-tiered system of 'checks and balances' enforced by the monarch, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The French Revolution was, in general, regarded in Britain as catching up with the progress that had been made since its own bloodless 'glorious revolution' of 1688, when the present system, called constitutional monarchy, had been established. Wordsworth visited France twice during the revolutionary period, and looking back on these times in *The Prelude* declared, 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!', while Percy Shelley, who was only born in 1792, described the French Revolution as the 'master theme of the epoch in which we live' (Norton 2006, vol. 2: 374; Shelley 1964, vol. 1: 504). Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams were among the British writers who lived for a period in France during these heady days.

Amidst this pro-revolutionary feeling in Britain, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) at first