Recent criticism has often overlooked William Blake’s relationship to the bourgeois culture of sentimentalism, focusing instead on his association with the radical London underworld of revolutionaries, artisans and plebeian dissenters. By removing Blake from their company and reading him instead through the polite world he knew well, Susan Matthews sets out to give us a new Blake, as well as a new angle on the conflicted development of a bourgeois culture in the late eighteenth century which was in the process of redefining the role and meaning of sexuality. With imaginative use of personalities, texts and images taken from an original range of archival material, Matthews returns to the Age of Sensibility and finds within its changing landscape answers to some of the crucial questions that remain about an artist and writer whose work continues to challenge scholars and critics today.

SUSAN MATTHEWS is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Roehampton University.
This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those ‘great national events’ that were ‘almost daily taking place’: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanisation, industrialisation, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion and literature were reworked in texts such as Frankenstein and Biographia Literaria; gender relations in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Don Juan; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; poetic form, content and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of comment or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of ‘literature’ and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars, on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

For a complete list of titles published, see end of book.
Contents

List of illustrations vii
Acknowledgements viii
Abbreviations x

Introduction: the birth of sexuality 1
1 ‘Happy copulation’: visual enthusiasm and the sexual gaze 16
2 Fuseli and the ‘female dream’ of Europe 30
3 A history of softness: William Hayley and The Triumphs of Temper 56
4 The Essay on Old Maids and the learned lady 82
5 Cowper’s fear: nature, population, apocalypse 110
6 Blake reads Richardson: anthologies, annotation and cultures of reading 141
7 A ‘blank in Nature’: Blake and cultures of mourning 169
8 Wollstonecraft and the adulterous woman 188

Notes 211
Bibliography 247
Index 265
Illustrations

2 William Hogarth, Enthusiasm Delineated, from John Ireland, Hogarth Illustrated Vol iii and last, March 1798, John Boydell. © The British Library Board (131b7).
8 Henry Fuseli, The Mighty Mother Sails Through the Air from The Temple of Folly, 1787. © The British Library Board (1346146).
9 William Blake, As if an angel dropped down from the clouds, 1809. © The Trustees of the British Museum.
13 Anon, The Tree of Life. Published by Bowles and Carver, undated. © The Trustees of the British Museum.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>List of illustrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Acknowledgements

This long project has incurred a long list of debts, far more than I could remember or list. I would like to thank my colleagues at Roehampton University for continuing support and encouragement. Mark Knight tipped me off about the book of Enoch; Cathy Wells Cole, Nicki Humble, Ian Haywood and Simon Edwards read and commented on early drafts; Martin Priestman made me feel that an interest in Darwin, Cowper and Hayley was not odd; John Seed offered invaluable leads on Malkin’s dissenting background; Kate Teltscher and Zach Leader read my original proposal. Above all I am grateful for the enthusiasm and insights of my students particularly those on my Blake and the Twentieth Century course.

Outside Roehampton, an army of muses, gnomes and fairies have encouraged, supported, nagged, cajoled and inspired this book out into the world. John Whale commissioned my first essay on Blake a very long time ago (and even then did not think it old historicism). I am grateful to Steve Clark for demanding a series of essays and for inviting me to the 2000 Blake conference at the Tate without which I would never have thought of writing again. Jon Mee not only invited me to speak to the Oxford Romantic Realignments seminar but spotted a book in my overlong paper. Helen Bruder and Tristanne Connolly provoked, inspired and commissioned an essay for Queer Blake as well as organising a conference that propelled the last changes in my book. It was a pleasure to meet some names familiar from my footnotes. Luisa Calè read an early draft of my first chapter and her work on Blake and Fuseli has been as important as her friendship. I learnt a great deal from Sarah Haggarty’s patient editing of my essay in Blake and Conflict. Thanks also to David Fallon, Mark Crosby and Angus Whitehead for help and advice. I am lucky to have found a friend and supporter in Anne Janowitz. Martin Myrone’s restaging of Blake’s 1809 exhibition shaped my thinking about the end of the book and Philippa Simpson supplied the best of my
pictures at the last moment: thank you to both. Perhaps my greatest debt is to those whose ideas I argue with and whose generosity and rigour is a model to follow. All Blake critics claim that ‘opposition is true friendship’ and I could not have formed my own argument without the work of those critics who have made Blake’s visual and verbal texts a rich repository of enthusiasms and insights.

I am very grateful for the patience and continuing support of James Chandler, Linda Bree and Elizabeth Hanlon at Cambridge University Press and to the anonymous readers who helped me to firm up my argument.

Blake knew that ‘Four Mighty Ones are in every Man’ but did not realise that their names are Alfie, Frankie, George and Agnes. My Zoas understand intellectual war and have contributed to this project more than they know. My husband, the Lambeth writer and artist Matthew Meadows, has endured the presence of another Lambeth writer and artist for too long. Even if he has not enjoyed the process, I am glad that he has endured.


Abbreviations