The loss of Britain’s North American colonies sparked an intense debate about the nature of colonization in the period 1770–1800. Drawing on archival research into colonies in Africa and Australia, including Sierra Leone and Botany Bay, Deirdre Coleman shows how the growing popularity of the anti-slavery movement gave a utopian cast to the debate about colonization. This utopianism can be seen most clearly in Romantic attempts to found an empire without slaves, a new world which would also encompass revolutionary sexual, racial and labour arrangements. From Henry Smeathman and John Clarkson in Sierra Leone to Arthur Phillip and William Dawes in Botany Bay, Coleman analyses the impact of the discourses and ideals underlying Romantic colonization. She argues that these paved the way for racial strife in West Africa and the eventual dispossession of Australia’s native people.

Deirdre Coleman is Associate Professor of English at the University of Sydney. Author of Coleridge and ‘The Friend’, 1809–1810 (1988) and Maiden Voyages and Infant Colonies (1999), she has published on anti-slavery discourse, travel literature and racial ideology in the journals Eighteenth-Century Studies, English Literary History and Women’s Writing. She has also contributed chapters to The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge (Cambridge, 2002) and Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770–1840 (Cambridge, 2002).
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, urbanization, industrialization, 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 response 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.

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ROMANTIC COLONIZATION AND BRITISH ANTI-SLAVERY

DEIRDRE COLEMAN
For Gretta
‘There is not a more difficult subject for the understanding of men
than to govern a large Empire upon a plan of Liberty.’

(Edmund Burke, on the America colonies, 1766)
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