This original book examines the way in which the Romantic period’s culture of posterity inaugurates a tradition of writing which demands that the poet should write for an audience of the future: the true poet, a figure of neglected genius, can only be properly appreciated after death. Andrew Bennett argues that this involves a radical shift in the conceptualisation of the poet and poetic reception, with wide-ranging implications for the poetry and poetics of the Romantic period. He surveys the contexts for this transformation of the relationship between poet and audience, engaging with issues such as the commercialisation of poetry, the gendering of the canon, and the construction of poetic identity. Bennett goes on to discuss the strangely compelling effects which this new reception theory produces in the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Byron, who have come to embody, for posterity, the figure of the Romantic poet.

ROMANTIC POETS
AND THE
CULTURE OF POSTERITY
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 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.

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*
ROMANTIC POETS
AND THE
CULTURE OF POSTERITY

ANDREW BENNETT
For Anna
## Contents

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**List of abbreviations**

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In the last chapter of this book, chapter 8, I spend some time contemplating the complex ramifications of debt repayment, paying honour, and the rendering of a gift. In the context of having written that chapter, it should come as no surprise to me to find that the acknowledgements pages of a book turn out to be some of the hardest to write. In full knowledge of such difficulties, I would nevertheless like to thank a number of people. Michael Bradshaw, Nicholas Roe and the two readers for Cambridge University Press read an earlier draft of the book when I thought that it was more or less finished, and showed me that it wasn’t: I am grateful to them for their detailed comments and for helping me to make sense of this book and, I hope, to make it make sense. Lucy Newlyn, whose work on the anxiety of reception in Romantic poetry and poetics is in many ways close to my own, generously allowed me to read some of her as yet unpublished research and has provided a sympathetic and challenging audience for parts of my book. Stephen Cheeke, Josie Dixon, John Lyon, Andrew Nicholson, Nicholas Royle, Timothy Webb, and the Cambridge Studies in Romanticism series editors made significant contributions to the final shape of the book by reading and commenting on my ideas as they developed. All of these people have given generously of their time and energy, and this would have been a lesser book without their responses, without their challenges to me to rethink and refine my ideas, and without their interest in my work. During the years that I have been writing this book I have taught English at the Universities of Tampere, Aalborg and Bristol, and I would like to acknowledge the way that the heads of department in all three institutions – Ralf Normman, Ernst Ullrich-Pinkert and Timothy Webb – supported my research during this time. Undergraduate and postgraduate students, particularly at the University of Bristol, have responded, often quizzically, often energetically, to my attempts to develop some of these ideas in seminars. On a more personal level, I
would also like to acknowledge the way that, over the years, friends and family have supported me and shown interest in work which is often very far from their own personal and professional concerns, and I would particularly like to thank my mother, Ann Bennett, who has given me crucial practical support, including somewhere to stay on my frequent visits to Cambridge University Library. I have presented parts of this book as papers at seminars and conferences in Aalborg, Aarhus, Bangor, Bristol, Chichester, Debrecen, Durham, Loughborough, New York, Stirling, Swansea, Tampere and Tartu, and I am grateful to the organisers of these occasions, and to their audiences, for the chance to try out my ideas and for the stimulus to write, think and rethink. My greatest debt is to my wife, Anna Hämäläinen-Bennett, who has lived with this book through from its inception to its afterlife as printed text and to whom the book is dedicated.

Parts of this book have already appeared elsewhere and are republished here by permission of the editors of the respective publications. Parts of chapters 1 and 2 were published as ‘Coleridge on Reputation’, in *La Questione Romantica* 5 (1999); a short section of chapter 4 appeared as ‘Speaking with the Dead: New Historicism in Theory’, in David Robertson (ed.), *English Studies and History* (Tampere English Studies, 1994); a slightly shorter version of chapter 6 appeared as ‘Keats’s Prescience, His Renown’, in *Romanticism* 2:1 (1996); an earlier version of chapter 7 was published as ‘Shelley in Posterity’, in Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (eds.), *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); some paragraphs from chapter 1 appeared as part of an essay entitled ‘On Posterity’ in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12:1 (1999). I am grateful to the editors of these volumes for permission to use this material.
Abbreviations

**Books**


**DQW**  De Quincey’s *Works*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1862).


List of abbreviations


Journals

CI  Critical Inquiry
ELH  English Literary History
JEGP  Journal of English and Germanic Philology
KSJ  Keats–Shelley Journal
MLQ  Modern Language Quarterly
MP  Modern Philology
SEL  Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900
SiR  Studies in Romanticism