ROMANTICISM AND CHILDHOOD

How and why childhood became so important to such a wide range of Romantic writers has long been one of the central questions of literary historical studies. Ann Wierda Rowland discovers new answers to this question in the rise of a vernacular literary tradition. In the Romantic period the child came fully into its own as the object of increasing social concern and cultural investment; at the same time, modern literary culture consolidated itself along vernacular, national lines. *Romanticism and Childhood* is the first study to examine the intersections of these historical developments and the first study to demonstrate that a rhetoric of infancy and childhood – the metaphors, images, figures and phrases repeatedly used to represent and conceptualize childhood – enabled Romantic writers to construct a national literary history and culture capable of embracing a wider range of literary forms.

Ann Wierda Rowland is an Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Kansas. She has published articles on William Wordsworth, Walter Scott, the Romantic ballad revival, the Romantic novel and sentimental fiction.
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 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.

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ROMANTICISM AND CHILDHOOD

The Infantilization of British Literary Culture

ANN WIERDA ROWLAND
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