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978-0-521-86382-7 - The Invention of Evening: Perception and Time in Romantic Poetry

Christopher R. Miller

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## THE INVENTION OF EVENING

Lyric poetry has long been considered an art form of timelessness, but Romantic poets became fascinated by one period of time above all others: evening, the threshold between day and night. Christopher R. Miller investigates the cultural background of this development in the tradition of evening poetry, which ranges from the idyllic settings of Virgil to the urban twilights of T. S. Eliot, and especially flourished in the works of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. In fresh readings of familiar Romantic poems, Miller shows how evening settings enabled poets to represent the passage of time and to associate it with subtle movements of thought and perception. His investigation leads to new ways of reading canonical works, and of thinking about the kinds of themes which may be evoked by lyric verse.

CHRISTOPHER R. MILLER is Associate Professor of English at Yale University.

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## PERCEPTION AND TIME IN ROMANTIC POETRY

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This project began with an attempt to explain the peculiar power of a two-word phrase in the last stanza of Keats's ode "To Autumn": "and now." In one grammatical stroke, it seemed to take in the events of the passing season (with the backward glance of its conjunction) and to situate the poem in an ongoing present (with its hovering adverb). And now, over a decade later, it is with the feeling evoked by that cumulative phrase that I wish to thank the people who have meant the most to the writing of this book. I began thinking about the Autumn Ode in a seminar taught by Helen Vendler, and her work – as both generous mentor and exemplary critic – has had a profound influence on my own. Jim Engell, meanwhile, gave me inexhaustible bibliographic help and advice on all things Coleridgean and Wordsworthian. I would also like to thank my Amherst College professors David Sofield and Bill Pritchard, who taught me modern American and British Romantic poetry, respectively; and Vincent Cheng, who introduced me to the study of lyric (and the pleasures of browsing the Norton Anthology) in a summer school course at the University of Southern California in 1985.

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