ROMANTICISM, REPUBLICANISM, AND THE SWISS MYTH

The first detailed treatment of Switzerland in British literature and culture from Joseph Addison to John Ruskin, this book analyzes the aesthetic and political uses of what is commonly called the “Swiss myth” in the parallel development of Romanticism and liberalism. The myth merged the country’s legends going back to the Middle Ages with the Enlightenment image of a happy, free nation of alpine shepherds. Its unique combination of conservative, progressive, and radical associations enabled writers before the French Revolution to call for democratic reforms, whereas those coming after could refigure it as a conservative alternative to French liberté. Integrating intellectual history with literary studies, and addressing a wide range of Romantic-period texts and authors, among them Byron, the Shelleys, Hemans, Scott, Coleridge, and, above all, Wordsworth, the book argues that the myth contributed to the liberal idea of the people as a sublime yet sleeping sovereign.

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; and 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 commentary 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 University Press, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

See the end of the book for a complete list of published titles.
For Sonia Bolea Climent
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I began researching this project in order to better understand my native country upon moving there in 2001. As I quickly found out, it meant not only becoming acquainted with a complex history and large corpus of printed and manuscript texts, made even more formidable by the development of the digital archive, but also addressing three of the period’s defining themes, namely the sublime, Rousseau, and revolution, and trying to contextualize all of this with the ever-expanding scholarship on republicanism. As a result, this book took an embarrassingly long time to complete, and it would require an inordinate amount of space to thank all the people and institutions that have helped me over the years.

Initial research was carried out when one still needed to spend ample time in a library. This is a guilty pleasure that I have tried to keep up through archival work. I wish to thank the librarians and archivists at the Swiss National Library, the Neuchâtel University Library, the Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Neuchâtel, the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne, the Geneva Cantonal Archives, the Vaud Cantonal Archives, the Basel University Library, the British Library, the Bodleian Library, the Wordsworth Trust, the Keswick Museum, Chatsworth House, and the University of California–Berkeley library. I also wish to thank the Swiss National Fund for Scientific Research, which supported two ancillary projects, as well as the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of the University of Neuchâtel for two research leaves, and the English department at the University of California at Berkeley for sponsoring me as a visiting scholar.

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A Note on the Text

Romantic-period spelling of Swiss names is notoriously inconsistent. Except when quoting texts directly, all place names have been modernized (e.g. Schwyz rather than Schwytz) and, when relevant, anglicized (e.g. Geneva rather than Genève). For the sake of clarity, I have respected earlier British usage in some cases, notably when authors replaced German toponyms with the more familiar French ones (e.g. Morat rather than Murten). The names of people and titles of works are normally given in the original unless commonly anglicized (e.g. William Tell rather than Wilhelm Tell, *The Social Contract* rather than *Le contrat social*). Unless specified, all translations are my own.