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978-1-107-02706-0 - Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy:

Rebellious Daughters, 1786–1826

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ROMANTIC WOMEN WRITERS, REVOLUTION, AND PROPHECY

Convinced that the end of the world was at hand, many Romantic women writers assumed the role of the female prophet to sound the alarm before the final curtain fell. Orianne Smith argues that their prophecies were performative acts in which the prophet believed herself to be authorized by God to bring about social or religious transformation through her words. Utilizing a wealth of archival material across a wide range of historical documents, including sermons, prophecies, letters, and diaries, Orianne Smith explores the work of prominent women writers – from Hester Piozzi to Ann Radcliffe, from Helen Maria Williams to Anna Barbauld and Mary Shelley – through the lens of their prophetic influence. As this book demonstrates, Romantic women writers not only thought in millenarian terms, but they did so in a way that significantly alters our current critical view of the relations between gender, genre, and literary authority in this period.

ORIANNE SMITH is an Associate Professor of the Department of English at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Her edition of Mary Robinson's *Hubert de Sevrac, A Romance of the Eighteenth Century* (1796) was published in 2009.

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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.

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For my daughter Annalise

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This project began when I was a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago as a conclusion to a paper on sectarian prophecy in the seventeenth century that gestured to a possible link between the political prophecies of the Civil War female prophets and the visionary discourse of Romantic women writers. My advisor, Steve Jones, encouraged me to pursue the topic, which evolved into my dissertation and, several years later, this book. Steve deserves the lion's share of my acknowledgments for his invaluable guidance and for the many coffee-fueled conversations we had at the Unicorn Cafe about this project and all things Romantic. Thank you, Steve! Many thanks too to the other faculty members of Loyola's English department who supported me, offered me concrete advice, and cheered me along: Chris Kendrick, Tom Kaminski, and in particular Jack Kerker. Adriana Craciun's exciting work on gender and Romanticism was an inspiration early on, and I was fortunate to have her as a teacher when she was at Loyola. My two close friends and fellow "furies," Megan Musgrave and Anne Close, gave me perspective and made me laugh. A Huntington Library Michael J. Connell Foundation Fellowship; a Keats–Shelley Association of America Carl H. Pforzheimer, Jr. Research Grant; and a Chicago English-Speaking Union Fellowship for Study in the UK enabled me to conduct the archival research required by this project. My last year of writing and research at Loyola was funded by an Arthur J. Schmitt Dissertation Fellowship, which was also much appreciated.

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