ROMANTICISM AND THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE

Bringing together studies in theater history, print culture, and literature, this book offers a new consideration of Romantic-period writing in Britain. Recovering a wide range of theatrical criticism from newspapers and periodicals, some of it overlooked since its original publication in Regency London, Jonathan Mulrooney explores new contexts for the work of the actor Edmund Kean, essayist William Hazlitt, and poet John Keats. Kean’s ongoing presence as a figure in the theatrical news presented readers with a provocative reimagining of personal subjectivity and a reworking of the British theatrical tradition. Hazlitt and Keats, in turn, imagined the essayist and the poet along similar theatrical lines, reframing Romantic prose and poetics. Taken together, these case studies illustrate not only theater’s significance to early nineteenth-century Londoners but also the importance of theater’s textual legacies for our own reassessment of “Romanticism” as a historical and cultural phenomenon.

JONATHAN MULROONEY is Professor of English at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.
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.
ROMANTICISM AND THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE

Kean, Hazlitt, and Keats in the Age of Theatrical News

JONATHAN MULROONEY

For Grace and Anna
Contents

List of Figures page viii
Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

Part I The Making of British Theater Audiences 21
1 Theater and the Daily News 23
2 Britain’s Theatrical Press, 1800–1830 57

Part II Theater and Late Romanticism 107
3 Edmund Kean’s Controversy 109
4 Hazlitt’s Romantic Occasionalism 152
5 Keats, Kean, and the Poetics of Interruption 191

Bibliography 236
Index 254
Figures

1. John Orlando Parry, *The Posterman* (1835); by permission of the Dunhill Archive.  
2. Front page of *The Times* (Monday, September 4, 1809); by permission of the British Library.  
3. George Cruikshank, “Keen-ish Sport in Cox’s Court!!: or Symptoms of Crim.Con. in Drury Lane” (Fairburn, 1824); by permission of Folger Shakespeare Library.  
4. “The Court of King’s Bench turn’d into a Cock pit, or 800 Symptoms of Kean Sport” (Marks, 1825); by permission of Folger Shakespeare Library.  
5. “Mr. Kean as Richard The IIIrd, Act 5th, Scene 4th” (Marks, early 1829); by permission of Folger Shakespeare Library.  
6. R. Cruikshank, “The Hostile Press; and the consequences of Crim.Con or Shakespeare in danger” (Fairburn, 1825); by permission of Folger Shakespeare Library.

Jacket Illustration: Detail of John Orlando Parry, *The Posterman* (1835); by permission of the Dunhill Archive/Getty Images.
Acknowledgments

This book emerged from a desire to bring together two seemingly disparate early interests – performed theater and Romantic poems. It has been overlong in the making, with an extended hiatus in the middle in favor of other commitments, and consequently I have the pleasure of acknowledging those who offered much help and many favors along the way. Part of Chapter 1 was published in Nineteenth-Century Contexts, and part of Chapter 5 appeared previously in Studies in Romanticism (published by the Trustees of Boston University). I thank the journal editors for permission to reprint these materials. A passage from Chapter 4 appeared in different form in an essay in The Fountain Light: Studies in Romanticism and Religion, ed. J. Robert Barth (2002).

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x

Acknowledgments

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