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HOW TO STUDY ROMANTIC POETRY

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Paul O'Flinn

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First published 1988

Published by
Higher and Further Education Division
MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Typeset by Wessex Typesetters
(Division of The Eastern Press Ltd)
Frome, Somerset

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
O'Flinn, Paul

How to study romantic poetry.—(How to study literature).

1. Poetry in English, 1745–1837.

Romanticism. Study techniques

I. Title II. Series

821'.6'09145

ISBN 978-0-333-42863-4 ISBN 978-1-349-09127-0 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-09127-0

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General editors' preface

EVERYBODY who studies literature, either for an examination or simply for pleasure, experiences the same problem: how to understand and respond to the text. As every student of literature knows, it is perfectly possible to read a book over and over again and yet still feel baffled and at a loss as to what to say about it. One answer to this problem, of course, is to accept someone else's view of the text, but how much more rewarding it would be if you could work out your own critical response to any book you choose or are required to study.

The aim of this series is to help you develop your critical skills by offering practical advice about how to read, understand and analyse literature. Each volume provides you with a clear method of study so that you can see how to set about tackling texts on your own. While the authors of each volume approach the problem in a different way, every book in the series attempts to provide you with some broad ideas about how to think about literature; each volume then shows you how to apply these ideas in a way which should help you construct your own analysis and interpretation. Unlike most critical books, therefore, the books in this series do not simply convey someone else's thinking about a text, but encourage you and show you how to think about a text for yourself.

Each book is written with an awareness that you are likely to be preparing for an examination, and therefore practical advice is given not only on how to understand and analyse literature, but also on how to organise a written response. Our hope is that, although these books are intended to serve a practical purpose, they may also enrich your enjoyment of literature by making you a more confident reader, alert to the interest and pleasure to be derived from literary texts.

John Peck
Martin Coyle

Chronology

- 1757 Blake born, London.
1759 Wollstonecraft born, Epping.
1764 Hargreaves invents spinning jenny.
1769 Watt patents steam engine.
1770 Estimated population of England and Wales: 7.48 million.
Wordsworth born, Cockermouth, Cumberland.
1772 Coleridge born, Ottery St Mary, Devon.
1774 Priestley discovers oxygen.
1775 Austen born, Steventon, Hampshire.
1776 American Declaration of Independence.
1779 Crompton invents spinning mule.
1780 Gordon Riots: Blake at the burning of Newgate Prison.
1783 Treaty of Versailles: American independence recognised.
1785 Cartwright invents power loom.
1788 Byron born, London.
1789 Fall of the Bastille: French Revolution begins.
Blake, *Songs of Innocence*.
1790 Estimated population of England and Wales: 8.68 million.
1791 Paine, *Rights of Man*, Part One.
1792 Royal Proclamation Against Divers Seditious Publications.
Paine outlawed.
Continental allies invade France. September massacres in Paris.
Shelley born, Warnham, Sussex.
Paine, *Rights of Man*, Part Two.
Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.
Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.
1793 Louis XVI executed. Britain and France at war. The Reign of Terror.
Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*.
Wordsworth, 'Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff'.

- 1794 Trial and acquittal of Holcroft, Thelwall and Tooke.
Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.
- 1795 Seditious Meetings Act and Treasonable Practices Act.
Keats born, London.
- 1796 Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects* (including 'The Eolian Harp').
- 1797 Coleridge writes 'Kubla Khan'.
Wollstonecraft dies.
- 1798 Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*.
- 1799 London Corresponding Society suppressed.
Combination Acts make unions illegal.
Napoleon assumes absolute power as First Consul.
Wordsworth completes two-part *Prelude*.
- 1800 Britain produces over 80 per cent of world's coal and
over 40 per cent of pig iron.
Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, second edition.
- 1802 Peace of Amiens (March): brief interlude in Anglo-
French war.
First practical steamship launched on Clyde.
- 1803 Anglo-French war resumes.
- 1804 Napoleon becomes Emperor.
Blake tried for sedition and acquitted.
- 1805 Battle of Trafalgar.
Wordsworth completes second version of *The Prelude*.
- 1810 Cobbett imprisoned for two years for attacking the
use of flogging in the army.
- 1811 Population of England and Wales: 10.16 million.
First attacks by Luddites in Nottinghamshire.
- 1812 Tory Prime Minister Spencer Perceval murdered.
- 1813 Leigh Hunt imprisoned for two years for libelling the
Prince Regent.
Southey Poet Laureate.
Wordsworth Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland.
- 1814 Napoleon abdicates.
Stephenson's locomotive.
Wordsworth, *The Excursion*.
- 1815 Battle of Waterloo. End of Anglo-French war.
Restoration of Louis XVIII.
- 1816 Coleridge, *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan*, *Pains of Sleep*.
- 1817 Habeas Corpus suspended.
Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*. Keats, *Poems*.

- 1818 Keats starts *Hyperion* and publishes *Endymion*.
1819 Peterloo Massacre. 'Six Acts' severely limit the freedom of the press and the right to demonstrate. Keats starts *The Fall of Hyperion* and writes 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' and his six major odes.
1820 Keats, *Lamia, Isabella, Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*.
1821 Population of England and Wales: 12 million.
Napoleon dies.
Keats dies.
1822 Foreign Secretary Castlereagh commits suicide.
Shelley dies.
1824 Byron dies.
1827 Blake dies
1834 Coleridge dies.
1850 Wordsworth dies. The final version of *The Prelude* published.