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978-0-521-89755-6 - Romanticism, Revolution and Language: The Fate of the Word from Samuel Johnson to George Eliot

John Beer

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ROMANTICISM, REVOLUTION AND LANGUAGE

The repercussions of the French Revolution included erosion of many previously held certainties in Britain, as in the rest of Europe. Even the authority of language as a cornerstone of knowledge was called into question and the founding principles of intellectual disciplines challenged, as Romantic writers developed new ways of expressing their philosophy of the imagination and the human heart. This book traces the impact of revolution on language, from William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, to William Hazlitt, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot. A leading scholar in Romantic literature and theology, John Beer offers a persuasive new account of post-revolutionary continuities between the major Romantic writers and their Victorian successors.

JOHN BEER is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Cambridge, and Emeritus Fellow of Peterhouse. He has published widely on Romantic literature, especially on Coleridge, Wordsworth and Blake, as well as on Victorian and modern literature. He was Stanton Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Cambridge for 2006–7.

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Preface and acknowledgments

This volume owes its origins to an invitation to give the Stanton Lectures in the Philosophy of Religion for 2006–7, eight of which were delivered in the Michaelmas term 2006 under the title ‘The Crisis of the Word in English Romantic Literature’. I am particularly grateful to the Faculty of Divinity in the University of Cambridge for this opportunity, which provided a basis for most of the chapters gathered here. A small amount of work in the book has been published previously: Chapter 4 is similar to my contribution to the volume *1800: The New Lyrical Ballads*, edited by Nicola Trott and Seamus Perry (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), while a section of Chapter 10 (not among the lectures given in Cambridge) was offered for the Gaskell Centenary conference at Canterbury in July 2007, subsequently to be published in the *Gaskell Society Journal*.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Tom Mayberry, whose lecture on Coleridge in Somerset at an early Coleridge Summer Conference first drew my attention to the diary of William Holland and its significance.

The discussions of shifts in British culture during the relevant periods could profitably be complemented by reading recent work on social studies, notably E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: V. Gollancz, 1963).

Abbreviations

AL	<i>Jane Austen's Letters</i> , ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).
AN	<i>The Novels of Jane Austen: The Text Based on Collation of the Early Editions</i> , ed. R. W. Chapman, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923).
BE	<i>The Poetry and Prose of William Blake</i> , ed. David V. Erdman; commentary by Harold Bloom (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday 1965).
BE ii	<i>The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake</i> : revised edition of the above (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
BK	<i>Blake: Complete Writings with Variant Readings</i> , ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957; repr. with additions and corrections in the Oxford Standard Authors series, 1966).
BQ	<i>Blake Newsletter: An Illustrated Quarterly</i> , continued as <i>Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly</i> (Albuquerque, N.M.; Berkeley, Calif., 1970–).
CAR	Coleridge, <i>Aids to Reflection</i> [1825], ed. John Beer, CC 9 (Princeton, N.J. and London, 1993).
CBL	Coleridge, <i>Biographia Literaria</i> [1817], ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, CC 7, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London, 1983).
CC	<i>The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge</i> , general editor Kathleen Coburn, associate editor Bart Winer, 16 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969–2002).
CET	Coleridge, <i>Essays on His Times</i> , ed. D. V. Erdman, CC 3, 3 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London, 1969).

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<i>CFriend</i>	Coleridge, <i>The Friend</i> [1809–18], ed. Barbara Rooke, CC 4, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London, 1969).
<i>CL</i>	Coleridge, <i>Collected Letters</i> , ed. E. L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71).
<i>CLects</i> (1795)	Coleridge, <i>Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion</i> , ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, CC 1 (Princeton, N.J. and London, 1971).
<i>CLects</i> (1808–19)	Coleridge, <i>Lectures 1808–1819: On Literature</i> , ed. R. A. Foakes, CC 5, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London, 1987).
<i>CLects</i> (1818–1819)	Coleridge, <i>Lectures 1818–1819: On the History of Philosophy</i> , ed. J. R. De J. Jackson, CC 8, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London, 2000).
<i>CM</i>	Coleridge, <i>Marginalia</i> , ed. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, CC 12, 6 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London, 1980–2001).
<i>CN</i>	Coleridge, <i>Notebooks</i> , ed. Kathleen Coburn and Anthony John Harding, 5 vols. in 10 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1959–2002).
<i>COM</i>	Coleridge, <i>Opus Maximum</i> , ed. Thomas McFarland, assisted by Nicholas Halmi, CC 15 (Princeton, N.J. and London 2002).
<i>CPL</i> (1949)	<i>The Philosophical Lectures, hitherto unpublished, of Samuel Taylor Coleridge</i> , ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949).
<i>CPW</i> (Beer)	Coleridge, <i>Poems</i> , ed. J. B. Beer, new edn, Everyman Library (London: David Campbell Publishers Ltd. and Random House, 2000).
<i>CPW</i> (CC)	Coleridge, <i>Poetical Works</i> , ed. J. C. C. Mays, CC 16, 6 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London, 2001).
<i>CPW</i> (EHC)	Coleridge, <i>Poetical Works</i> , ed. E. H. Coleridge, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).
<i>CShC</i>	<i>Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism</i> , [1936], ed. T. M. Raysor; Everymans Library, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, and New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960).

x	<i>Abbreviations</i>
CSWF	Coleridge, <i>Shorter Works and Fragments</i> , ed. H. J. Jackson and J. R. De J. Jackson, CC 11, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London 1995).
CTT	Coleridge, <i>Table Talk</i> [1835], ed. Carl Woodring, CC 14, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J. and London 1990).
CWatchman	Coleridge, <i>The Watchman</i> [1796], ed. Lewis Patton, CC 2 (Princeton, N.J. and London 1970).
DWJ	<i>Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth</i> , ed. E. de Selincourt, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941).
GEL	<i>The George Eliot Letters</i> , ed. G. S. Haight, 9 vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1954–78).
GK	<i>The Works of Mrs. Gaskell</i> , with introductions by A. W. Ward, The Knutsford Edition, 8 vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1906).
GL	<i>The Letters of Mrs Gaskell</i> , ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester University Press, 1966).
GL2	<i>Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell</i> , ed J. A. V. Chapple and Alan Shelston (Manchester University Press, 2000).
HW	<i>The Complete Works of William Hazlitt</i> , ed. P. P. Howe, after the edition of A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1930–4).
KL	<i>The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821</i> , ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).
KP	<i>The Poems of John Keats</i> , ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1970).
LL (Marrs)	<i>The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb</i> , ed. Edwin Marrs, 3 vols. only (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1976).
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i> (Baltimore: 1889–).
RX	John Livingston Lowes, <i>The Road to Xanadu</i> (London: Constable, 1927).
SW	<i>The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley</i> , newly edited by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols. (London: Ernest Benn, and New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1926–30).

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<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement.</i>
<i>WL</i> (1787–1805)	<i>The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787–1805</i> , ed. E. de Selincourt; 2nd edn, rev. C. L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).
<i>WL</i> (1806–11)	<i>The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, 1806–11</i> , ed. E. de Selincourt; 2nd edn, rev. Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
<i>WL</i> (1821–53)	<i>The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, 1821–1853</i> , ed. E. de Selincourt; 2nd edn, rev. A. G. Hill, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–88).
<i>WPrel</i>	<i>The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850</i> , ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1979).
<i>WPrW</i>	Wordsworth, <i>Prose Works</i> , ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).
<i>WPW</i>	Wordsworth, <i>Poetical Works</i> , ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940–9).