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R E V I E W

Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830*

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poets sometimes appear to understand more than we do; they admittedly share our problems but we suspect they have seen these problems more clearly and in greater depth. And in our interpretations it may seem that (rather than explaining their 'relevance') we are attempting to discover something which, in the silence of their texts, they already know"<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Martin Butlin, *William Blake* (ex. cat.), London, 1978, p. 23.

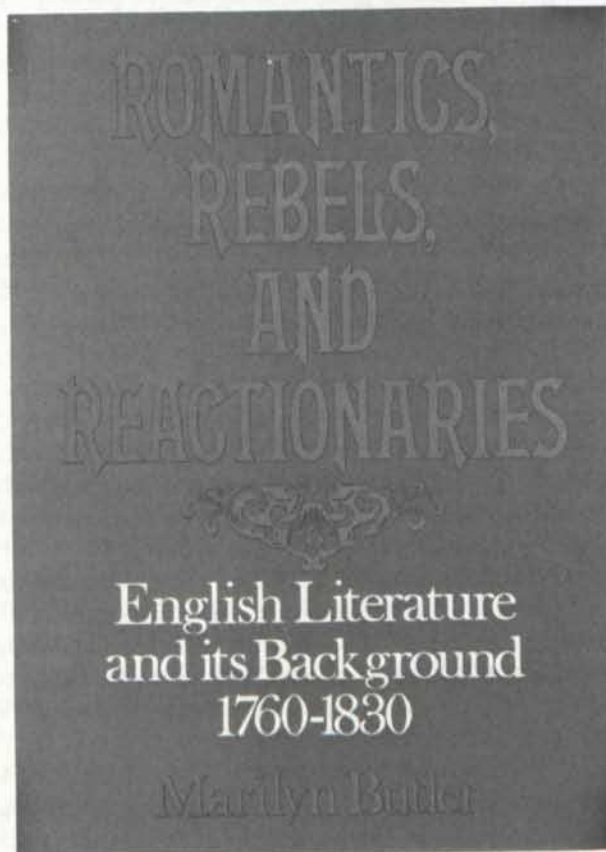
<sup>2</sup> David Bindman, *William Blake: His Art and Times* (ex. cat.), (New Haven and Toronto, 1982), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Hölderlin's *Major Poetry: The Dialectics of Unity* (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1975), p. 7. My thanks to Larry Day for bringing the Unger paragraph to my attention.

Several assumptions and theses make up a credo for this work. "A book is made by its public, the readers it literally finds and the people in the author's mind's eye" (p. 9). The democratization of patronage in 1760-1830 consequently affected all the arts. The writers of the period responded as rebels or reactionaries. Dissent provided "the classic stock of the English left," hence Priestley, Paine, Godwin, Hazlitt, and Blake, and hence the defections of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. Conditions and moods changed rapidly, so that literary periods of such short duration as 1790-98, 1800-15, 1817-20, and 1820-23 can be identified in critical reviews, fiction, and poetry.

Marilyn Butler has shown her superior knowledge and control of documentary and intellectual history in books on the novelists Edgeworth, Austen, and Peacock. Her inclusion now of poets and essayists accompanies a greatly increased factor of speculation. Instead of specific citation, she gives for each chapter "suggestions for further reading." (In keeping with this appeal to the younger student, the publisher has reduced the typeface sufficiently to exclude the aged scholar.) Reliance upon unidentified secondary sources makes it difficult to tell when error is typographical, but insistence upon rapid fluctuations in response to public mood makes significant a misdating of Coleridge's *Watchman* and an implication that Keats could have seen a book by Coleridge entitled *Lay Sermons*. Organization and method resemble those of Frederick E. Pierce, *Currents and Eddies in the English Romantic Generation* (Yale, 1918), although Butler subordinates minor authors in a fashion deemed unscholarly in Pierce's day. She refutes an error then current that Romanticism rebelled against an Augustan eighteenth century. Readings in art history and attention to system lead her to say instead that a "revival of Neoclassicism began with Byron's *Childe Harold*" (p. 181).

The bipolar formulas of the book do not impede novel interpretations and in general encourage them: Wordsworth's Preface of 1800 advances Neoclassical precepts in a Neoclassical way (p. 60). Wordsworth was counter-revolutionary in 1796 (pp. 64-65); later, slower than Coleridge, he recognized that a counter-revolutionary stance could bring popularity (p. 68). Of Blake's works of 1790-94 "the corporate author" (in accord with the axiom quoted at the beginning of this review) "is the urban subclass which emerged through its opposition to Britain's national policy" (p. 43). Blake's roots are "in the artisan world, Protestant, radical, Bible-reading, to which the Swedenborgians appealed before they organized themselves" (pp. 48-49); he "conveys no feeling for the English plot of ground" (p. 44). English Blake, made an internationalist by Fuseli, ranges to America, Europe, Africa, Uranus, Creation, and the Last Trump, all in keeping with the public consciousness of changing political events. Shelley wrote for an elite (p. 114, contrast p. 146). Reviving the old argument that *Alastor* attacks Wordsworth, Butler adds that the "fanatics" at the opening of *The Fall of Hyperion* are



Marilyn Butler. *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982. Pp. 213. \$17.95.

Reviewed by Carl Woodring



Wordsworth and other Christian apologists (p. 152) and that *Mont Blanc* and *Frankenstein* likewise reject Wordsworth's solitaries. Chapter 5, "The Cult of the South," argues that *Lamia*, *Don Juan*, and various works by Shelley and Peacock carry out the anti-Christian sexuality of Erasmus Darwin and Richard Payne Knight. There is a stimulating paragraph on *The Witch of Atlas*; like almost all the assertions concerning individual works, it would be strengthened by development and demonstration.

The method, then, is to show how brief segments within 1760-1830 can be characterized by changed relations between and within literary works of rebellion or reaction. Alert application of the method brings the observation that "the Napoleonic Wars may have cost more lives in proportion to the British population than the 1914-18 war," and that the "failure of literature to reflect the holocaust" illustrates a turning away from the poor after 1800 (p. 115). Setting Germanic Christianity and gloom against liberal Mediterranean classicism, Butler discovers that the early heroes of Byron and Shelley are activists, their later protagonists passive bystanders (p. 125). The same polarization leads to an identification of contradictions in *Manfred* (p. 122).

Many of Butler's past strengths continue in this latest book. I hope that its analysis of rapid fluctuation in taste is accurate enough to predict a short life for this period in which literary historians succumb, at a high price, to the seductions of originality.



## The Gates of Memory

GEOFFREY KEYNES Kt.

Geoffrey Keynes. *The Gates of Memory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, Pp. 428. \$24.95.

Reviewed by Morton D. Paley

When Sir Geoffrey Keynes began working on Blake, there was no reliable edition of the complete writings, no bibliography, and no catalogue of the separate plates. Keynes provided all these and much, much more. Few other scholars can have contributed so much of the fundamental research on a major figure, and yet Blake has been only one of Keynes's numerous literary interests, and those interests coexisted with his brilliant career as a surgeon. *The Gates of Memory* provides us with a fascinating account of the "real Self" of one of the extraordinary figures of our century.

Keynes' editorial interests seem to date back to 1902, when he met Rupert Brooke at Rugby. As a result of their ensuing friendship, Keynes began collecting Brooke's poems; much later he would edit the *Poetical Works* (1946), *Bibliography* (1954), and *Letters* (1968). First authorship also occurred at Rugby with the publication of a prize essay on Roman remains unearthed in a field