



Revolutions in Taste, 1773-1818: Women Writers and the Aesthetics of Romanticism

Fiona Price

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How and to what extent did women writers shape and inform the aesthetics of Romanticism? Were undervalued genres such as the romance, gothic fiction, the tale, and the sentimental and philosophical novel part of a revolution leading to newer, more democratic models of taste? Fiona Price takes up these important questions in her wide-ranging study of women's prose writing during an extended Romantic period. While she offers a re-evaluation of major women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith, Price also places emphasis on less well-known figures, including Joanna Baillie, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Elizabeth Hamilton and Priscilla Wakefield. The revolution in taste occasioned by their writing, she argues, was not only aesthetic but, following in the wake of British debates on the French Revolution, politically charged. Her book departs from previous studies of aesthetics that emphasize the differences between male and female writers or focus on higher status literary forms such as the treatise. In demonstrating that women writers' discussion of taste can be understood as an intervention at the most fundamental level of political involvement, Price advances our understanding of Romantic aesthetics.

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