

Katherine D. Harris

From: owner-RomanticGender@listproc.sjsu.edu on behalf of Dawn Nelson [circe2198@yahoo.com]
Sent: Wednesday, April 26, 2006 9:11 AM
To: RomanticGender@listproc.sjsu.edu
Subject: Abstract and discussion questions for Mellor article

Attachments: Abstract for 232.doc



Abstract for
32.doc (22 KE)

I also attached this as a word document if that is easier for you to read.

Mellor, Anne K. *Romanticism and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1992. 107-143.

"Exhausting the Beautiful" makes the argument that while some female writers like Wollstonecraft were challenging the dominant conception of the ideal woman, others like Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans were actually contributing to the hegemony by writing verse in support of the male constructions of the feminine ideal that was included in the literary annuals. The article begins by discussing Burke's definition of beauty and then describes the way the Landon and Hemans crafted themselves and their poetry to fit this definition. The secondary argument that Mellor makes is that through their poetry, Landon and Hemans actually ended up undermining the very ideology that they were trying to uphold. However, this argument is made in absolutes and is therefore less easy to wholeheartedly agree with. Although the article is sometimes repetitive in its main points, those points nonetheless are made in a clear, straightforward manner which sheds some light on the insidious nature of the literary annual, or as Mellor refers to it: "ideological propaganda."

Discussion questions:

1. Mellor says that both Landon and Hemans end up undermining the very things that their poetry so highly regards: Landon's poetry seems to show that true, lasting love is impossible, while Hemans shows that "domestic felicity may be merely fiction." She seems to imply that the poets did not realize that the ideology in their poetry was "imploding." Isn't it possible that they did understand this and that their treatment of this ideology had a purpose?
2. What are some other definitions of beauty that we have encountered so far? Do these definitions break down along the lines of the male and female or the masculine and feminine? What does beauty mean to each?
3. Mellor describes the illustrations of women at that time in this way: "They promoted an image of the ideal woman as specular, as the object rather than the owner of the gaze. The women in these illustrations typically look down, up or sideways, but rarely straight ahead; they are looked at but they do not see (the viewer; the world before them). They are presented as chaste but nonetheless erotically desirable—with a consistent highlighting of bare white arching necks and broad shoulders and half uncovered breasts." How is this illustrated view of women upheld in the poetry and prose of the time?

-Dawn

When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him. --Jonathan Swift

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