



The Majesty of the People: Popular Sovereignty and the Role of the Writer in the 1790s (Oxford English Monographs)

By Georgina Green

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The Majesty of the People links emerging Romantic ideas about the role of the writer to the ambivalence of the concept of popular sovereignty. By closely examining how theories about the role of the intellectual or the writer are developed as part of the 1790s' contestation of the concept of the majesty of the people, Georgina Green provides a coherent account of debates about popular sovereignty, and contributes to understanding of authorship and the rise of 'culture' in this period. Part one, 'the political existence of the people', shows how the history of ideas about the political role of the people in the eighteenth century meant there was a role for writers and organisations who could challenge the invisibility of the 'people out of doors'. Part two, 'the sovereignty of justice' shows how this urge to give the people a tangible form was moderated by the tension between the sovereignty of will and the sovereignty of justice, a tension foregrounded by Revolutionary France and addressed in the writing of Thomas Paine, Helen Maria Williams, and William Godwin. Part three analyses how this potential tension between popular sovereignty and absolute values such as reason, justice or divinity pressurizes Wordsworth and Coleridge's conception of their role as writers. These enquiries demonstrate the impact of the idea of the Majesty of the People in the 1790s and in emerging conceptions of the role of culture in society.

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Review

brilliant, demanding, but rewarding. Kenneth R. Johnston, *Journal of British Studies* Green's study shows just how unstable the route liberal descriptor 'the majesty of the people' had become by this point, and illuminates the influence on Romantic-era writing of the contest over the phrase's mutable field of referents. John Bugg, *Review of English Studies* compelling ... [with] nuanced insights. Quentin Bailey, *European Romantic Review* With an impressive breadth of reference, this book explores an interconnected set of far-reaching ideas. Green meticulously dissects the concept of popular sovereignty ... It is a challenging but ultimately rewarding read that offers much to anyone concerned with the political debates of the 1790s, with the six writers examined here, or with broader issues of "culture" and "the intellectual" as they take shape in the nineteenth century. Jane Hodson, *Review* 19

About the Author

Georgina Green is a research fellow at the University of York, currently working on the Leverhulme funded project 'Networks of Improvement 1760-1840'.

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