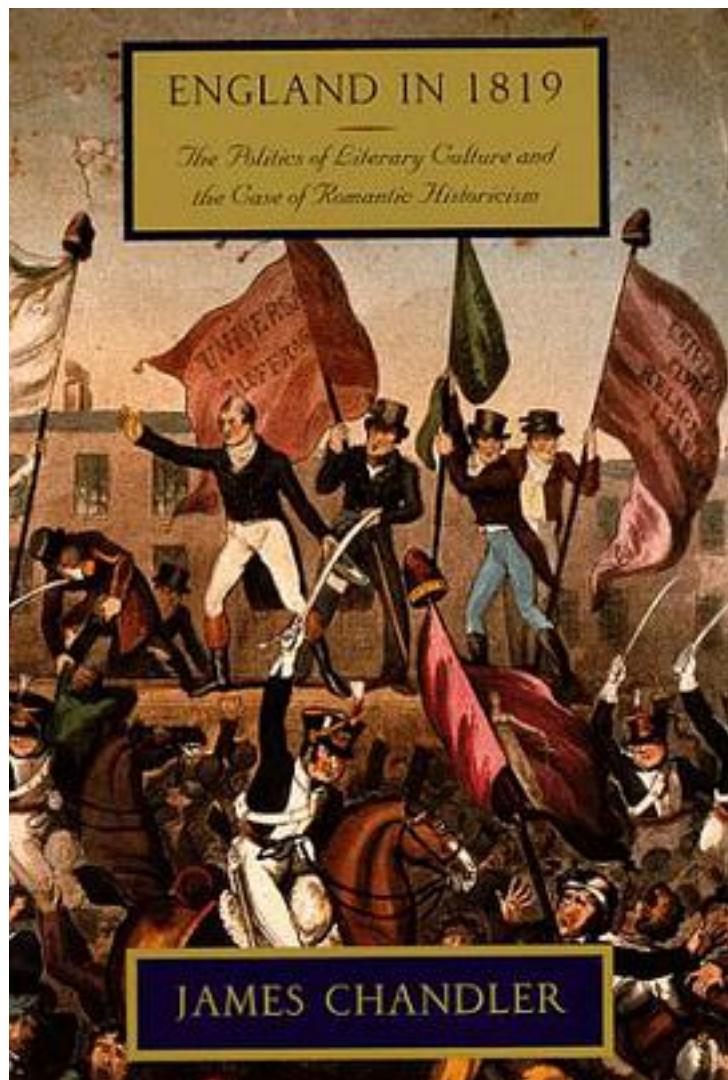


England in 1819



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The year 1819 was the "annus mirabilis" for many British Romantic writers, and the "annus terribilis" for demonstrators protesting the state of parliamentary representation. In 1819 Keats wrote what many consider his greatest poetry. This was the year of Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound", "The Cenci", and "Ode to the West Wind." Wordsworth published his most widely reviewed work, "Peter Bell", and the craze for Walter Scott's historical novels reached its zenith. Many of these writings explicitly engaged with the politics of 1819, in particular the great movement for reform that came to a head that August with an unprovoked attack on unarmed men, women, and children in St Peter's Field, Manchester, a massacre that journalists dubbed "Peterloo". But the year of Peterloo in British history is notable for more than just the volume, value, and topicality of its literature. Writing from 1819, as the author argues, was acutely aware not only of its place in history, but also of its place "as" history - a realization of a literary "spirit of the age" that resonates strongly with the current "return to history" in literary studies. Chandler explores the ties between Romantic and contemporary historicism, such as the shared tendency to seize a single dated event as both important on its own and as a "case" testing general principles. To animate these issues, Chandler offers a series of cases of built around key texts from 1819. Like the famous sonnet by Shelley from which it takes its name, this book simultaneously creates and critiques its own place in history. It sets out to be not only a crucial study of Romanticism, but also a major contribution to an understanding of historicism.

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