

Walter Reed
English/Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts
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What I Did on My Piedmont Project; or,
How I Learned to Read Romanticism in the Light of Ecology
--and to Read Ecology in the Light of Romanticism

After being overstimulated by the Piedmont Project Workshop in May, I set about the business of reconstructing my syllabus for English 330, "Romanticism," in the light of what I had learned from those who had ventured more deeply into the wilderness. I was pleased to discover that my exploration was in one sense a "place revisited," according to the Romantic model, as I connected with early boyhood interests in nature, preservation, Thoreau, rock-collecting, bird watching, etc. I also revisited a theoretical model of cultural history proposed by one of my most inspiring undergraduate teachers, a model that he had called "The Ecology of Mind." I found I was able to use this notion to rethink the way I had long presented the topic of Romanticism to my students, with a new emphasis on its sustainability as a world view or cognitive environment in the midst of the natural environment. In other words, I found myself taking ecology and sustainability both literally and figuratively as I revisited a course I had taught, off and on, for the last thirty years.

As it has turned out, I have probably spent more time and energy reconstructing this familiar course over the last six weeks than I have on any course I've taught. Finding new materials, looking at old materials in a new way, and trying to put new resources for the course on the electronic Web-platform of "Blackboard" have utterly consumed what I thought would be a leisurely beginning of a relatively unoccupied summer. I began by reading several books on the natural history of the English Lake District, the native soil of English Romantic poetry, along with other books on the history of nature writing in this region and elsewhere. The most valuable book was one by Jonathan Bate, a British Romanticist of some stature, entitled *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. In a down-to-earth fashion, Bate argues that the most relevant aspect of the Romantic movement today, especially in England, is not its celebration of human consciousness, its embrace or rejection of socialist politics or its discovery of the 'prison house of language', but its concern with nature and how human beings might live in harmony with the larger eco-system. That is, he returns to what everyone, several generations earlier, thought Romantic poetry was all about. But his is not simply an antiquarian or nostalgic appreciation. Looking at major works by major figures like Wordsworth and Ruskin, he shows that Romanticism is immediately and vitally relevant to the ecological crisis and politics of our own times—that it is more "Green" than "Red" in its vision of the future of society and that—given the dismal track-record of 20th c. Communist and Socialist regimes in treating the natural environment--this is a cause for hope. From here, I went back and read some of the early classics of "natural history," as it was called—by Gilbert White, William Bartram, Dorothy Wordsworth and William—and looked again at the history of landscape painting in the work of such painters as Constable and Turner. Last but not least, I found some recent, 20th c. treatments of the natural history of the Lake District, scientific and photographic, and decided to add these perspectives to the course.

Practically speaking, I have used the concept of ecology both to frame my presentation of the Romantic movement in general, describing the interplay of eight major concepts that are distinctive to Romantic culture as a “conceptual ecology,” and to focus on three of these concepts—Romantic Nature, the Romantic Sublime and Romantic Primitivism—to suggest the ecological vision intrinsic to Romantic literature, visual art, and music. (See assignments for Sept. 18-25, Oct. 7-16 and Nov. 11-18.) While preserving my usual concentration on six major English poets of the period, I have added three thematic sections that feature selected works of these “Big Six” along with writings, visual art, and songs by other, lesser figures. I have constructed these inter-sections (occupying nine class periods, all told) on three geographical regions of Romantic interest: the Lake District, the Alps, and the “Celtic hinterlands” of Scotland and Ireland. The main lesson I hope to present in each is that the artistic representations of the natural environment in the Romantic period owe a great deal to specific ecological features of a region or place.

What may be the most innovative (and hence unpopular) bit I have added to the course is a double-barreled Romantic nature writing assignment. (See #3 in the Requirements.) I am asking students to visit one of preservation sites on the Emory campus—the remnants of our collegiate wildness—,write a short prose description of and reflection on what they see, and then—later in the semester—turn this prose description into a paragraph of blank verse. In effect, I am asking to put themselves in the place of Dorothy Wordsworth, the Romantic natural historian, then in the place of William Wordsworth, the Romantic nature poet who often quarried her journals for his poetry, the “emotion recollected in tranquility,” as he called it, of his verse. I will be curious to see how they respond to this practical, creative project. To those who complain that it’s not fair, relevant, coherent or acceptable to their urban or suburban sensibilities, I will quote (selectively) from Wordsworth’s own poetic manifesto:

Books! ‘Tis a dull and endless strife,
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music; on my life
There’s more of wisdom in it.
. . . .
One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man;
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.
. . . .
Enough of science and of art;
Close up these barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

- grew, @ ASong, @ ALucy Gray, @ APoor Susan, @ ANutting@ (363-68);
- lonely
- AThe world is too much with us, @ AComposed upon Westminster Bridge@ (386); AResolution and Independence, @ AI wandered as a cloud, @ AMy heart leaps up, @ AOde: Intimations of Immortality@ (450-60).
- Sept. 16 W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (388-450): Book First; Books Second, Fifth, Eleventh, and Thirteenth (selections).
- Sept. 18 Romantic nature (the ecology of the Lake District) (I):
 William Wordsworth, *A Guide through the Lake District* (sel.) (Electronic Reserve);
 Dorothy Wordsworth, *Grasmere Journals* and Letters (sel.) (W&M, 478-91);
 Thomas De Quincey, *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets* (sel.) (Electronic Reserve and W&M, 492-95);
 W. H. Pearsall and W. Pennington, *The Lake District: A Landscape History*, chap. 1 (Electronic Reserve);
- Sept 23 Romantic nature (II):
 William Wordsworth: AThere Was a Boy@ and AMichael@ (W&M, 362-63, 369-80);
 David McCracken, *Wordsworth and the Lake District* (sel.) (Electronic Reserve);
 Charlotte Smith, ABeachy Head@ (Electronic Reserve);
 John Clare, selected poems (W&M, 841-51).
 William Bartram, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (sel.) (Electronic Reserve).
- Sept. 25 Romantic nature (III):
 John Constable, sketches and paintings (Blackboard);
 J. M. W. Turner, sketches and paintings (Blackboard);
 John Ruskin, from AOf the Turnerian Picturesque@ (W&M, 516-20)
 Hunter Davies, *A Walk Around the Lakes* (sel.) (Electronic Reserve);
- Sept. 30 Samuel Taylor Coleridge: ASonnet to the River Otter@ [+ William Lisle Bowles, ATo the River Itchin, Near Winton@] (522), AThe Eolian Harp@ (522-24), AThis Lime-Tree Bower My Prison@ (524-26), AFrost at Midnight@ (562-63), ADejection: An Ode@ (563-66).

- Oct. 2 Coleridge: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part 1 (526-28),
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (528-42), *Kubla Khan* (545-47) [+ Mary Robinson, *To the Poet Coleridge* (225-27)],
Biographia Literaria, chaps. 13, 14, 17 (selections) (573-82).
- Oct. 7 Romantic sublimity (the spectacle of the Alps) (I):
Coleridge, *Hymn Before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni* (Electronic Reserve)
W. Wordsworth, selections from Book Sixth of *The Prelude* (W&M, 414-20);
Wordsworth's Route Over the Simplon Pass in 1790 (website) (Blackboard)
- Oct. 9 Romantic sublimity (II):
J. M. W. Turner, sketches and paintings (Blackboard);
John Ruskin, selections from *Modern Painters* (Electronic Reserve);
- Oct. 14 **Fall Break**
- Oct. 16 Romantic sublimity (III):
Percy Shelley, *Mont Blanc* (W&M, 754-58);
Byron, selections from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the Third (W&M, 654-60);
Mary Shelley, selections from *Frankenstein* (Electronic Reserve).
- Natural history journal entry due.**
- Oct. 21 George Gordon, Lord Byron: *She walks in beauty* (602), *So, we'll go no more a-roving* (603), *Manfred* (608-38).
- Oct. 23 Byron: *Don Juan*, *Dedication*, Canto 1 (667-717).
- Oct. 28 Byron: *Don Juan*, Cantos 2, 3, 7, 11 (selections) (717-45);
Letters (747-51).
- Oct. 30 Percy Shelley: *To Wordsworth* (754), *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* (758-59), *Ozymandias* (760), *Sonnet: England in 1819* (761),
The Mask of Anarchy (761-71), *Ode to the West Wind* (771-73), *To a Sky-Lark* (773-75).
- Nov. 4 P. Shelley, *Adonais* and *Companion Readings* (776-92).
- Nov. 6 P. Shelley: *The Cloud* (792-94), *from Hellas* (794-97), *With a*

Guitar, to Jane@ (798-800), ATo Jane@ (800), Afrom *A Defence of Poetry*@ (800-10).

- Nov. 11 Romantic primitivism (tales of the Celtic Hinterlands) I:
Literary Ballads: ASir Patrick Spence,@ ALord Randal@ (W&M, 322-23, 333);
Thomas Gray, AThe Bard@ (Electronic Reserve);
Blake, illustration of Gray=s AThe Bard@ (Blackboard);
John Martin, AThe Bard@ (W&M, Color Plate 1)
James Macpherson, *Fingal*, Book I (Electronic Reserve);
Robert Burns, poems (W&M, 323-333) and songs (Blackboard);
Anon., AGriogal Cridhe@ (Blackboard)
- Nov. 13 Romantic primitivism II:
Sir Walter Scott, selections from *Waverley* (Electronic Reserve);
Scott, selections from *The Lay of The Last Minstrel* (Electronic Reserve);
Wordsworth, AThe Solitary Reaper@ (W&M, 460-61).
- Nov. 18 Romantic primitivism III:
Thomas Moore, poems (W&M, 334-35) and songs (Blackboard);
James Clarence Mangan, selected poems (Electronic Reserve);
Samuel Ferguson, from AHibernian Nights Entertainment@ (Electronic Reserve).
- Term paper prospectus due**
- Nov. 20 John Keats: AOn First Looking into Chapman=s Homer@ (854), AOn the Grasshopper and Cricket@ (856), ASleep and Poetry (sel.) (857-59),
AOn Seeing the Elgin Marbles,@ (864), AOn sitting down to read King Lear once again@ (864), ASonnet: When I have fears@ (865), AThe Eve of St. Agnes@ (865-75), ALa Belle Dame sans Mercy@ (875-76).
- Nov. 20 Keats: AThe Odes of 1819" (877-86).
- Nov. 27 **Thanksgiving Break**
- Dec. 2 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ABiographical Notice@ and Vol I (Penguin Classics, pp. 1-111); Ann Radcliffe, selection from *The Romance of the Forest* (Electronic Reserve).
- Dec. 4 Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Vol. II (115-219).
- Dec. 9 Conclusion: The Endurance of Romanticism and the Sustainability of

the Ecological Imagination.

Requirements

- 1) Regular attendance in class and active participation in discussions.
- 2) A five-page paper interpreting a poem or passage from one of the six major authors: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley or Keats. (You will be assigned an author and given a due date for the paper.)
- 3) Two exercises in Romantic nature writing. The first, due on October 16, is to be a journal entry (in the manner of Dorothy Wordsworth, William Bartram or another author of the period) in which you report on a walk you have taken in one of the nature preserves on the Emory Campus. It should be a prose fragment of 250-300 words in which you observe and report on significant features of the landscape. The second, due on Dec. 2, is to be a poetic meditation reflecting on the same landscape or features in the manner of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge or another author of the period.
- 4) EITHER a term paper (12-15 pages) on a topic related to the course but extending beyond the assigned readings OR a pair of take-home exam essays written in answer to general questions covering the assigned readings. I will meet with each of you individually before the Fall Break to discuss these possibilities and help you decide which one you want to pursue during the rest of the semester. If you choose to write the term paper, you must submit a 2-page prospectus by Nov. 18; otherwise you will be expected to write the exam essays. Questions for the exam essays will be given at a set time during the exam period.

Final grades will be calculated on a proportional basis, with attendance and participation counting for at least 20%.

Texts

Most of the readings are contained in Volume 2A of *The Longman Anthology of British Literature: The Romantics and Their Contemporaries*, edited by Susan Wolfson and Peter Manning. Since the assignments refer to selections as well as page numbers in this anthology, it is important that you use it. Copies are available in the DUC Bookstore. You should read the brief introductory sections to each author or work as well as the texts themselves and pay attention to the footnotes and marginal glosses.

Copies of the Penguin Classics edition of Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* are also available the Bookstore. Do read the introduction, by Marilyn Butler, as well as the notes.

Many of the texts, images and audio recordings for the three topical sections of the course--[ARomantic Nature](#),[@ Romantic Sublimity](#) and [ARomanticism Primitivism](#)--are available through the Electronic Reserve system of Woodruff Library and/or through the Blackboard site for English 330. (You can access Electronic Reserve material from the Library web-page or through the Blackboard site.)