

ENG 521
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November 4th, 2010

The Niger and the Romantic Imagination

According to researcher Nicholas Howe, the many names that Europeans invested upon the Niger River, among which he mentions Joliba and Neel Abeed, during the eighteenth century are a clear indication of how it managed to capture the imagination of the Romantics and become an object of desire (230). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that there were multiple references to this mystical river in many of the travel accounts and in much of the poetry of this time. For instance, in the quintessential eighteenth century travel narrative *Travels in the Interior District of Africa*, Mungo Park's Romantic description of the first time he set eyes on the Niger exemplifies this desire:

... I saw with infinite pleasure the great object of my mission the long-sought-for majestic Niger, glittering in the morning sun, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, and flowing slowly to *the eastward*. I hastened to the brink, and having drunk of the water, lifted up my fervent thanks in prayer to the Great Ruler of all things for having thus far crowned my endeavours with success. (55-56)

As Howe insightfully suggests, this moment reaches the realm of the "traveler's sublime" (230) through Park's "ecstatic communion" (230) with the river, which he achieves by drinking from its waters, and through his subsequent thanks to God for allowing him to complete his mission. As Howe also points out, this moment is rendered as sublime not only due to Park's dramatic description but also due to the interests vested in the discovery of the course of the Niger. After all, it was the Europeans, not only Park, who had been dreaming about this moment since Herodotus first mentioned the Nile in his writings (233). However, it is not only geographers and travelers who had become fascinated by the mysterious river; poets had also been writing about the Niger in the hopes of investing some of their poetry with the river's mystery and grandiosity.

One example of a poet whose imagination was captured by Park's account is Percy Shelley, who in his poem *Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude* depicts the journey of a lonely traveler who follows the course of a river to its unknown limits. Besides the obvious similarities in terms of topic and presence of a romantic hero in both *Alastor* and *Travels*, an interesting similarity between both texts is stated by Shelley himself in the prologue to his poem. According to Shelley's description, Alastor stands for the poet who "drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge and is still insatiable" (1053). This insatiable drinking echoes Park's own dramatic internalization of the Niger, although in Shelley's account the poet's quest for knowledge is made more explicit than in Park's narrative. Through his comparison between a traveling poet and an actual explorer, Shelley suggests that poets travel through the recesses of the imagination which are, at times, as unexplored and foreign as the African continent. However, for Shelley's poet, the sublime moment comes when his journey allows him to become one with nature and transcend the "web of human things" (line 719).

To conclude, in both *Alastor* and *Travels*, the river serves as a catalyst for transcendence and the attainment of knowledge. In Park's case, it is the fulfillment of more than a century-old geographical quest in which he sees evidence of Providence's hand. For the poet in Shelley's *Alastor*, on the other hand, the river allows him to travel through the corners of his mind until he

is able to contemplate “nature’s vast frame” (line 720) and realizes that he is now beyond the essential limits of human experience, birth and death. In other words, there are no beginnings or endings, just an awe-inspiring experience that flows endlessly like the Niger.

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4 November 2010

John Clare, Materialist?

Browsing through a selection of Clare's poems for this week, I was particularly struck by two. I was having trouble choosing between the two when I realized that together, they offer insight into a problem of Romantic aesthetics. They are "The Pettichap's Nest" and "The Eternity of Nature."

As might be obvious, "The Pettichap's Nest" is about . . . the pettichap's nest. Really. That's it. The main mode of the poem is simple description. No flights of figurative language, no allusions or analogies. This lack is itself significant, but let us first focus on the words on the page.

In "The Pettichap's Nest," the speaker is addressing a silent companion, similar to the device that Wordsworth often employed. They are walking a woodland path and have discovered a nest by the roadside. The speaker displays his ornithological knowledge by remarking on the unusual placement of the nest so near a roadway and lacking any discernible protection: "I've rarely found / A place less likely for a bird to form / Its nest," remarks the speaker, noting its location "by the rut-gulled waggon-road, / And on the almost bare foot-trodden ground, / With scarce a clump of grass to keep it warm!" (1-5). He then goes on to give a detailed description of the materials and construction of the nest, the eggs contained therein, and finally the bird when it flutters nearby.

The poem ends with a reassertion of the speaker's surprise that at finding the nest in what appears to be an inhospitable and dangerous place. That's it? No invocation of Eternity, no appeal to the Muse, or Imagination, or Fancy? No intimation of Immortality? No, nothing. Mere description, which is in itself significant. By sticking to concrete details, Clare foregrounds the value of the physical, the importance of this insignificant clump of grass and hair at the side of the road. There is a hint of some small miracle that a small, fragile nest of eggs survives so near the trampling path of humans and animals. But it remains a hint only. The primary effect is one of directing attention to concrete facts that might normally escape notice.

Regarding "The Pettichap's Nest," Richard Cronin has noted that "In such passages he is making his own eloquent plea against an aesthetics of transcendence." Cronin goes on to say that Clare makes his Romantic contemporaries seem childish and credulous in their desire to transcend the temporal and the corporeal. Clare had no qualms about the "aesthetics of transcendence" in other poems, such as "Dawnings of Genius," so I question Cronin's implication that Clare was purposefully contradicting such an aesthetic. But I do agree that this is the cumulative effect of this poem.

The Romantic tendency to view material nature as a gateway to the ideal, as a means of transcending the very physical reality it represents, is a contradiction I struggle to rectify. Clare's determination to force our attention on a small, insignificant, easily overlooked piece of materiality functions to counteract this tendency. Which brings me finally to "The Eternity of Nature." In this poem, Clare celebrates individual components of nature as eternal, or, more accurately, *eternally recurring*: leaves, flowers, the sounds of flowing water, etc. This perspective offers a plausible solution to Clare's contrasting perspectives on transcendence. We tend to equate materiality with the temporal. But if

nature is eternally recurring, forever renewing and re-establishing itself, then a small, concrete detail such as the petticoat's nest is also a metonym for transcendence of the temporal, thereby uniting corporal nature with pantheistic notions of Nature.

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Felicia Dorothea Hemans's "Juana"

The most striking element to most of Hemans poems are the epigraph that are placed at the beginning. Sometimes they are quotation from her earlier poems, but then also she references other authors, such as, Dante. The beginning of this particular poem, "Juana", is an epigraph by Hemans herself, and it serves as an explanation/introduction to the poem's subject matter, love. "Juana" is named for Juana of Aragon (1479-1555), who was wife to Philip, Duke of Burgundy (1478-1506) and mother to Charles V (1550-1558), who was Holy Roman Emperor from (1519-56) (Wu 1293).

The poem details the tragic romance between Juana and Philip upon his death, but I suggest that Hemans own marriage is the impetus for the re-telling of this specific account. Juana, after the death of her husband, refuses to leave his side in hopes that he will spontaneously start to breathe again, but instead of this happening, his body is eventually buried and Juana is left broken-hearted and appearing to all those around her, insane. Although Hemans's husband did not die, he did "abandon his wife for Italy, never to return", which left Hemans raising five children alone (Wu 1242). The similarities arise in the pain felt by both women, after being "left" by their husbands. Also, both Hemans and Juana were not appreciated by their husbands while they were together. Hemans's husband said of her, "it was the curse of having a literary wife that he could never get a pair of stockings mended", while Juana's husband "was not only neglectful; he was openly unfaithful to her" (Wu 1242 & 1293).

Due to these similar circumstances, I read Hemans's poem as if the commentary was based on her own experiences, as well as, Juana's when she writes "patient love must win back love at last" (l. 32). This line exemplifies women in relationships as passive, to be left, abandoned, and this lack of agency could be the link between Heman and her connection to Juana's story. The poem continues "the sunny smile / Which brightly fell, and joyously, on all but me erewhile", which further supports Juana's story, and likely Hemans's, in that their husbands were not concerned with bringing them joy (ll. 33-4). The pain they each must have felt becomes channeled into more writing for Heman, but insanity and imprisonment for Juana. So, perhaps, Hemans needed to write about Juana to assuage the feeling that she could become her. It is noted in the introduction to Hemans's works that she was forced to continue turning out writing merely to pay bills. So, in a sense, after her husband leaves, Hemans is put into the same situation as Juana, exiled from her "required" societal position as mother and wife. While Hemans gains great intrigue and fame for her writing, she remains alone until her death.

The last of line of "Juana" is meant to universalize Juana's fate with that of herself and perhaps her readers. The line reads, "But a woman's broken heart was left in its lone despair behind" (l. 52). This idea was likely popular among women readers since not only could they probably empathize, but the abundance of distance travel during this time period makes it likely that many women were left alone, like in times of war (as the notes mention, Hemans had a military family). Also, the addition of rampant diseases during the Romantic period multiplies the likelihood for death and despair, which leads to "lone" women who are left "behind" (l. 52).

This also comes full circle, back to the epigraph, which is also about death, loneliness, and despair.

Hemans, Felicia Dorothea. "Juana." *Romanticism an Anthology*. By Duncan Wu. 3rd ed. Malden: Blackwell, 2009. 1293-4. Print.

Erica Olson
10-31-10

Keats, "Robin Hood" (1820)

This poem is one of a peculiarly large number of works including the Robin Hood character that were published in 1820 – others are by Leigh Hunt, Thomas Love Peacock, and Sir Walter Scott. Keats' "Robin Hood" is remarkable in that it crams Keatsian ideals into a structure and subject that traditionally had been much less weighty.

The Robin Hood character seems to build itself part by part, acquiring a new layer of meaning in each passing century. The first literary mention of him was in 1377 in *Piers Plowman*, in which the character Sloth hears about Robin in tavern tales. Here he is clearly not an upper class or a literary figure, but purely a popular hero, and in some of the anonymous medieval ballads he takes from the dishonest rather than the rich and gives to whom he pleases. From this time period we get the setting of Sherwood Forest, the conflict with Nottingham, and the band of Merry Men, pieces that stick in all subsequent layers of the Robin Hood Story. It was the Tudor period that gave Robin his association with the nobility, with him represented as a dispossessed lord who takes revenge on his own class – a version which we see still in Leigh Hunt's 1820 series of four Robin Hood poems. Anthony Munday popularized this aristocratic version of Robin Hood in two 1601 plays, *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington*. Our own day's association of Robin Hood with children's literature comes from Howard Pyle's 1883 opus *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of great renown in Nottinghamshire*, which included drawings and a style of story-telling that particularly appealed to children.

Robin Hood was hugely popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Romantic writers across Europe were looking to give their countries mythic origins and heroes, and Robin Hood seemed a uniquely English character who could fit such a mission. The Robin Hood story was told in many forms: novels, plays, operas, songs, and works purporting to be historical scholarship about his life and times. Joseph Ritson's 1795 *Robin Hood: A Collection of all the Ancient Poems, Songs and Ballads, now extant, relative to that celebrated Outlaw* was a main reference for 19th-century writers, including Keats. In 1820, Peacock published a novel called *Maid Marian*, and also in 1820, Robin Hood was a minor character in Scott's *Ivanhoe*. These developments paralleled, I think, the same process that King Arthur stories experienced during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The first published stories about King Arthur had Arthur as the central character and served to solidify his own story, where he was form, his notable deeds, and the main supporting characters. But after awhile, people were very familiar with that story, so writers either added a whole new layer, like Munday did with Robin as a dispossessed noble, or started doing spin-offs that were set in the general universe of the story but not at all focused on the original main characters and events.

When Keats wrote this poem, the story of Robin Hood was very old and, due to its recent popularity, very familiar. Everyone knew about Robin's conflicts with the sheriff, his romance with Maid Marian, and his slaying of Guy of Gisborne. The interest in this poem comes from how Keats transforms the subject anew. The poem gives a typically Keatsian treatment: serious, tinged with sadness, and fixated on mortality and the passing away and decaying of things. While there is a call to merriment at the end – Keats starts eight lines with "Honour" as opposed to three with "Gone" in the preceding stanza – it is not a complete nor innocent merriment because there is also the knowledge of mortality and the sadness that "those days are gone away,

/ And their hours are old and gray.” I call this a ‘typical’ Keats poem, but I don’t mean that to be indicative of poor or mediocre quality. To the contrary, I think it’s a glorious and brilliant poem, and only ‘typical’ because most of Keats’ works have those qualities!. It’s quite genius how Keats uses the traditional form of medieval and Renaissance Robin Hood works, with very short iambic lines and rhyming couplets, but then crams his own Romantic ideology into that form. ‘Cramming’ is an apt descriptor here because Keats forces a much heavier theme into a story that traditionally relies on a rote hero and supporting cast, includes a simple moral, and has a light and sing-songy presentation.

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Annotation 9
October 31, 2010

Bloody Transgressing Social Vampires

Once again, Happy Halloween. Carrying on the exploratory theme of Promethean transgressors, I've been implying that Frankenstein's monster is just as much a transgressor as he is the product of a Promethean anti-hero's over-reaching. With that notion in place, I moved on to discuss Lord Byron as the quintessential archetypal Promethean hero, or anti-hero, via his own autobiographical impulse. In *Prometheus*, Byron represented his speaker as an essentially tragic figure who sacrificed his freedom for the betterment of mankind, punished by a judgmental Saturn. However, in his fragment, Byron represents the potential dark side of over-reaching—and only potential in that he never finished his story. John Polidori, a volatile companion of Byron's and participator in his legendary horror-story challenge, composed *The Vampyre* as a partial response to Byron's incomplete story (Ryan 1). Ryan points out that Polidori's story, which was published in *The New Monthly Magazine* in April of 1816, was first attributed to Byron. However, Polidori sent out a letter next month claiming authorship, admitting to basing his story partially on Byron's fragment. Ryan contends that Polidori's claim is most probably true, as "Polidori's malice also seems clear, especially since the vampire Ruthven resembles more than a little the popular image of Byron current at the time" (1). Polidori's tale is simple, but possibly the first of its kind, and conflates social monstrosity with a mearcstappa-type monster.

Ruthven, who as Ryan suggests strongly resembles Byron, is a social butterfly with no scruples, though at first he hardly seems murderous: "His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him, and those who had been accustomed to violent excitement, and now felt the weight of ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention" (7). He's a noted philanderer, who targets married women and their virgin daughters, and though charitable to poor people, only gives "but when the profligate came to ask something, not to relieve his wants, but to allow him to wallow in lust, or to sink him still deeper in his iniquity, he was sent away with rich charity" (9). The tale's protagonist, Aubrey, at first is infatuated with Ruthven, and accompanies him on many adventures, but a letter from "His guardians insisted upon his immediately leaving his friend, and urged, that his [Ruthven] character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society" (10). The "evil power resident" in Ruthven is cast by his reputation.

Aubrey eventually finds an excuse to leave Ruthven after confronting his companion over his iniquity, and leaving him heads out to explore Greece. Here, Aubrey first learns of Vampyres, and is attacked by one while traveling out in the forest with a peasant girl whom he's infatuated with (14-15). Ruthven later arrives in Athens, and upon hearing that his friend is injured, dotes on him (!) for a protracted period. Ruthven uses "kind words, implying almost repentance for the fault that had caused their separation" (15), and Polidori's protagonist once again finds himself in the companionship of Ruthven. Abusive as this friendship seems, it endures again until Ruthven is mortally wounded by a group of robbers, and dies after demanding that Aubrey not sully his reputation (17). Aubrey mourns the passing of his friend,

though the body disappears. The robbers, who seem puzzlingly obliging after wounding Ruthven, claim to have carried out Ruthven's final burial wish, an ultra-specific process mirroring Darvel's final request in Byron's fragment (18). In any case, the body is no longer where the robbers left it, and Aubrey regards their astonishment as a false pretense for wanting to steal Ruthven's clothing.

After traveling again, Aubrey arrives at Calais to meet up with his sister, and spots Ruthven in a crowd. Not wanting to sully his own reputation by breaking promises to Ruthven, but on the other hand horrified by the walking dead, falls into a swoon (20-21). Torn between allowing "this monster" to roam the earth and the value of his own word, Aubrey locks himself in his room (very Frankenstein-like), and falls into ill health. Ruthven, gleeful at his friend's illness on his account (apparently), calls on Aubrey daily. Being refused audience, Ruthven turns to Aubrey's sister, and eventually seduces her into marriage. This turn causes Aubrey to have a fit, and he dies of blood effusion, though not before he writes down the preceding tale. Ruthven then is left free to feed on Aubrey's sister: "The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a Vampyre!" (24). In short, reputation killed Aubrey. His refusal to transgress even the most basic social standards resulted in his exploitation and death at the hands of one who has no scruples.

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Collecting and *Emma*

Within her book, *On Longing*, Susan Stewart argues that collecting is intrinsically linked with desire. Stewart states, “In the collection, such systematicity results in the quantification of desire. Desire is ordered, arranged, and manipulated, not fathomless as in the nostalgia of the souvenir” (Stewart 163). In this way, desire is not only a means of organizing objects, but it is the collector’s very drive to collect them. Within Regency England, collecting was recognized as a means to gain knowledge and private collections were a signifier of wealth, influence, and power. While traditional models of collecting revolved around travel, as men like Joseph Banks requested thousands of foreign specimens, Jane Austen’s model of collection based eroticism is situated within walking distance from Emma Woodhouse’s home, Hartfield. Drawing upon this idea of collection, I argue that Austen’s novel, *Emma*, uses this notion of desire within collecting as a means to explore deviant same-sex intimacies. Austen constructs a model of eroticized collection by way of Emma’s same-sex intimacy with Miss Taylor, demonstrating how Emma forms intimacies with women and situates them within heteronormative relationships with husbands who own land within walking distance from her home as a means of collecting them and insuring their company. It is through this model of eroticized collection that Austen offers social commentary regarding the notion that the success of heteronormative relationships is built and premised upon a heteronormativity that is itself hatched from homosexual desire.

Consider, for instance, the way in which *Emma* begins. Emma and her father say goodbye to Miss Taylor, Emma’s governess, as she is situated within a marriage to Mr. Weston. Although “she had always wished and promoted the match,” Emma states that, “the want of Miss Taylor would be felt every hour of every day” (Austen 4). By placing Miss Taylor within a marriage to Mr. Weston, Emma sacrifices her same-sex intimacy with Miss Taylor in an effort to collect her; after all, “there was every such comfort in the very easy distance of [Mr. Weston’s] Randalls from Hartfield, so convenient for even solitary female walking” (Austen 14). It is through the collection of Miss Taylor where Emma’s process of collecting becomes evident. Emma fears for the loss of those to whom she is intimately attached and therefore seeks to find them permanent positions and homes within the heteronormative society within the proximity of Hartfield. Miss Taylor implies not only a willingness to be collected, but also an intimate attachment to Emma as she reflects upon her husband’s character, stating, “Mr. Weston’s disposition and circumstances... would make the approaching season no hindrance to their spending half the evenings in the week together” (Austen 14). In this way, a newly married Miss Taylor reveals that she still prioritizes Emma and must adjust to her new heteronormative lifestyle as Mrs. Weston, emphasizing a distinct shift in paradigms from desiring Emma to the obligatory heteronormative wifely duties. By situating Miss Taylor within a heteronormative relationship and sacrificing their same-sex intimacy, Emma has placed Mrs. Weston inside her collection. After all, there are only a few ladies “whom Emma [could find] herself very frequently able to collect” in terms of company (Austen 19).

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Annotation #9

To See the World in a Peony: Keats' Melancholy Treatment

In "Ode on Melancholy" (1820), John Keats tells the reader how to experience the "aching Pleasure" (23) and mightiness (29) of melancholy. It's not in the forgetfulness of "Lethe" (1), "Wolfsbane" (2), and other poison. Nor is it in abstract emotions like "sorrow's mysteries" (8). Instead, melancholy "dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die" (21). Indeed, in this line, Keats shows that only those who can embrace melancholy can feel true beauty because only in understanding and relishing its transience can beauty be truly appreciated. As a result, the only the person who can really taste of "joy's grape" is the one "whose strenuous tongue / Can burst [it] against his palate fine" (27-28). That is, the very nature of experiencing joy means consuming it or bursting it. Like "Beauty" (21), "Pleasure" (23), and "Delight" (25), true "Joy" is ephemeral—ever at his lips / Bidding adieu" (22-23)—resulting in melancholy.

Keats seems to develop the main theme of "Ode on Melancholy" in the first and third stanzas of the poem. In fact, all the lines quoted above come from these two stanzas. However something unique happens in the second stanza. As if saying that we can't always dwell emotionally in the precise moment of bursting joy's grape, Keats gives a list of temporary cures for melancholy in this middle stanza. Indeed "when the melancholy fit shall fall" (11), we can better understand the emotions by considering other transient beauties. These include "a morning rose" (15), the arc of a wave on shore (16), or "globed peonies" (17). Likewise, if lovers show anger we can stare deep into their "peerless eyes" (20). In other words, in small creations or moments of beauty in nature, we can comprehend what may seem overwhelming personal melancholy.

Like Blake who suggests that we "see a World in a Grain of Sand / And Heaven in a Wild Flower" (1-2), Keats implies that we can digest a world of emotions with a "wealth of globed peonies" (17). The fact that Keats uses the word "globed" instead of "round" seems to indicate the greatness, wonder, or importance of the flowers because this descriptive makes the peonies like globes, the world. Interestingly, peonies aren't completely round. If Keats wanted to be literal he would have called them "hemispheres." Yet in a poem is about seeing beauty in sorrow, seeing the fullness of the flower, rather than its lack seems appropriate.

Duncan Wu claims that the "Ode on Melancholy" is about the "dark potency" of the "presence of death" in beauty (1340). Or as Miriam Allott explains, this poem demonstrates "the necessary relationship between joy and sorrow" (qtd. in Wu n1, 1400). Yet Keats seems to say more. We can understand and even revel or "glut" in that sorrow (15) by finding a few "droop-headed flowers" (13) like morning roses and peonies.

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30 October 2010

Balboa and Cook: Timeless European Visions of New World Sodomites
“They are all sodomites,” reads Jonathon Goldberg’s title to the third section on post colonialism in his text *Sodometries* (Goldberg 176), deriving his title from a remark made by Balboa in 1515 upon describing the indigenous peoples of Panama. In researching these various accounts of new world “discovery,” Goldberg recognizes how, especially between men, sodomy represents a violation of category rather than a specific observed sexual act. When Balboa fed forty Panamanian natives accused of “abhorrible and unnatural lechery” to his dogs, he had not actually witnessed these men performing sodomy as a form of sexual practice (180). Rather, he had discovered men who lived amongst each other dressed as women. To Balboa, such behavior clearly translated into sodomy. Hence, Goldberg asserts, the idea of sodomy cannot be correlated to any actual erotic practice; it instead becomes an “empty category” that resists definition, specifically because it relates to mannerisms that are unintelligible and incomprehensible within the context of accepted early modern European social norms (196). He therefore posits that sodomy should be investigated in these colonial texts not as a sexual act but as a set of behaviors that defy what Europeans would have understood as “natural” gender or even human practices. One example of this “sexless” sodomy for which Goldberg provides evidence is the native practice of piercing, which appalled early European visitors to the New World.

While Goldberg cites only early modern accounts of Spanish conquistadors, the representations he considers occur in transnational and timeless ways. Similar attitudes are, for instance, expressed in William Ellis’ recollections in *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage*, written by an Englishman almost three hundred years after Balboa’s voyage. Juxtaposing Ellis’ recollections of pierced, “grotesque” native bodies against Goldberg’s reveals striking similarities. Goldberg notes that while the Europeans witness no actual acts of sodomy, they nevertheless persist in seeing native bodies through a sexually-charged perspective. In noting that native bodies are “well-proportioned” (in Balboa’s words) and “well made” (in Ellis’), both explorers are complicit in sexualizing the native male body. Moreover, their ability to gender or sexualize this body in a “civilized” way is impeded by their confused perception of its cultural markings, such as piercings, as distortions and/or violations of a presumed normalcy. The piercing becomes an excellent metaphor for sodomy because it is something that Balboa and Ellis would have perceived as a comparable type of unrecognizable and unnatural violation. As Goldberg notes of Balboa’s observations, “The ‘well-proportioned’ bodies of these men are ‘deformed’; orifices have been opened and distended in ways they should not be. The male body is violated, pierced” (Goldberg 196). Ellis notes similar physical distortions after remarking upon the “well-made” physique of native men: “they had no holes for the reception of ornaments either in the under-lip or cheek, but they had blue beads, and many others of different kinds, in their ears” (Ellis 330). The spectacle of piercings in Ellis parallels that noted by Goldberg in his account of Spanish perceptions. The male native body becomes synonymous with the “sodomical body,” or, in other words, the body beyond rational categorization.

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William Godwin's [*On Property*] from *Political Justice*

Displaying his iconic and continual radical thought during the years of great political revolution and war, Godwin's writing was seen as very oppositional to Britain's causes of the time and handled very sensitively. In his writings directly around the time of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror under Robespierre, Godwin's philosophical thoughts were aligned with the radicals of the time but overtly deviant to the conservative British sensibility. He inspired many young students of the time including Wordsworth, and his emphasis on rational thought governing all aspects of life made him an exemplary writer of the Enlightenment period. In his pieces including [*On Property*] from *Political Justice*, Godwin discusses his belief in a society which would today be considered a precursor to communism. "It was a prospect of a world stripped of property, social inequalities and political strife, which would justify his reputation as one of the first philosophical anarchists and proto-Marxists" (Wu 151). [*On Property*] is just an excerpt that shows his beliefs how a better society of community would rid the current state of inequality that he recognizes.

Immediately in this excerpt Godwin emphasizes the authority of reason in one's life and how the obsession or "Accumulation" of property can be the antithesis to a world governed by reason (153). He is not writing just of the deserved amount of property that an individual is entitled to but the greed of accumulating property to the point of "superfluity" (153). The idea of moderation that is critical to the thinkers of the Enlightenment is considered here in the context of property, and he discusses that if the great industrial need for workers was decreased, then the average man would have the liberties and leisure to exercise other important aspects of life especially of "intellectual improvement." He writes, "Every man would have a frugal yet wholesome diet; every man would go forth to that moderate exercise of his corporal functions that would give hilarity to the spirits..." (153). While discussing the superfluity of industry and labor that it demands, Godwin constantly is led by the power of justice for the individual and how that should be made manifest in everyday activities.

Godwin concludes to describe the current state of Britain and how the unbalance is seen at every level of life: "At evening they return to a family, famished with hunger, exposed half-naked to the inclemencies of the sky, hardly sheltered, and denied the slenderest instruction..." (153). The difficulties of the working poor as expressed by Godwin in *Political Justice* are representative of the themes we have discussed in class of Britain's differences of class status, disease, and the ongoing wars and money spent abroad at the time. Like his contemporaries and political activists of the time, Godwin is insisting on change in every level of Britain's economical and social state.

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“As If From Dreams Awakening”

After reading Caroline Norton’s poem, “As If From Dreams Awakening,” as well as her other poems in the anthology, I immediately connected with her. I felt that the way she described the feeling of despair when waking from a dream in which a former friend or loved one was a major role was so much the way I feel in the same situation. But, after taking a look at her biography, I noticed that we are much different. The reasons she had for being afraid of waking were not the same as mine. Come to find out, Caroline Norton was a victim of marriage for solely financial purposes, in order to save her family from their financial ruin. She married a rich man named George Norton, who was physically abusive to Caroline, and we see proof of this in one of her accounts in which her sarcastic remarks were “punished by a sudden and violent kick; the blow reached [her] side; it caused great pain for several days, and being afraid to remain with him, [she] sat up the whole night in another apartment” (Spartacus). Caroline was rumored to have had an affair with Lord Melbourne, a rumor which was explored in trials and was never proven to be true (Spartacus). George Norton determined to keep Caroline away from their children, as the custody law at the time gave sole custody to the father in any situation. It is due to this unfair separation of mother and children which caused Caroline to take action and write pamphlets urging for the change of this law; she was successful, and as a result the “Custody of Children Act became the first piece of feminist legislation passed into law” (Spartacus).

Despite her success with this law, Norton had to endure many hardships, such as the death of her son while separated from her children and the years of abuse and slander coming from her husband. It is no wonder that she would write a poem about the joys of dreams and the fear of waking from them. I might even suggest the loved ones the narrator sees in her dreams are Caroline’s children which she has been kept from. This poem blurs the lines of dreams and reality, which, I believe, is a particularly feminist aspect of writing. The suggestion that reality is based on perception and has no clear definition is feminist because it opposes dominant strictures set upon everyone’s understanding of reality. Rather than telling us, “this part is real and this part is a dream,” Norton confuses the strict border there by noting the way that the sadness or happiness of a dream does effect the way we feel when we wake. She also acknowledges the realness of dreams when we are within them. The best example of this is when she explains that people sometimes outwardly cry when something tragic happens in a dream: “We vainly strive, while weeping,/ From their shining spirit track/ (Where they fled while we were sleeping)/ To call those dear ones back!” (5-8). The lines between dream and reality are certainly blurred here, as we cannot determine in which lines she is describing a sensation the narrator felt when awake or one felt while dreaming. She implies, then, that the narrator felt this sensation in both states.

From this reading of the poem, we might conclude that Norton suggests the realness of dreams and the dreaminess of reality. Certainly, in a world in which one’s own children can be kept from their innocent mother by an abusive father, we might want

to believe that the brief time she can be with these children in her dreams is as real as anything and that, when she wakes, she longs to sleep to see them again. On the contrary, when the narrator dreams of these loved ones, it seems to bring up old grief that she wishes she would not have to deal with when she wakes. This is why she fears waking. She wants to stay awake, rather than sleep, forever: "Oh could day beam eternally,/ And memory's power cease" (32-33). The narrator, and perhaps Norton herself, would rather forget the people she longs for, yet she is haunted by them every night. Dreams of her lost loved ones become the source through which her reality is affected with grief and loneliness.

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Annotation 9

Annotation 9: Wordsworth's "Anecdote for Fathers, showing how the art of lying may be taught"

From the title of this poem, I thought it was going to be a list of instructions and helpful hints on how to lie to your kids. I thought "this may be a valuable source of information to some," but concluded it wasn't for me. However, wonder tugged at my senses (as it often does when I read intriguing words like "lying"), and I read on. Further investigation proved my guess completely wrong. The poem is about innocence, purity, and (in a very Blake-like way), a close look at the relevance of logical reasoning.

The speaker of the poem asks his five year old son the seemingly simple, yet loaded question of "which like you more? / ... / Our home by Kilve's delightful shore, / Or here at Liswyn farm?" (25-28). This question is obviously an important one for the speaker to ask as it is repeated almost verbatim in lines 30-33. The boy, a mere five years old, looks at his father in "careless mood" and offers a simple answer to the question—"At Kilve I'd rather be / Than here at Liswyn farm" (35-36). The father, expecting a well-reasoned answer more complex than the one offered, presses the boy for more information as to why he would rather live at Kilve by saying "Now, little Edward, say why so, / My little Edward tell me why" (37-38). The boy, not wanting to reveal his true purpose in wanting to live at Kilve, merely says that "[he] cannot tell, [he] [does] not know" (39). The boy "cannot tell" about why he has a preference—which is in and of itself an interesting read as it could be read as if the boy doesn't know why he prefers one place over the other, and/or that he knows, but cannot reveal why to a father who would expect something more philosophical and well-reasoned.

After asking the boy five more times which place is his favorite, the boy finally exposes his secret and tells his father that he prefers Kilve because "there was no weathercock" (54). Interpretations can be made about why the boy would prefer a house with no weather measuring device; however, the answer suits the father just fine. It is in this simple, truthful answer that the poem gathers meaning. The father, concluding that he has never before heard "better lore," understands the innocence and youthful answer as something as well-reasoned as anything else. At once, the boy displays both maturity and youthfulness in his well-crafted answer. The child is shown to have more intelligence than his father, leaving the reader to assume a theme of youthful intelligence and freshness. And, at the same time, the father learns that as a father and human being, sometimes it's better to just accept things because that is how they are, rather than over rationalize everything.

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Annotation IX
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John Clare, "The Fox," and the Politics of the Mob

In the chapter "I Never Meddle with Politics," Jonathon Bate explores, nonetheless, Clare's political impulse: "A party man he was not, but political opinions he certainly had"--especially when it came to the taxation of the poor and working class" (355; 356). Bate's exploration of Clare's politics includes Clare's hatred of violence, especially violence wrought by a mob (359). To emphasize this aspect of Clare, Bate recapitulates the story of a politically motivated arson attack on a local farm in December 1830, and he traces its impact on Clare. The fire lasted "six hours, destroying the stables, a barn, a granary, and a threshing machine...[i]t chilled Clare's blood to think of what had happened, not least because his humanitarian instincts recoiled from the suffering of cows, pigs, and horses burnt to death in the blaze" (357).

Bate's exposure of Clare's indignation of mob violence and animal suffering helps frame Clare's "The Badger" and "The Fox" (Clare 84-86; 87-88). Though both poems document the brutal treatment of animals wrought by a mob, this exploration focuses primarily upon "The Fox." The poem begins with the discovery of the fox. A shepherd's dog's "barking high" alerts the shepherd to something nearby, and the barks attract the attention of the ploughman, who gives a "hearty shout," finds the "weary fox" with whom the dogs have toiled, and "beat[s] him out" (ln 1-4). Thinking the fox dead, the ploughman wants to "plough him in" (ln 5), but the shepherd wants the fox's skin (ln 6). In an act of abject cruelty, the ploughmen "beat [the presumed dead fox] till his ribs would crack" (ln 9), and then the shepherd throws the fox over his shoulder and heads off.

However, the fox suddenly starts from his "dead disguise" (ln 12) and dashes for escape. The shepherd, ploughman, and dogs chase after the fox, and as the narrative continues, the action draws one more person into the growing mob's pursuit: the woodsman. He stops working when he hears the "fray" (ln 22), and when the fox runs by, he throws hatchet at it (ln 24). In the end, the fox eludes the mob by "bolt[ing]" into a "badger hole" (ln 22). Though the mob tries to dig the fox out, the hole is too deep. The fox makes it.

"The Fox" demonstrates how the seed of violence begins with one action and spreads to other actions and people, from the dogs, to the shepherd, to the ploughman, and to the woodsman thereby generating a mob. But the political vociferation of the poem emerges more subtly from its form. Similar to "The Badger," Clare structures the poem in a series of sonnet stanzas ("The Fox" has two sonnet-stanzas while "The Badger" has five). As a tradition, the sonnet form speaks to that which is polished, revered, respected, stately, civilized, and erudite. But the brutal treatment of the fox is anything but civilized and learned. The content of "The Fox," therefore, is dissonant with the form, thereby offering an opportunity to undermine the seemingly accepted practice of animal brutality by civilized humans. Society permits, in other words, the uncivil treatment of a brute by a "civilized" species. Another observation bolsters this interpretation. Clare crafts the sonnets with heroic couplets, complete with their masculine end rhymes. Could it be that Clare sees the mob mentality originating from an androcentric notion of power? In other words, the brutal treatment of the fox is executed by men who see themselves as revered, stately, civilized, and in the right. Skeptics may point to the fact that Clare often used heroic couplets, but regardless of intention, the dissonance between the form and content of "The Fox"

offers readers the opportunity to explore Clare's vociferation against mob violence towards animals in a refreshing way.

"The Fox" (along with "The Badger") demonstrates yet again the far reaching exploration of nature during the Romantic period. Far from being solely an aesthetic or sublime depiction of a nature remote from every day culture and habit, Clare's work exposes the nature inextricably bound up in culture and the every day patterns of human existence. During today's epoch when ecocriticism gravitates to an analysis of nature on the local, everyday level, Clare can be seen as an important pioneer already working towards such a paradigm shift, for he writes about the human-environment interactions taking place within walking distance of his backyard.

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"Muse upon the solemn scene": Access and "Joy" in "A Night Piece"

While contemplating the moon and stars in "A Night Piece," Wordsworth's subject observes a tension between the beauty and immensity of the heavens. The night sky contains extraordinary wonders, which virtually demand association to one another and the observer's immediate surroundings. At the conclusion, the subject expresses mixed feelings about what he has witnessed, a "deep joy" at odds with the character of the "solemn scene" (Wordsworth 418.22, 24). Wordsworth intersects a number of conflicting sentiments in the poem. The appearance of the moon and stars is at once shocking and marvelous. Additionally, the effort to portray celestial bodies seems overwhelming, but the subject's eventual success is bittersweet, as the grandeur of the scene far exceeds the expressive limits of the verse. Wordsworth stresses the foreignness of sublime objects to complicate their description, while exploring emotions felt in contact with the extraordinary.

The poem opens with stasis. Before he introduces his subject, the "musing man," Wordsworth describes a scene dominated by "one continuous cloud," which "overspread" the sky, concealing the moon (417.7, 1-2). The cloud prevents the scene from reaching the height of its majesty, reducing the moon to "a dim-seen orb" that "chequers not the ground/With any shadow" (417.4-5). Here, contact with the heavenly may seem desirable, or at least, more evocative of intense feeling than the sight of the clouded sky. Certainly, the appearance of the clear sky by way of a "pleasant gleam" followed by "[t]he clear moon, and the glory of the heavens" appears to evoke feelings of clarity and delight for the man (417.6, 11). Moreover, the man is "startled" by the change, casting his gaze upward after "[walking] along with his eyes bent to earth" (417.8-9). The first actions of the poem describe a movement from inactivity and ignorance to a literally illuminated state. Awareness may be a result of this transition, but the ensuing exposition and the nature of the change prevent a completely optimistic reading.

Clarity proves equally awesome and disturbing. The reference to the sky as a "black-blue vault" "immeasurably distant" provokes comparable uncertainty (417.12, 18). The circumscriptive terms associated with the heavens ("vault") enter a contest with the first impression felt in contact, as if the night sky and its figures are too glorious for words, or the comfort of the subject and the poet. Again, the man's "deep joy" is a complex emotion, "not undisturbed" by the undefined gravity of the "scene," and strangely groundless—the feelings expressed throughout the poem are too various to join with any sort of cohesion (418.22, 24). The subject may achieve understanding in his observation of the heavens, but he never establishes a stable, harmonious connection. Further, despite its beauty, the poetry never fully captures the wonder of the night, instead pausing—indeed, "the vision closes"—at a moment of anxiety (418.21). The night inspires by being too great for words, by leaving the observer in puzzled awe. To elucidate this feeling, Wordsworth blurs portrayals of insight either as a source of wisdom or the prelude to confusion, and concludes only with the assurance that the "vision" has ended—the man's contact was restricted, and now, reaches its terminus.

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Annotation of William Wordsworth's *Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquility and Decay, a Sketch*

William Wordsworth's *Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquility and Decay, a Sketch* is relatively deceiving in simplicity at first. The poem is a narrative describing "an old man traveling" on the way to see his sick son, a mariner, for the last time before he dies of illness, and so much of the plot is relayed in the title itself. However, Wordsworth's expressions about traveling are romanticized and expressive, and the latter portion of the conjoined title complicates the simple narrative.

Wordsworth's commentary on the consequences, bodily and cognitive, of travel on a person is what seems to give this poem substance. The old man himself is nameless, and his anonymity gives him a universality—a generalization of empathy—and yet also a mysticism that transcends the quotidian experience. Even the old man's walking is transcendent, and Wordsworth notes that "He travels on, and his face, his step,/ His gate, is one expression; every limb/ His look and bending figure, all bespeak/ A man who does not move with pain, but moves/ With thought" (lines 3-7)¹. At this point in time in the poem, the reader is unaware of the old man's objective in journeying, but Wordsworth relays a sense of purpose within the old man's step for it is an "expression" and yet also a "thought". In this, I have to suggest that the means of journeying is not simply to reach a destination for the old man; Wordsworth does not create the old man as an automaton who is mechanically walking, with a numb mind and numb senses, to reach the final destination: his son. Rather, the journey and the act of walking is an articulation.

It is not quite certain *what* the old man is communicating. By the end of the poem, it seems that the old man is journeying as an act of love to speak once more to his son, but this connotation is not fully present in the earlier portions of the poem. Instead, Wordsworth accents the old man's serenity; he repeats "patience" twice, following these two utterances with "peace so perfect"—an alliterative emphasis on "p's" that goes back to Wordsworth's first statement that the man "does not move with pain" (lines 10, 11, 13, 6). These are the impressions that the old man leaves on the observers: those of patience and peace and painlessness. However, the old man himself is "insensibly subdued" and he "hardly feels"; he "hath no need" of patience" (lines 7, 14, 12). Considering these, the old man appears insensate, and while these functions of his body and mind are immobile, his functions for thinking and walking are antithetically mobile. I am not quite certain what to make of this juxtaposition of difference, this compatibility. It appears that Wordsworth is commenting on the influence of travel on the body and mind; traveling is an expression that can bring solitude and a sense of rest. He is not the heroic and romantic traveler who is journeying out of desire to see new wonders.

Instead, the man is "one expression" in traveling, a statement that is connotative of wholeness and syncretism. His syncretism is so complete that the hedgerow birds "regard him not" and "He is by nature led" (line 2, 12). Wordsworth seems to suggest that solitary travel can bring one closer to oneself and to nature at the same time. Here, I

¹ Wordsworth, William. "Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquility and Decay, a Sketch" Ed. Wu, Duncan. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. 3rd ed. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006. 402-403. Print.

have to wonder if this is related to the title of the poem, where Wordsworth names “Animal Tranquility and Decay” without including any ‘animals’ in his poem besides the first hedgerow birds who are not tranquil or decaying. Could he be speaking of the father and son, noting that in being one with nature all man is animal? This could be, and I’m not currently conscious of a better alternative. This being said, there is more to think about in terms of the parallel Wordsworth constructs between “tranquility” and “decay”—a parallel constructed in the presence of the old man in the poem.

However, it is necessary to consider the conclusion of the poem as well. The old man is traveling to take a “last leave” of his son, a mariner who has been “brought to Falmouth” (lines 18, 19). The confluence of journeys here is significant. The son was a traveler as well, being a mariner, and the son had just accomplished a journey from Falmouth. Similarly, the saying “last leave” connotes a new journey for the son through death. What most interests me here is Wordsworth’s reversal of so many travel narratives, where the traveler is animated by newness and adventuring, seduced by the new spectacles to see. Rather, the traveler and his son are traveling to a closing, rather than a beginning (except, I suppose the son, in a sense). How are the connotations of peace and patience distinct because they are traveling towards a boundary, rather than transgressing them?

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4 November 2010

Evolution of Grief in Lord Byron's "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year"

In Lord Byron's "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year", death is prevalent. This is not uncommon among Byron's works, but the fact that this poem was written so close to his own death just a few months later alludes to the prophetic aspect of the poem. However, it is more likely that the poem is a reaction to the recent deaths of his friend Percy in 1822 and his daughter Allegra. The brooding speaker in the poem is typical of Byronic poetry.

The poem begins with the speaker inviting the reader into his desires, both of the desire to end his heartache, but also to feel love. He begins with his disbelief at his own grief, declaring it "should be unmoved" (1). The desire not to feel pain is replaced with the longing to still feel the comfort of love. Nature is invoked as a signifier of the change in his heart. A "yellow leaf" (5) has replaced the "flowers and fruits of love" (6) as his heart grows heavier with grief. Yet, he is doomed to suffer alone, as the evil and corrupting power of "the worm" and "the canker" (7) belong only to him.

His sorrow shifts from a withered and discolored leaf to a burning pain. He likens his sorrow to the burning sensation of both a "volcanic isle" (10) and a "funeral pile" (12). Rather than focus on the loss in this stanza, he focuses on what has been left behind, which is volatile. A volcano is unpredictable and fire is wild, which heightens the pain in the speaker's voice, especially when the final line in the stanza refers to the ritual burning at a funeral.

The striking image of the previous stanza is lessened with the following line's usage of "hope" (13) as the first in a series of emotions. Rather than take away from the impact, it alludes to the healing power of hope. He continues with "fear" and "jealous care" (13) as the remainder of the "exalted" (14) emotions that exist in the experience of pain. Rather than continue with the hope of finding love, he admits that he "cannot share/but wear the chain" (15-16) of love. The image that springs from that last line of the stanza is restrictive rather than freeing. He feels love is the cause of his grief, and at the same time he wishes he could experience it, he also feels restrained by it.

The poem shifts slightly by referring to the "hero's bier" as full of "glory" (19). Only the hero can die in glory, and is honored when "borne upon his shield" (23). He feels life as a constraint, and is jealous of the fallen hero, who "was not more free" (24) than he was in death. He laments the souls that "regret'st thy youth" (33) and exalts those who died on the battle field (36). The parting command is to visit "a soldier's grave" (38) and "take thy rest" (40). His sorrow has given way to the honorable mention of a fallen soldier. The end, though slightly ambiguous, has a peaceful allusion to the impending death.

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