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"Better Lore" of the Romantic Coast: Maritime Ecologies and Cultural Infrastructure from England, Scotland, and Beyond

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Abstract

This essay adapts presentations the authors shared at the Edge Hill NASSR/BARS conference in the Summer of 2022 into a collaboratively constructed discussion. It reflects on what a recent "coastal turn" in ecocriticism, critical geography, and related fields might contribute to Romantic studies, and considers how coastal geographies (real and imagined) have informed aesthetics, politics, and lived experience, especially in settler-colonial contexts. Ranging from seventeenth-century poetry to contemporary fiction, from British waterways to the Mississippi Basin, it strives to bring Romantic accounts of coastal life into conversation with current modes of ecological thought and new forms of theoretical interrogation.

The following essay adapts presentations the five of us shared at the Edge Hill NASSR/BARS conference in the Summer of 2022 into a collaboratively constructed discussion. At our session we reflected on what a recent "coastal turn" in ecocriticism, critical geography, and related fields might contribute to Romantic studies, and considered how coastal geographies (real and imagined) have informed aesthetics, politics, and lived experience, especially in settler-colonial contexts. As places where oceanic and terrestrial ecologies meet, coasts expose human habitation and knowledge to forces of entropy and reformation. An inherently interdisciplinary field, coastal studies explores the historical geographies, literary representations, and cultural formations of littoral zones. Coastal studies generates power from the interstitial friction between disciplines, and has the capacity to significantly alter our sense of the literary, scientific, and colonial

cultures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The discussion captured below, which ranges from seventeenth-century poetry to contemporary fiction, from British waterways to the Mississippi Basin, strives to bring Romantic accounts of coastal life into conversation with current modes of ecological thought and new forms of theoretical interrogation.

We begin this discussion with a poem familiar to Romanticists. Most scholars and students who know William Wordsworth's "Anecdote for Fathers" read it as an exemplary lyrical ballad of rural—that is, terrestrial—life (*Lyrical Ballads* 71–73). Few of them, however, understand it as exemplifying a Romantic coastal aesthetic. The poem's plot, such as it is, registers this divide. On a "dry walk" (line 5), a gentlemanly narrator asks his young son if he prefers their new, inland dwelling place, a "farm" nestled amidst "woods and green-hills warm" (24, 41) to their former residence "at Kilve's smooth shore by the green sea" (30)—and receives contrary answers he struggles to process. However much a narrative, the poem is also a lyric; it distills thoughts which float free of a speaker and situation, forming an impersonal infrastructure. This lyric aspect, latent throughout the poem, becomes manifest with the typically shocking Wordsworthian turn that comes when the father-narrator browbeats his son into inventing an explanation for preferring their former coastal home. Seizing on "a broad and gilded vane" "upon the house-top" (52, 51), the boy silences his father with the specious, if imaginative, claim that he prefers Kilve because there by the sea there was no such "weather-cock" (55). Fathers should learn when not to speak; moreover, if fathers, perhaps for reasons of political urgency, settle the arborescent, vertically arranged interior, a new generation may prefer, and perpetuate, the rhizomatic, horizontal, and less striated life of coastal regions.

Meditating on the coast in this pastoral mode, Wordsworth suggests in “Anecdote for Fathers” how patriarchy might give way to a gentler patrimony of culture, to what Wordsworth’s narrator, in his final stanza, admits is “better lore.” Soon enough, with 1807 poems like “Elegiac Stanzas” and “Ode to Duty,” Wordsworth would propose a mission for such pastoralism, making a high romantic argument for cultural imperialism. To some extent, such an epic vision is inconsistent with the maritime georgics and marine pastorals that made up the *Lyrical Ballads* and that would continue to populate the Wordsworthian cultural edifice. If the coastal horizons of Wordsworthian culture eventually narrow, however, they still proffer lines of flight. The dystopia is also a heterotopia, depending on which way the wind blows. The inland weathervane that halts conversation in “An Anecdote for Fathers,” may also be a dialectical image of what it means to find new vectors for experience.

If the long eighteenth century saw the European coast emerge as a social milieu, and not simply a natural one (Corbin), the coastal turn in European literature emerges with that Enlightenment, as well as with counter-Enlightenment and Romantic reactions. Geography, hydrography, and locodescription are mediating practices conditioned by Enlightenment. Yet while the Romantics who write about the coast participate in modern, spatial practices, they may seem less like programmers implementing Enlightenment codes than like hackers exploiting Enlightenment geographical taxonomies and turning those taxonomies to new uses, be they counter-, pre-, or post-Enlightenment ends, orientations, or remediations (Fielding). Europe’s coastal turn involves itself with a dialectic of Enlightenment—with a process epitomized for Horkheimer and Adorno by the seafaring romance figure of a modern Odysseus—because turning the natural coast into culture is an open, and still unfinished endeavor.

To adapt Deleuze and Guattari on the unconscious: the Enlightenment does not symbolize, it engineers (53). And, to quote Lauren Berlant, “infrastructure is the living mediation of what provides the consistency of life in the ordinary” (20): it comprises both built physical environments and the social environments that sustain them and are, in turn, sustained by them. The Romantic-period infrastructure that synthesizes the modern coast also engenders an anti-, post-, or hyper-social mode of consciousness that crystalizes with the Ossian-obsessed Johann Gottfried von Herder, and refracts through the marine imaginations of Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and their followers in the Wordsworth circle.[1] As coastal living requires both material and conceptual infrastructure, the natural coast’s modern improvement involves the ritual and communicative dimensions of life early on termed “culture.” Herder, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth articulated “culture” as a term for vital social practices abstracted from the land: for processes associated with nature’s necessary-seeming remediation, and with a nation cultivated now to fit into the world, now to encompass it. This governing idea of culture shares formal elements with theories of the maritime empire toward which its progenitors manifested much ambivalence. For the Romantics, then, coastal environments were grounds for cultural settlement, and, for that, culturally unsettling. The discomfort the Romantics evinced with the national pedagogies such locales evoke (sometimes even as they sought to voice those pedagogies) would contribute to the development of an ambiguous aesthetic with which generations of readers would identify.[2]

Wordsworth and other contemporaries expressed unease with the Enlightenment infrastructure enclosing their country and, potentially, the world, and with how life within that infrastructure was being reengineered to provide economic and social opportunities for their

generation and those to come. It is worth asking, though, exactly what such life entails, and for whom? How was life being transformed by the crises of the Romantic era? This is a question many recent works of coastal history—by, for instance, Isaac Land, John Gillis, and David Gange—have been asking, one that has been inspiring work in our field as well. As we write, a contemporaneous *Romanticism on the Net* collection on "Scotland's Coastal Romanticisms" (co-edited by Anna Pilz and Penny Fielding, and featuring two of the contributors to this salon) is making the case that Scottish coastal writing around 1800 was deeply implicated in the coastal infrastructure of imperial Britain in spite of continued unease about the status of Scotland itself as a colony within that edifice. During the Highland Clearances, most Gaelic-speaking Scots who did not emigrate were compelled to live and work on the coasts in often-crowded crofting communities supported by new fishing ports (including Tobermory, Helmsdale, and Ullapool on the west coast and villages such as Hopeman in Moray on the east) that often failed to live up to their promise as centers of economic prosperity. No doubt this legacy of displacement is part of why Scotland's coasts have attracted such critical attention.

Wherever you stand in Scotland, salt water is within fifty miles (Worthington 3). The Marine Scotland Directorate of the Scottish Parliament has assessed that more than 900 islands contribute to a coastline extending to around 18,743 kilometers. Under the Scotland Act 1988, which is based on fishing rights, Scotland's sea territory amounts to nearly six times the size of its land mass, extending into the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Norwegian sea to the north-east and the North Sea to the east (Marine Scotland Information). In contrast, Scotland's only land border, with England, is just 154 kilometers long—0.82% of the length of its coastline. While islands and sea lochs contribute to the sublimity of these dramatic statistics, they underscore

Scotland's status as a marine nation, a term invoked by the Scottish Parliament as a marker of cultural and economic Scottishness. They also consolidate Scotland's archipelagic character, as a result of which it participates in a wider, archipelagic global environment. Fiona Stafford and Nicholas Allen nicely define the thought processes elicited by archipelagos as "a turn towards the coast, the sea, and the endless declension of water as the matter, embodied and imaginary, of shifting relations" (6). That pivotal turn is as political and cultural as it is environmental, looking away from the centralizing locales of government towards the coastal communities already mentioned. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, marginalized and displaced people eked out a subsistence living as fisherfolk and crofters around the Scottish coast, supplementing their income with smuggling and other illicit activities.

Susan Oliver's *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland* looks at how fiction addressed these challenges of labor supply in a subsistence economy. Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816), set along the North Sea coast, and his 1821 Shetland tale *The Pirate* provide two complementary case studies (50–51, 140–41, 158–59, 164–68). The only constants for these communities are the sea, with its complex ecologies. But, even then, non-human food chains were breaking down and species were sliding toward local extinction. The world's largest single colony of Northern Gannets, on the Bass Rock, was seriously threatened at least twice in the nineteenth century, by over-fishing for herring and by Victorian day-trippers shooting the birds for fun (Smout 50). Herring stocks and the substantial, long-established oyster beds of Edinburgh were devastated by over exploitation due to new technology including the seine or ring net for herring fishing, introduced in 1838 in the west of Scotland but quickly adopted elsewhere (Thurstan and Roberts 3). Commercial concern led to Acts of Parliament that provided limited protection, but in none of

these cases was there a literary response comparable to the subjective remorse over environmental despoliation we see in Wordsworth's 1798 short poem "Nutting." How can Romantic period accounts of fragile coastal ecologies help us to think more productively about the Humanities' role in a twenty-first century world, where unstable sea levels, changes in water temperatures and salinity, extreme weather conditions and continued exploitation make necessary a rethinking of how coastal environments are understood?

The Firth of Forth, with its numerous reefs and islands, some no larger than protruding rocks and crags visible only during propitious tides and weather conditions, did give one Romantic-era artist a countervailing sense of environmental complexity. Joseph Mallord William Turner depicted examples of these "islands" in his painting of the *Bell Rock Lighthouse* (National Gallery Scotland), where the title structure is built on such a rock in the extreme northern outer reaches of the Firth (Figure 1). Smaller reefs in the foreground thrust through the

[INSERT IMAGE 1:]

Figure 1. Joseph Mallord William Turner. *Bell Rock Lighthouse.* 1819. Watercolor and gouache with scratching out on paper. 30.6 x 45.5 cm. Purchased by Private Treaty Sale 1989 with the aid of funds from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Pilgrim Trust. Image reproduced courtesy of National Galleries of Scotland.

waves, threatening shipping while providing a habitat for unseen, teeming marine life-systems. Turner does not particularize that biodiversity in this or his other Scottish marine paintings, but uses color, light and shade, and brushstrokes to suggest a heaving, organic environment. The relationship between the Bell Rock lighthouse, the island on which it is built, and the sea captures a fierce tension between Enlightenment "engineering" and Romantic aesthetics. What emerges is a battle between radically different forms of the sublime: the lighthouse commands

the viewer's attention through its claim to a monumental stability, while the violent motion of the sea disorientates to insist on more imaginative and disturbing narratives. Seen in context with Turner's other Scottish sea paintings of *The Bass Rock* (Lady Lever Gallery, Tate Britain) and *Staffa, Fingal's Cave* (Yale Center for British Art), a total environment emerges in which human beings are either absent or compositionally portrayed as struggling to stay alive, as in the finished Bass Rock painting in which a fishing boat is shown sinking (Figure 2). The watercolor

[INSERT IMAGE 2:]

Figure 2. Joseph Mallord William Turner. *The Bass Rock*. c.1824. Watercolor and pencil with scratching out on paper. 16.5 x 24.6 cm. Purchased by William Hesketh Lever in 1923. Image reproduced courtesy of National Museums Liverpool, Lady Lever Art Gallery.

palette for the boat and men is in marked contrast to the rest of the painting: their hot browns and oranges contrast with the cold blues, buffs, and whites of the seascape in a manner that captures the life-threatening nature of their situation. People are either absent or figure as strikingly distinctive alien life forms in these paintings. They are outside of, or struggle to remain alive in, an environment where a biodiverse marine ecosystem is at one with the sea, sky, and rock.

Since the seventeenth century, forms of scientific writing have explored the marine fauna and flora of the Firth of Forth, adding visual illustration to written records of phenomena including the world-significant gannet colony of Bass Rock (early examples include Robert Sibbald's 1684 *Scotia Illustrata*, his contributions to John Slezer's 1693 *Theatrum Scotiae*, and Francis Barlow's much-reproduced seventeenth-century ornithological drawing "The Bass Island"). Detailed descriptions of birds, animals, common and rare plants, corallines, mollusks, shellfish, and fish build a stunning account of a vibrant and diverse biosphere. James Hutton's ground-breaking *Theory of the Earth* used the Bass Rock as an example of a volcanic igneous

intrusion, overturning previous assumptions about how sea islands were formed. For Hutton, this deep geological history of the Bass enabled him to demonstrate that Scotland's coastline had been formed in a long series of violent geological processes in which volcanic eruption was just one event and change was continuous:

> What I would infer . . . is, that this whole coast has undergone considerable changes . . . rendered broken and irregular by some violent convulsion of nature . . . It is demonstrable that such a basaltic rock . . . could not have been the eruption of a volcano, consequently those rocks must have been masses protruded in a fluid state, under an immense cover of earth, and they could not have risen immediately out of the sea, with all their various minerals, their veins and cutters, their faces and angles. (2: 282)

Hutton's comparative deduction aligns with ecocriticism's glocal theory as defined by Roland Robertson and Ursula Heise, and by extension with Anthropocene studies, since it requires local and global environmental conditions to be interpreted as mutual instances of disruptive activity, and complements the radical perspective of archipelagic theory. But it also demonstrates how the politically, artistically, and scientifically disruptive thought of Romanticism and late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century science can help us more productively confront twenty-first century environmental dilemmas.

That metaphor of disruption—so vital to Anthropocenic arguments—might also work as a figure for how coastal cultural studies can put pressure on our most basic disciplinary assumptions. For instance, some of the best work in coastal studies is archeological.[3] It examines the dross and midden floating on the surface of shallow waters, the ruins of villages and ports, the observations of scientists and tourists. But this archeological approach is already implicated within the infrastructure that it studies. Early Celticists like Hector MacLean, Alexander Carmichael, and J. F. Campbell—all of whom were born in the Western Highlands and Isles and

were native Gaelic speakers—were steeped in the study of the residual materiality of those places and their emergence as touristic destinations, and used those material archaeologies to model their approach to the Gaelic literature they disseminated in Scotland and around the diaspora.[4] Motivated by a post-Linnaean sense of difference and diversity, they published nuanced textual *variorum* editions of the oral poetry and tales of coastal and island regions. In the process, the littoral spaces in which these collectors found these ancient stories and songs became an abiding metaphor for the work of literary collecting itself.

In the opening paragraph of his *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, published in 1860, Campbell records that "On the stormy coasts of the Hebrides, amongst seaweed and shells, fishermen and kelp-burners often find certain hard light floating objects, somewhat like flat chestnuts of various colours—grey, black, and brown, which they call sea-nuts, strand-nuts, and fairy-eggs" (ix); Martin Martin, in his 1703 *Description of the Western Isles*, identified these as "Molluka beans" (qtd. in Campbell ix). These "beans," Campbell continues, were collected by locals and "used as snuff-boxes, but they are also worn and preserved as amulets, with a firm or sceptical belief in their mysterious virtues" (x). In later, more enlightened times these molluka beans were called "trash" and wearing them branded as "ignorant and superstitious." However, "learned botanists, too wise to overlook trifles, set themselves to study even fairy-eggs; and believing them to be West Indian seeds, stranded in Europe, they planted them, and some (from the Azores) grew" while "Philosophers, having discovered what they were, use them to demonstrate the existence of the Gulf Stream, and it is even said that they formed a part of one link in that chain of reasoning which led Columbus to the New World" (x). Botanists now know them to be the seeds of "Guilandina Bundoc," which flourishes in the Caribbean; the seeds are

commonly identified by their Caribbean moniker, nicker nuts, and still known for the vast distances they travel along Atlantic sea currents to Ireland, the Hebrides, and Orkney.

What is amazing about this passage is the enormous combination of disciplinary and geographical perspectives it contains: folklore, botany, flat chestnuts, fairy eggs, the West Indies, Europe. Nothing is "settled" here; everything is caught in a tidal whirl of spaces and times, facts and beliefs. Yet, Campbell takes this small moving object, a bean floating in the sea, and encompasses it within a textualized global totality. We do not need to look much beyond the reference to Columbus to note the underlying colonialism of this project. In the next paragraph, Campbell compares observing molluka beans to transcribing and editing oral tales:

> within this century, men have gathered nursery tales. They set themselves earnestly to learn all that they could concerning them; they found similar tales common to many languages; they traced them back for centuries, they planted them in books, and at last the Brothers Grimm, their predecessors and the followers, have raised up a pastime for children to be 'a study fit for the energies of grown men to all the dignity of a science' . . . (x)

Science and literature are parallel disciplines within an imperial mandate. Hebridean verses, like molluka beans, make sense of their place only insofar as it is read within a global context.

Such movements of objects and artifacts, including literary ones, both printed and oral, translated and original, appear even more dynamic when we expand our scope to encompass a longer history of pre-Romantic, Romantic, and post-Romantic forms. "*Posadh Mhic Leod*" or "The MacLeod Wedding" by Mairi nighean Alasdair Ruaidh (Mary MacLeod, of the Isle of Harris) is a seventeenth-century example of a Gaelic vernacular tradition that came into its own in the eighteenth century through poets like Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, Rob Donn Macaoidh, and Donnchadh Ban Mac-an-t-saoir, and that extends to the present day athwart the

imperial perspective represented by Romantic literary archeology. The subject of the poem is the marriage of Roderick Macleod (who was Mary's clan chief; her father was the Macleod's bard) to Margery Mackintosh from Trotternish in Skye; a marriage that Mary opposed. The poem is a dialogue between Mary and Margery, whom Mary calls "A MacDonald Lady" and clearly wants to go back to Skye. Margery asks Mary about a ship that has appeared off the coast. Mary takes the opportunity to brag about MacLeod vessels—and Roderick, whom Mary secretly loves.

In the middle of the poem Mary offers this little lyric:

> As I sat above a seal-haunted strait,
> Looking toward Hirt [St, Kilda's – the isle], of blue birds
> Came a wheedler a saucy wheedler,
> And wishing to gossip asked of me
> What was the custom of that race of Leod?
> Him I gave my answer due,
> Well did I know the custom of the MacLeods
> Wine they broach and ale they drink
> And with liquor thrice-brewed they fill the stoup:
> A timely aid to a feast's enjoyment!
> Thou woman over yonder by the water's edge,
> It is because thou comest from Trotternish
> That to-day thou art left without a mantle!

These lines anticipate elements of a proto-Romantic eco-critical fantasy of immediate contact with and within the natural world, intimacy like that sought by Wordsworth's "Anecdote for Fathers." Although she sits "above" the strait looking over the islands, the poet is immersed in a waterway and surrounded by birds. This immersiveness is sealed by a Gaelic pun on the birds and the wheedler, "Nan an gorma/Thainig bleidean," such that the "wheedler" or gossip appears like a bird, chatty and saucy. But this playful, natural world is already enmeshed in a cultural infrastructure motivated by rivalry and competition. This is not a place where things are preserved, like molluka beans becoming objects of study for botanists, philosophers, and

Celticists: it is a place where people arrive, eat, drink, fight. The poem is not reflective or abstractive or edifying. It is active, even transitive. In this perspective, the Skye channel is not a littoral zone where things are collected but a transitory one where things and people move and interact and brag and feel. This is a poem about crossing, water and land, human and non-human, celebration and anger. Its purpose is not to archive what is left after the things of the world die, but to participate in their collective life.

Connections between the early modern and the Romantic literary history of coastal Scotland are not hard to come by. Consider, for example, Mary, Queen of Scots's picturesque departure from the Solway Firth at Dundrennan in Walter Scott's 1820 novel *The Abbot*:

> The sails were hoisted, the oars were plied, the vessel went freshly on her way through the Frith, which divides the shores of Cumberland from those of Galloway; but not till the vessel diminished to the size of a child's frigate, did the doubtful, and dejected, and dismissed followers of the Queen cease to linger on the sands; and long, long could they discern the kerchief of Mary, as she waved the oft-repeated signal of adieu to her faithful servants, and to the shores of Scotland. (372)

In an era now routinely described by historians and critics alike in terms of snowballing emigration from all over Scotland to the far-flung regions of the "Angloworld" (see McDonagh, Belich), Scott's contemporaries could have been forgiven for anachronistic readings of their sixteenth-century monarch's leave-taking. And, taking place in a "remote corner of Galloway" (368), one of Scott's many such peripheral key-locations for the tides of history around and beyond the islands of Britain, the episode underlines how the Romantic-period interested itself in the particularities of specific coasts as much as in the generalities of coastal environments.

Yet mobility, it seemed to many in the Romantic period, was heaping new pressure on the terms of local belonging. For a discussion of this pressure, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*

turned to its new contributor John Galt, whose "The Steam-Boat" was serialized between February and December 1821. There, in the story of shopkeeper Thomas Duffle's coasting "sea voyages" (517) using the novel technology of steam, Glasgow (his home) is for much of the narrative a kind of virtual location, a notional anchor for a life newly spent in motion. As the steam network radically expands Duffle's horizons, what proceeds is a series of miscellaneous tales and incidents that miniaturizes the form of *Blackwood's* and its rival literary periodicals in the era of mass print. Being a middle-class shopkeeper from urbanizing Glasgow, it seems, has less to do with the genre of the local annal or chronicle—the basis of Galt's breakthrough success with *Annals of the Parish* (1821)—and more to do with the travelogue and the map.

Galt's interest in modernity as a spatial dialectic organized by coastlines provides a distinctly open ending to our topic. Just how late is it, now, in the long Romantic era? How far might such a coastal Romanticism extend? In the final passages of James Kelman's 1983 short story, "Not not while the giro," the stream-of-consciousness narration takes a sudden turn. Grasping onto "the self sufficiency of the sweetly self employed" as a counterpoint to life on the breadline, the speaker describes a pedestrian route "straight round the Scottish Coast from the foot of Galloway right round to Berwick." Soon he is imagining amazed onlookers witnessing his progress years down the line: "Mummy here comes the Scottish Coastroad Walker," "It is rumoured the man was a Captain of Industry Your Grace, been right round the Scottish Coastroad 28 times and known from Galloway to Berwick as a friend to Everyone" (205–07). Walking the coast is an escapist fantasy here, a literary idea. But it carries its own entrapment—"I cannot leave The Great British Shores. Come to that I cannot leave the Scottish ones either." As this suggests, modern coastlines are thresholds of freedom where movement for many is both

restricted and compelled—as the prolonged migrant and refugee crises of the present make so clear. For his part, Kelman's speaker must also reckon with the unevenness of the nation: "Ayrshire is a worry its being a very boring coastline" (205). Coasts are sites where political entities including nations and all their constituent parts are both made and made ridiculous.

As we thus underscore the interdependence of bioregion and infrastructure in both the Romantic era and our own, we can better speak to Morgan Vanek's recent call for a "translocal" eighteenth century, an approach that attends not only to the interconnections between regions that define our periods of study but also, through an environmentally inflected historicism, to those that transect our home institutions. Tracing the manifold connections between watersheds and coastlines helps to describe dynamics of hydrography, commerce, and settlement across centuries, and can even reposition literature programs in dynamic relation to historical patterns of extractive capital inside as well as outside of our universities. Following such mandates, many researchers at our home institutions are helping build cross-disciplinary and publicly engaged programs that attend to local bioregions.

In Vancouver, one of the most naturally beautiful but also wealthy and densely populated coastal cities in North America, several initiatives at the University of British Columbia are researching the effects of human-created climate change on coastal ecologies. Although the research is science-based and data-driven, their dedication to climate justice has recently led these scholars to seek out and promote scholarship on the colonial legacies of British Columbia's coastal and cultural infrastructures. At the University of Essex, Environmental Arts and Humanities scholars alongside marine and freshwater science similarly connect research with practice to work towards environmental justice. Research into oyster beds and coral reefs

complements literary historical work on dependent communities and cultures. Cultural environmentalism and production, sustainability, public policy, and environmental business studies flow together under the aegis of the Interdisciplinary Studies Centre at the School of Philosophy and Art History; the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies runs a distinctive MA in Wild Writing: Literature, Landscape and the Environment; and the Law School and Human Rights Centre offers international law degrees that confront climate change. At the University of Texas in Austin, scholars researching the coastal consequences of climate change have been sponsored by the Bridging Barriers Grand Challenge programs Planet Texas 2050 and Good Systems, and can find at the Harry Ransom Center and at the University's other archives resources furnished especially for cultural histories of human-nature relations. The Edinburgh Environmental Humanities Network is an interdisciplinary collaboration focused on the values and discourses that propel environmental decision-making. And the University of Iowa's Obermann Center for Advanced Studies has dedicated itself to building programs that connect social, economic, and environmental concerns under a mandate for public humanities.

From the perspective of a translocal coastal romanticism, these programs connect the Firth of Forth with the Essex coast, the inland waterways of the Salish Sea with the industrialized coastlines of the Gulf of Mexico, within commercial, environmental, and literary histories. Even an inland state such as Iowa, situated in the center of the midwestern Corn Belt, can be connected to coastal dynamics. Locals joke about Iowa's coasts—bordered by the Missouri River to the west and the Mississippi to the east—but its connection via both of these waterways to the Gulf Coast to the South is considerable. Spanning nearly 56,000 square miles of the upper Mississippi Watershed, Iowa's industrialized system of extractive agriculture creates soil erosion

and nitrogen pollution throughout the state, with consequent silting, algae blooms, and the hypoxic "dead" zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

What does it mean to read and to teach Romantic poetry in the midst of such industrialized regions? To answer this question, we can return to Wordsworth; this time, to a late Wordsworth who has settled on a riverine coastal aesthetic that relinquishes the wildness that edges the *Lyrical Ballads* while still insisting on a formative relationship with nature. In his tributes to the River Duddon, from the "birth-place of a native Stream" (1.9) to the "receptacle vast" (32.7) of the Irish Sea, Wordsworth renders its course "pure, vigorous, free, and bright" (1.13), even as he knew waterways throughout the industrializing West were being engineered to serve more as drainage channels for agricultural run-off than as living ecosystems of trophic relay. Accustomed to bifurcating coasts into industrial or untamed spaces, students may find little common reference when they encounter Wordsworth's famous synthetic metaphor for his autobiographical project: his sighting, from "a slow-moving Boat" in "the bottom of the deeps" of "beauteous sights, weeds, fishes, flowers / Grots, pebbles, roots of trees" that he overlays with the reflections of "rocks and sky, / Mountains and clouds" and the "gleam / Of his own image" (4.256–70). But having meditated on the uncultivated coasts to be found, for instance, in Charlotte Smith's apostrophes to the River Arun (far from the "busy mart" of "trade" [1]) or Coleridge's to the River Otter ("wild streamlet of the West" [1]), students can overlay these representations with experiences of waterways in which they see far too much of our own image. Together we can then revivify Coleridge's ambitions, recorded in his *Biographia Literaria*, to use the windings of a brook in its passage to the sea as the occasion for "description, incident, and impassioned reflections on men, nature, and society" (196), likewise recognizing the

confluence of social, economic, and natural systems in our own watersheds, now with an emphasis on ecological degradation and environmental injustice.

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Notes

[1] On Charlotte Smith's coastal poetics, see O'Quinn.

[2] For the fuller version of this argument, see Baker.

[3] See Grant on Loch Aoineart and St. Kilda.

[4] Archeological studies in Scotland in the nineteenth century were still largely conducted via textualist imperatives of eighteenth-century antiquarianism. See Marsden.

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