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Melissa A. Pelletier
Longwood University

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"WHAT MAN HAS MADE OF MAN":
FROM BRITISH ROMANTICISM TO NEO-ROMANTICISM

by

Melissa A. Pelletier

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

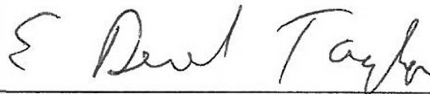
Longwood University

Department of English and Modern Languages



Michael Lund, Ph.D.

Thesis Director



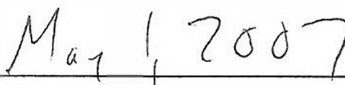
E. Derek Taylor, Ph.D.

First Reader



Chene Heady, Ph.D.

Second Reader



Date

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Acknowledgments

The Green World: where nature reigns and man works in conjunction with her, not against her. For as long as I can remember, I have known, as dear friends of mine sing in "Outside Looking in," that "somewhere in my memory/ there's a picture painted of a dream" (Anderson). In this dream, words are more powerful than any weapons, music more soothing than any drug. I believe I have an old soul that belonged to a medieval bard, for I breathe words and drink music with a need to create of these life-giving gifts something more. Since I was a child with no concept of the evil that resided in my world, I have wanted to tell of the magic around me in trees, under rocks, in the shapes of clouds and the pinprick glitter of stars. As an older child, through my teens, my twenties, I have longed to tear the tawdry facade from what Wordsworth declared "man has made of man" and inspire thought and change, even in just one person—a return to the green from the grey. In writing this thesis, I have realized that dream. But I could not have done so without the help of some very special people.

First and foremost I need to thank Dr. Michael Lund, my director. I could not have begun to write without his wisdom and expertise. Despite his oft-proclaimed dislike of poetry, his assistance and insight was invaluable. And, he was my first teacher in British Romanticism.

Second, I thank Dr. Derek Taylor. You often frustrated me beyond belief in classes, but you made me a better writer and thinker. Without your Romantic Poetry class, I don't think I would ever have understood William Blake, or had as good a grasp on poetry in general. You taught me to simplify as well as analyze, and I owe you for it.



Third, thank you Dr. Chene Heady. I never had you for a class, and barely know you. You told me you were like Dr. Taylor, so I figured I was in good hands! And you proved to be just as exacting a perfectionist. I know your input and attention to even the smallest details made this a better thesis than it would have been without you,

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Thank you Mom, by the way. I didn't forget you. Best for last, huh? Without your constant, um, attentions and myriad phone calls, I may never have finished this. Without your constant support and lifelong belief in me and my dreams, I would never have begun. I owe you more than a few horses, gray hairs, and a permanent guest room, Mom. For the woman who started me in my love of words with her stories of Gertrude Gefilte Fish, and my adoration of nature with countless excursions to beach and forest, lake and field, I owe you the realization of a dream.

To my sisters, Allison Pantle and Rebecca Pelletier, soon to be Shorttall: I love you both and all the brainstorming, distraction, frustration. I adore you for pretending to listen when I was most frustrated, and for saying things to shut me up that ended up being

epiphanies for me. Just remember, no matter how “old” you are, to stay, as Bob Dylan wrote fro his infant son, “forever young.”

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Thank all of you, again, for your help and support, even when things looked bleakest. We muddled through and have arrived, here, at the picture of my dream as it comes to life. I can never thank all of you enough.

Melissa Pelletier

01 May 2007

All of this synergy is producing more energy.
The stars look so perfect from so far away—
you find that the moon is cut so round.

* * *

The earth is a set of keys
that sits on your mantelpiece
unlocking paths like the ageless waves
break on the beach.

* * *

And some people say it's a glorious day,
when you have awakened and found your own faith
has come to light.
There's no wrong or right.

“Glorious Day”

Derek Anderson, Jamie Pohl, Glenn Sedita, Sean Sedita, and Chris Yetter
of Orange Avenue

May God bless you and keep you always,
May your wishes all come true,
May you always do for others
And let others do for you.
May you build a ladder to the stars
And climb on every rung,
May you stay forever young.

“Forever Young”
Bob Dylan

Introduction

Many cutting-edge literary theorists resist traditional identification of individual works by the period in which they were written. Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray in the *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* explain the traditional rationale of periodicity: “writers within a given historical era . . . even writers working in different genres—can be shown objectively to have more in common in terms of themes, styles, and structures of work than writers of different time frames, even those that are chronologically adjacent” (335). Charles D. Bressler explains that in such studies “historical background of the text is only secondarily important because it is the aesthetic object, the text, that mirrors the history of its times. The historical context serves only to shed light on the object of primary concern, the text” (213). But Murfin and Ray go on to note that recent “critics of periodicity have pointed out that the parameters of literary periods are arbitrarily drawn and have little, if anything to with literature” (335).

However, the concept of literary periods still tends to govern how literature is studied in most American universities. The 8th Edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, an industry standard, continues the organizing principles of the previous seven versions: chronological grouping of works and authors from the Middle Ages to The Twentieth-Century and After. Therefore, this study draws on historical events and the idea of literary periods to link two bodies of work—products of British Romanticism and Modern Neo-romanticism—to show a continuity of important themes over the last two centuries. By examining the presence of children, nature, and rebellion

in these two periods we can trace an evolution of literary expression in relation to historical events.

The Monstrous Debt: Modalities of Romantic Influence in Twentieth-Century Literature, a text that was published in 2006, discusses the Neo-romantic relationships extant in literature today. An editor and contributor to this text, Richard Marggraf Turley, states of the return to Romantic tenets in “Keats, Bob Dylan, and the End of Influence” that “At the end of history where every writer finds him- or herself, there can be no triumphant, final return to the unified text, the never-before-uttered” (202). Everything in history repeats, every author is guilty of being influenced by previous generations. The only thing unique in writing is the presentation itself. However, the benefit of this intertextuality is that the themes and lessons of the past are never lost, merely presented in a more socially relevant framework, temporally speaking. In response to the bleakness and despair of Modernism and Postmodernism, some twentieth-century poets have turned back to essential elements of British Romanticism such as a celebration of the rejection of social organizations, endorsement of childhood innocence, and advocating of the search for answers and meaning in nature. British Romantics saw the world around them shrinking, becoming meaner and dirtier, and, as a Modern Neo-romantic bard states in “Radio Song,” “the innocence of youth [becoming] far out of reach/ when knowledge gets a hold” (Anderson). People denied what they were and their responsibility in the world; people also felt English society was riding a downward spiral into its own destruction.

Wars were plentiful during the relatively short Romantic era. The Irish Rebellion occurred in 1798. Susan B. Egenolf says of the Irish Rebellion that:

In the waning years of the eighteenth century, Ireland, following the American and French examples, attempted its own revolution between May and September of 1798. As many as 30,000 people were killed in the Irish rebellion—more than in the French Reign of Terror. Though insurgent forces had some success, briefly establishing a republican government in Wexford, French reinforcements arrived too late and the British troops decisively put down the rebellion. (845)

But this rebellion and its thousands dead was only one of many skirmishes.

Napoleon was rampant on the Continent and beyond throughout the Romantic era. In fact, advances in warfare made this killing of men a yet more deadly game.

Robert Epstein notes how

Napoleonic warfare is characterized by the French use of the army corps system and decisive victories in which the opposing armies are destroyed in one big battle, usually lasting a single day. . . . Warfare itself changed in 1809, and moved beyond Napoleon's powers of comprehension or adaptation. . . . The argument is that the increased size of armies and the use of telegraph, railroads, and new weapons all changed warfare essentially. (375-6)

Men had, in other words, found newer and more efficient ways of killing their kind. And all this occurred in the wake of the French Revolution and the execution of Louis XVI in

January of 1793, followed by the Reign of Terror (1793-4) which, at the time, was perhaps the most horrific event the world had yet experienced. Not only was Napoleon wreaking havoc throughout Europe and even into northern Africa, but revolutions such as the Spanish and continuing skirmishes in France, peppered the continent. In short, men were set on killing men for as little as a spit of land or as much as a perceived right to do what they wanted for religious or territorial motives.

Perhaps one of the reasons for humankind's dissatisfaction was the plethora of disasters that had nothing to do with its violence. These were disasters that neither God nor government could prevent, that education could not, at the time, explain. Richard Evans states that:

Some [diseases] indeed may be said to be creations of the industrial age itself. The classic example of such a disease, as many historians have pointed out, is cholera. Unknown in Europe, this terrible affliction was spread from its home in India across to Afghanistan and Russia as trade began to increase with the combined effects of British industrialization and the creation of the British raj. Once in Europe, it moved rapidly along waterways and, later, railways, which were the main arteries of the rapidly expanding commerce of the nineteenth century. As it arrived in the mushrooming towns and cities of a society in the throes of rapid urbanization, it took advantage of overcrowded housing conditions, poor hygiene and insanitary water-supplies with a vigour that suggested that these conditions might almost have been designed for it The disease

spread in a series of waves or pandemics. . . . It was the second pandemic, lasting from 1826 to 1837, that saw cholera sweep across Europe and North America. (124-5)

The water was polluted by the congested city itself dumping its waste in the same source from which it procured its consumable water. Humankind was the instrument of its undoing, leading to millions dead. Granted, human science was focused on technological achievement. Human beings had not yet concluded that they were, or even could, poison themselves with their own waste— but the resultant epidemic decimated a population nonetheless.

But not all of humankind was racing toward thoughtless destruction of its world and itself. A small but influential faction of the human race, the Romantic poets, saw the effects of society's errors on their core selves and cried against it. They were insightful enough to see that humankind was in danger of destroying itself and its world. Humankind not only killed its own species, but sought dominion over the rest of life on earth. In forcing nature to do its bidding, in disrespecting her boundaries and bounty, it set a course for its own destruction. The Romantics, therefore, urged an escape from "what man has made of man" and an exodus back to nature's embrace, a questioning if not full rejection of humankind's limiting laws, and a renewed reverence for the untainted innocence of childhood.

Ultimately, the rejection of the self as a dominant force and acceptance of the self as just another animal—a part of nature who must respect her and abide by her laws—was the tenet preached by the Romantic poets. In the face of humankind's corrupt social

institutions and churches, its stranglehold on formal education, and its destruction of the world in which it lived, the only solution seemed to be that humankind itself must be sanitized and reinvented. John Keats had what is perhaps the most remembered theory concerning a solution to humankind's taint. He termed this "negative capability."

Bernbaum touched on this Keatsian theory when he said that "The true poet would find himself by losing himself" (223). This concept condenses John Keats idea of how true poetry may be found, a concept he first penned in a letter to George and Tom Keats. He wrote in December of 1821:

I had not a dispute, but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason. (370)

This concept advocated the rejection of self-consciousness, of self awareness and judgement. The teaching of humankind and its laws suffocated the truth in the self, so only a negation of these taints could reverse the effect. Keats' feeling was that only by shedding the trappings of humankind could one find one's true potential. True art, to Keats, resided in the subconscious, still untainted, mind. Innocence was not dead, just rejected and abandoned. Reconnection to this aspect of the self and the subsequent surrender to it were, for Keats, the way to write true poetry and be a complete person. Another aspect of negative capability is the ability to empathize with others and thus lose

the burden of one's own consciousness in the identity of another. The surrender was, for him, and all Romantics, the only means by which humankind might save itself from its fate.

Chapter One: Romanticism

Childhood

British Romantics celebrate the child's innocence while bemoaning the stains of experience. None did this better than William Blake, perhaps most noted for *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Davies and Beatty note that Blake in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* appeals to the childlike self in readers by utilizing "an exceptionally specialized branch of the lyric which happened to be very active in the latter part of the eighteenth century: the children's hymn" (Davies 20). This form and the celebration of childhood innocence are both readily apparent in "Nurse's Song" from *Songs of Innocence*.

"Nurse's Song" is a lyrical poem that celebrates the state of childhood and teaches one to maintain that state as long as possible, the nurse in the poem urging her charges to "go & play till the light fades away" (13). To the innocent reader, the poem is saying nothing more than what appears on the paper. The light, to the experienced reader's mind, is the light of youth, and the line a reminder that youth, like the light of day, fades. Despite one's best efforts, one will find himself in bed with the ravages of experience, the knowledge that life grants.

Experience for Blake is social mores, the edicts that steal the freedom of expression, the freedom of seeing the world with open mind and heart. Experience teaches the lesson of mortality and hurt, of loss and sorrow. Experience teaches the value of home and hearth, of avoiding shadows and uncivilized spaces, of fearing the unknown instead of seeing its possibilities. The nurse warns her charges: "Come home my

children, the sun is gone down/ And the dews of night arise” (5-6) as a way of cautioning against the very things experience has taught her to fear, as a way of teaching that the night will drown one in its terrors unless one flees the dark for the safety of home.

The children, however, have a different way of seeing the darkening world. Not fearing the coming of the unknown, their eyes are open to their world and they plead: “in the sky, the little birds fly/ And the hills are all cover’d with sheep” (11-2). Where the nurse sees the society-taught threats of darkness, the children only see the innocence about them, not monsters and evil, but little, harmless birds and a blanket of white, fluffy sheep. This innocence of vision depicts the innocence of heart, the freedom from fear.

The innocence of children is coveted by the Romantic poet because it reflects a world as it once was, before experienced adulthood carved its way into it. Over the space of millennia, humankind formed into societies and cities, developed a market system with the requisite material goods and capitalism. A need to want more and still more arose with the formation of class structure and the growing disparity in income and social place. Desire was turned to the creations of humankind, namely money and goods, and away from the natural world in which human beings lived. With this desire and the disparity arose crime and the need to lock oneself and one’s goods into a box for safety. Instead of exploring the beauty of the natural world, humankind carved from it materials for its homes and buildings, stripped it for its pastures and fields. It destroyed the innocence with its industry and need for control of its surroundings, of people lower in class, of its families, and of its belongings. The more human beings had, the more they wanted, and the more rigid humankind’s controls became, controls meant to protect its goods. Lost were the innocent eyes that could see the good and joy, the innocent heart

that, like the children in “Nurse’s Song,” could trust blindly. The Romantic poet yearns for this time when life was simpler, the time when inspiration arose within as a Wordsworthian “spot of time” from the place of Keats vaunted negative capability.

While these concepts shared their similarities, their key difference lay in how one achieved this selfless state. Wordsworth, in “The Prelude,” spoke of how

There are in our existence spots of time,
 That with distinct pre-eminence retain
 A renovating virtue, whence—depressed
 By false opinion and contentious thought,
 Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
 In trivial occupations, and the round
 Of ordinary intercourse—our minds
 Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
 A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
 That penetrates, enables us to mount,
 When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
 This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
 Among those passages of life that give
 Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
 The mind is lord and master—outward sense
 The obedient servant of her will. Such moments
 Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
 From our first childhood. (209-25)

These spots were moments, as he described in Volume One of the 1802 version's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, where one was taken over by "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (265). The transference into the place of true art resided in the self, in one's experience. The self was not deleted, but expanded until it became selfless. For Keats, it was the absence of self that allowed one to enter into art, become art, without the catalyst Wordsworth mentioned. This selfless place, whether one arrived there through experience or not, was one free from influence and was the breeding ground, for the Romantic, of true art: and this place only existed truly in childhood. Innocence has no need to "leave off play" (7) and hurry indoors "Till the morning appears in the skies" (8). When no harm is intended or suspected, darkness holds no horrors, and nature has no teeth. For the innocent child a cloud could become Pegasus and daffodils could dance. This innocence explored so thoroughly by Blake is not just the lost joys, but the place in the soul from whence true life springs, and from whence true beauty bubbles to the surface free of constraint and the bleakness of experience.

Nature

William Wordsworth's "Lines Written in Early Spring" exemplifies the British Romantic trait of searching for answers and meaning in nature. The title of the poem signifies rebirth, and the poem itself lists such images to support this. The persona details the beauty of the natural world, describing "the primrose tufts" (9), the way "the birds around [him] hopped and played" (13), and the manner in which "The budding twigs spread out their fan/ To catch the breezy air" (17-8). These images portray a world of peace and beauty, a world where life progresses as it ought. Taken alone, the images

presented offer a sense of joy and freedom. Indeed, the freedom exists in the unsullied world where nature reigns. The peace, joy, and progression of life are, as the persona states, “Nature’s holy plan” (22). These images, however, are not the only ones listed, and indeed not the truly important ones; they are just the frame for the poet’s lesson.

The frame of the natural world, the peace and purity of it, contains the persona’s lament for “What man has made of man” (8). The persona mentions he heard, while escaping the world of humankind’s creation, Nature’s voice singing in “a thousand blended notes” (1); instead of joy, the surrounding images and nature’s song “Bring sad thoughts to mind” (4). As Percy Shelley stated in *Defense of Poetry*, “Poetry turns all things to loveliness . . . it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms” (Shelley). For the Romantic, it is in nature that one may truly understand what is lacking in humankind’s world, what was sacrificed to create the steaming, polluting, gobbling Leviathan of an industrial world. Only in nature can one find answers for how to mend the insult of humankind’s influence on the world.

The true story, that of humankind’s failings and the solution, is tied into the frame when the persona tells how “To her fair soul did Nature link/ The human soul that through me ran” (4-5). With these lines, the soul of humankind is stated to be part of nature’s domain, part of the natural cycle of things. In so stating, the persona denies humankind’s claim to a right to treat the world as it pleases, for, in so doing, with every tree felled, all pollution spewed into air and water, for every creature forced from its natural home, humankind is infringing on a world to which it belongs. In essence, destruction of its world is also the destruction of humankind.

The persona twice addresses the question of what humankind is making of itself, how it is responsible for the destruction in the world. Contrasted with the mention of pleasure in nature, with the peace and simple beauty of the images, the line bears significance. The persona's time with nature has led to the conclusion "That there was pleasure there" (16) in the world— which implicitly denies that there is pleasure in humankind's urban scars— and that "If this belief from Heaven be sent,/ If such be Nature's holy plan" (17-8), then has the persona "not reason to lament/ What man has made of man?" (19-20). Twice, the persona mentions the grief granted by thought of humankind's harm to its world and itself; twice, the persona mentions nature's plan and humankind's link to it. "Man," to the persona, is aborting himself from nature's womb, poisoning the world that unquestioningly nourishes him. Nature offers answers, solace; "Man" has chosen not to accept.

Thus, an excursion into nature for the persona results in found meaning and implied answers. Meaning in the world resides in nature, in the Presence that suffuses the green world, that links all things together in an intricate web. Humankind, as it is upsetting the balance and tearing the web, can only mend the world by ceasing its destructive ways and returning to the world that has always cared for it. The secondary answer, seen in the lament being repeated at the poem's close, is that humankind will not alter its ways. It will continue to upset the balance, and eventually destroy its world, itself with it. No more will "every flower/ [enjoy] the air it breathes" (11-2). Humankind's industriousness and hate, the poem suggests, will finally destroy it and its world, and all possibility for rebirth.

Rebellion against Society

Rejection of social organizations, specifically organized religion, government, and formal educational systems, is the basis of British Romanticism. The need to escape the world of humankind to find answers, meaning, and solace in nature directly stems from the world humankind has created, its social organizations and the corruption therein. The celebration of childhood innocence is also a reaction to “what man has made of man” (Wordsworth 8), the innocence and simplicity of youth not yet being corrupted by the rule of humankind. The necessary limitations involved in formal education created an environment where blank minds could be taught exactly what the establishment desired. Anything contrary to that agenda was omitted.

Perhaps the best example of this Romantic rejection is presented in the comedic failure of a poetic persona who received the finest education school and church could bestow in Lord Byron’s *Don Juan*. Don Juan in Canto First, stanza XLIX is said to have

waxed in goodliness and grace;

At six a charming child, and at eleven

With all the promise of as fine a face

As e’er to man’s maturer growth was given:

He studied steadily, and grew apace,

And seem’d, at least, in the right road to heaven,

For half his days were pass’d at church, the other

Between his tutors, confessor, and mother. (I.XLIX.1-8)

But, despite this promise for goodness inspired by his education, Juan, “a little curly-headed, good-for-nothing,/ And mischief-making monkey” (I.XXV.1-2) fails to

succumb. His face supercedes his learning and he becomes romantically involved with “Donna Julia, whom to call/ Pretty were but to give a feeble notion/ of many charms in her as natural” (I.LV.3-5) and who is by “all/ selected for discretion and devotion” (I.LV.1-2). In both cases, Juan and Julia have exemplary educations and moral backgrounds, but their attractiveness takes precedence and leads each to abandon their sense of right and wrong to indulge their baser instincts. They know the laws of society and the church and blithely ignore them, choosing to indulge their physical needs. The comedic delivery of Byron’s work, instead of moralizing about the failures of Juan and Julia to succeed as citizens, celebrates their acceptance of instinct.

Organized religion, according to the Romantics, created of God what best suited its needs: a being to arouse fear and exert iron-fisted control on society. This, Voltaire mentioned, must be suspect because of humankind’s very hand is in its creation. Romantics saw that the human world was ordering its life by this human work and challenged it. Unlike poetry, which allows one to draw one’s own conclusions and believe or disbelieve the message therein, religious doctrine had taken on an absolute force in society, the human hand in its conception forgotten by many. Therefore, organized religion, including religious works like the Bible, were to be rejected by the Romantics as corrupt, and the true God’s presence sought in the natural world among its works, in the connections among all living things. Finally, governing bodies must also be rejected as corrupt and possessed of an agenda, of which one goal was to exert control through a system of fear and punishment, much like organized religion. Only in the world before humankind’s corruption could truth and meaning or answers be found.

Rosso and Watkins note that “‘Rime [of the Ancient Mariner]’ demonstrates [Coleridge’s] great theme of the One Life” (Rosso 222). Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” tells the tale of a mariner who breaks from the world of humankind. He seeks the One Life, the time Romantic poets are seeking to recover, eschewing humankind’s laws and corruption. He tells the Wedding Guest, who “listens like a three years’ child” (15), that “Merrily did we drop/ Below the kirk, below the hill,/ Below the light house top” (21-3). At once the reader is to recall the trustingness and naivete of childhood and to see the escape from the world of humankind, its law, and its church as positive. In fact, it is not this abandonment of that which humankind has built to keep the world at bay, but the mariner and his crew refusing to totally eschew the world of humankind’s making that leads to the hazards along their journey.

The storm the mariner and his men encounter “chased [them] south along” to a frozen world barren of warmth, of familiar life. They fail to note the beauty of the glaciers “As green as emerald” (54) or to hear the voice of this nature, “Like noises in a swound” (61). However, the seamen seek answers in their frozen world, their icebound crypt; upon spying an Albatross, “As if it had been a Christian soul,/ We hailed it in God’s name” (65-6). Thus, by virtue of looking outside the world of humankind for answers, “The ice did split with a thunder-fit; The helmsman steered [them] through” (68-9). And, for a time, the sailors fare well while the Albatross accompanies them. When the mariner, however, kills the bird that has usurped the prayers to the Christian god their luck changes for the worse. In so doing, the mariner, instead of garnering the favor of said god, incurs the wrath of nature.

With the return of bad weather also arrives sickness and death to all but the mariner. Death visits the ship in person in the guise of a ghost ship that appears as fleshless bones on the horizon, sailing against the wind, against all law of humankind, and manned only by innocence herself. The mariner watches as all around him suffer for his failure to accept the voice and manifestation of nature in place of humankind's gods. The mariner, "With [his] cross-bow/ [He] shot the Albatross" (l.81-2). For this, he suffers until, finally, he no longer fears nature. He, alone with innocence on a ship crewed by the dead, in a world with nothing but himself, sees in the water after a time "the water-snakes" (273).

Snakes, in Christian lore, are the servants of the devil, the tempters, and responsible for the Fall. However, the mariner, no longer anchored to the world of humankind, peers overboard, "watched their rich attire" (279), noting how "every track/ Was a flash of golden fire" (280). Instead of recoiling, despite their beauty, he praises it, declares them not the hand of the devil, but "O happy living things! no tongue/ Their beauty might declare:/ A spring of love gushed from my heart/ And I blessed them unaware" (282-285). It took the revelation that life— not humankind's names and edicts and law— was praiseworthy and the receptacle of God to finally free the mariner of his sin of killing the previous harbinger of nature's good will. John Beer states in "Coleridge, Ted Hughes, and Sylvia Plath" that "In the Ancient Mariner," ['epiphanic experience'] is presented as an existential act issuing from seep within the Mariner's being, a simple affirmation directed toward the luminous energies of water-snakes" (139). It is during this praise of the sea snakes that "The Albatross fell off, and sank/ Like lead into the sea," an act that thereby freed the Mariner from his curse (290-291).

The mariner fled the world of humankind with its support as “The ship was cheered” (1.21). The sailed away from the restrictions of humankind and its constructs as “merrily did [they] drop/ Below the kirk, below the hill/ Below the lighthouse top” (1.22-3). When the mariner returns to the world of humankind, it is not via the ways he once knew. His final ties to the creations of humankind are severed when his “ship went down like lead” (7.549). At this time, he is in the company of what he assumes to be “the Hermit good” (6.508) who will “shrieve [the mariner’s] soul” (6.511) and finally “wash away/ The Albatross’s blood” (6.511-2). Instead, the mariner finds a different kind of hermit than the holy man he anticipated.

Far from providing salvation, the mariner’s encounter with the hermit ends with the cut to his final ties: the loss of his ship. The hermit, far from saving the mariner and shrieving him of his sins, is instead rescued by the mariner and the Pilot. His shrieving, at the mariner’s bequest to “shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!” (7.574) is perfunctory and not necessary at that point. The mariner has lost all his ties to the world of humankind and is fated to travel the seas, telling his tale to others he encounters. The mariner states how

this frame of mine was wrenched
 With a woeful agony,
 Which forced me to begin my tale;
 And then it left me free. (7.578-81)

The frame wrenched was the frame in which he lived, the world of human society and its laws, religion, and formal education. The agony of breaking from everything he was taught to believe, from the world he knew, pained him, but, in the end, left him free to

choose his own path, except when "That agony returns:/ and till my ghastly tale is told,/ This heart within me burns" (7.583-5). Occasionally the world from which he broke reasserts itself and breeds doubt in the rime of the mariner. However, recalling his tale and his trials to another who is still thickly encrusted with the law of human society, frees the mariner, for a while, of the burden of his rime.

Humankind's world, its laws, violate the natural order and force conformity, uniformity, and the exertion of rigid control over human kind. This uniformity is a bane to Romantics. The praise of humankind as the highest animal is wrong. Humankind's church, that construct of society, is not ultimate truth. Humankind's law is not absolute, and the forcing of all other beings to adhere to these laws or face dire punishment is not just acceptable, but necessary. The shackling of young minds in the rigid mold of that which experience mandates they learn, education that comes from books, adults of the species, not actual experience and learning. . . . In this, the world of humankind fails, Coleridge quietly states in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Only in learning to see through the facades humankind has erected on the world, to learn to think for oneself, to seek for oneself answers through actual experience, not in a book, will humankind have a chance to shed the weight of its sin against the world.

Chapter Two: Modern Romanticism

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have perhaps seen more useless bloodshed than any other centuries. As so many modern poets have written, the modern world is one of war. A few of the most notable are World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and the United States' most recent effort, the war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. Smaller skirmishes, of course, litter modern history with death and destruction. These are not the wars of the past where one side fought for something it desperately believed in; but, according to some poets, they are wars of senseless, useless killing for no other real reason than each side's governing body thinks it is probably right. The warriors, the ones sent to the killing fields, have no choice in the matter but to swarm forward with one goal: return home alive. In these modern times, say writers, the only ones who care about the wars are the leaders, safe in their towers, who send these boys and girls like so many video game avatars to die for causes in which few believe. These chosen warriors' daily goal is often not to spread democracy, or communism, or advance another political agenda—it is just to survive one more day, to return home to kiss their children goodnight, and grumble about the bills with their wives or husbands.

However, death is not the only tragedy of war. These wars leave the survivors damaged, as well. Leslie Roberts notes a study that shows how “fifteen to twenty years [after the war], Vietnam veterans are more than twice as likely to suffer from serious psychological problems—alcohol abuse, major depression, and anxiety—as soldiers who did not serve in Vietnam” (159). Much of the time, too, these wars begin as small civil wars into which major powers needlessly insert themselves and sacrifice their troops.

Lawrence Freedman notes that:

when major states intervene abroad [in foreign civil wars], they normally claim to do so in the name of universal values rather than selfish national interests. Right. Back in the days when interstate conflicts were the norm, governments used formal declarations to endow themselves with extraordinary wartime powers, such as rooting out ‘enemy aliens’ residing on their soil, controlling economic activity, or suppressing domestic dissent. . . . Such great disparity of power now exists between democratic countries and the rest of the world that Western governments feel they can risk fighting wars that would have had little domestic support in the past. The promises of swift, decisive victory against a weaker foe sometimes mitigates concerns over casualties. (16-7)

This propensity to want to involve one’s country in the affairs of others, to play the hero by swooping in and decisively saving the righteous, this group determined by these foreign officials based on their criteria, leads to nothing but increased social and personal damage. It is not unlikely that this phenomenon is just a large-scale result of social desensitization. Allen D. Hertzke discusses the role of the media in undermining society. He states that:

The 1969 National Commission Showed that the effects of television violence [–desensitization–] could be checked if it was clear that the victim of the violence was suffering, a finding that should raise concerns about the desensitizing effects of a new generation of ultra-violent, ultra-graphic video games. Desensitization, in which violence is seen as ‘no big deal,’ emerges as one of the commonest indirect effects of media

violence. A desensitized individual feels less empathy for the victims of real-life violence and proves to be far less likely to intervene on the victim's behalf. While desensitization to violence does not necessarily mean that the viewer is more violent, it does make him more likely to accept violent acts done by others. (641)

Thanks to the media, the fear of the unknown is stripped away and viewers, readers, and listeners can experience "first hand" the horrors of which they were once afraid. More than that, the deaths and violent acts enacted are not real, the human actors surviving to play another role and the animated ones' suffering disregarded. Instead of portraying the beauty and hope in the world, writers and producers are forced by a voyeuristic audience to give them a peephole into society's depravity. They can then feel "awful" while munching popcorn from the safety of a theater or their homes. Thus, desensitization, and the apathetic social view of pain and suffering.

Discouraging as any government's sacrifice of men and women to further its political agenda, more so, for a number of poets, is the increasing propensity of humankind to prey on its own kind. This affliction, like social apathy, has been linked to violence in the media. Richard B. Felson notes that much of the current violent trend in society may be linked to technological advances. He states that "Not long after the introduction of television in the American households, there occurred a dramatic increase in violent crime. Some scholars and commentators see a causal connection. The most common argument is that children imitate the violence they see on television" (104). Children are being victimized, in a sense, by the media. The exposure to violence in the form is television, movies, and video games, and exposure unknowing or uncaring

parents fail to restrict, is robbing children of their innocence. This creates an adolescent who fails to understand consequences for actions – not simply punishment if they are caught, but the very real injury inflicted on those whom they happen to victimize, the finality of death. The media creates idols of its personalities. Modern day children, left to their own devices, look to these idols for clues about how to act. Amy Binder even looked into the effects of the music children listen to, music being the modern version of popular poetry—very popular if one is to judge by the glut of music and music paraphernalia consumed by this generations youth. Specific genres of music lyrics, as with certain poets and their works, have a certain power over its listeners and readers. For one, Binder states how “the *types* of danger contained in rap lyrics . . . created legions of misogynistic listeners who posed a danger to women, particularly because rap music depicted rape and other brutality” (759). More so, perhaps, than ever before, the innocence of society is being molded and shaped by its poets. Poets who, in their obsession with fame and fortune, fail to recognize their responsibilities to society.

Thanks in part to media portrayals of society, the world seems to have become obsessed with personalities and forgotten people. The “Me” generation focuses on itself and how its daily encounters directly benefit or harm just that one person. Reason has fled in the face of this selfishness. True, the Romantic poets saw reason as a shackles on human imagination and, in essence, an abolition of reason would appear to be an event to be celebrated. However, this loss is not of the reason the Romantics eschewed, for it is replaced with a narrower, meaner kind of reason. The self, not science and law, has become the new idol, and all actions must benefit that self. Human beings have, instead of turning outward, away from the world of human kind, has turned further inward—an

effect that further limits it. Humankind is acting as a mass of individuals as consequences, in the face of real-life media, take on an unreal quality and are, therefore, disregarded. Society is failing to care not only for its adults, but for its future. Innocence is being corrupted and destroyed before it has a chance to bloom. The pulp magazine stories about "The Shadow" written by Walter Gibson and later made into a radio program that aired in the 1930s and 40s opened each segment with the question "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" The reply was "The Shadow knows." Today, that evil, far from lurking in the recesses of the heart, is all too apparent. Henry E. Hankerson notes that:

the range of social problems related to cause of child abuse and neglect include: (1) a large scale of mental illness, (2) rising health costs and unequal medical services, (3) poverty in the midst of affluence, (4) unemployment among youth and heads of households, (5) poor housing, (6) high rates of delinquency, (7) inadequate and irrelevant education, (8) hunger and malnutrition, (9) sex crimes, (10) racism, and (11) handicapping conditions. Society's knowledge of the causes of child abuse and neglect has not produced adequate results for the millions of children who suffer severe physical, emotional, and social abuse and neglect daily. (400)

These are social problems a synergistic society could ameliorate if not fully rectify. However, humankind is so wrapped in its own dealings, in its own gratification and injuries, that it can no longer see the larger world. In fact, Marian Wright Edelman notes that "Most Americans now realize that poverty is not just the result of personal

inadequacy, laziness, and unworthiness, despite some national leaders' attempts to portray the poor as culpable. . . . Of those 32.5 million poor, more than 13 million are children. Children make up the poorest age group in America" (23). There is no real reason for the social disparity to affect the innocent and blameless of a nation—yet it does.

The world of the future is being destroyed in the present for no real reason at all and, as in the past, the writers, specifically the poets, are trying to help.

Faced with an empty future and missing a reason for the way of the world, modern poets have turned to the tenets of the Romantic period in Britain. While government sponsored war perhaps has some rationale behind it, the individual's war against its own kind lacks such. Human beings kill other human beings for little or no reason but to take what they desire from others. Humankind terrorizes individuals and groups; it rapes women; it molests children. Much good and generosity exists in human society, but the negative aspects and acts get more media attention. With the advent and increasing popularity of affordable media, such as periodicals and penny newspapers in Victorian England, came the mass knowledge and interest in the crimes of human being against human being. However, instead of revealing his depravity, this attention made of the criminal a sort of celebrity, a household name: and the phenomenon continues today. Who hasn't heard of Jack the Ripper or Jeffrey Dahmer, of Columbine or the Virginia Tech massacre, of the Oklahoma bombing, 9-11, or O.J. Simpson? Crime is in vogue, and humankind in its greed fails to see the horror of cashing in on this quality.

Serial killers are celebrated in film and literature, from the various "true crime" films and books to much straight fiction. Violence is the theme of choice in movies, fiction, video games, and entertainment. Extreme Sports celebrate the damage and

propensity for damage one may inflict on oneself as well as others; scars and other bodily demarcation are badges of honor. Children's cartoons make a game and a joke of violence and death; even the innocuous America's Funniest Home Videos encourages laughter at the pain of others.

Many Neo-romantic writers have concluded that the civilized human world is no longer a haven from the outside world, but just another trap. Nowhere is safe any longer. And the judicial systems, once bound to protect the innocent from false accusation, has bred a super-breed of lawyers who have made a game out of defending the most heinous criminal. No longer does "innocent until proven guilty" apply. Modern human beings can be actually guilty and found innocent— and the media seems to prefer this— as long as he or she can afford a good attorney. Criminal trials have become media spectacles, not subjects of serious literature. They have become video games of a sort, where the victim is forgotten, and the lawyers are the combatants playing a jury for advantage. Will the defendant found with the knife buried to the hilt in the victim's chest, spattered in their blood, be found guilty? No matter, the modern über-lawyer will manipulate the jury, and the defendant will skip away, free. Unlike the days gone by where monsters, like the Romantic writer Mary Shelley's creature in *Frankenstein*, were, despite their human-seeming appearance in some cases, actual monsters (the werewolf or vampire), monsters today are men, and their atrocities are fodder for laughter, celebration, and emulation. Society has become a cess pool of horror, but poets find individuals too involved in themselves to see anything wrong.

With nature losing ground to the atrocities perpetrated against her by her smartest animal, even that haven is threatened. While, yes, say poets, nature can and will heal

from anything humankind can inflict upon her, the human taint is everywhere.

Humankind has torn a hole in the ozone layer, stripped forests, overfished oceans.

Human beings are impatient to wait and inject animals with hormones to make them grow bigger and faster with no regard for how those hormones will affect the human beings who will later ingest their flesh; and it clones them to make more, faster, without having to preserve parent animals. In fact, it has taken to even more extreme measures against nature. Daniel M. Schwartz states a case where:

fishermen—irate over a recently imposed limit on sea-cucumber harvesting . . . held the [Darwin Research Station] workers hostage and threatened to kill several rare and endangered species or tortoises. . . . Although the Ecuadorian marines recaptured the station without loss of human life, it was later discovered that 81 Galapagos Island tortoises had been killed—mostly by way of torture, mutilation, and hanging. (490)

Humankind has turned from heedlessly destroying nature to wilfully exploiting its rarities and torturing them like prisoners of war. Little is sacred. Nothing safe from the teeth of humankind. All that is left to save humanity from itself is the next generation.

Humankind's last hope is its offspring, and to this solution a number of modern poets have turned. They are the children of their parents, who may be doomed to inherit the same destructive properties, the same ennui and apathy. The innocence of youth becomes all the more precious. Untainted, however, the very young can be trained to change their world, to save themselves and rectify the sins of their parents. However, the taint of experience is acquired earlier and earlier. Flora J. Arnstein, a San Francisco

teacher, states of her students' poetry in her 1961 article "I Met Death One Clumsy Day," that, since she began teaching several years previously,

at most four or five [poems] have been written on war and death, although in the early years of my teaching were inclusive of World War II, and a larger number of children and adolescents participated [in the voluntary writing program] than in the later [classes]. In contrast, during these last two years more than fifty-two poems have been written on [war and violence]. . . . It is not hard to account for this choice of theme, considering the Viet Nam War, the ubiquitous television reportage, and the constant implied use of the bomb. . . . I find myself deeply troubled not only by [the students'] preoccupation with war (which under the circumstances is to be expected) but by their apparent sense of continuous confrontation with the idea of death. . . . That these manifestations exist at all in the context of childhood and adolescence seems to me to call for sober consideration . . . children and teenagers bring a sure intuition of all [war's] instability and confusion of values. (853)

Unable to hide from the violence of the world that is fed to them in their television programs, video games, music, literature, the children are being lost.

Focus cannot remain on the adult generations, but on the youth. Groups dedicated to preservation and salvation of natural resources abound, from radical individuals who take matters into their own hands, such as individuals one hears of in the news who break into facilities where animals are used in testing and free the animals while destroying property, to nationally recognized organizations like Greenpeace and

PETA. Their campaigns— from pleas to avoid animal cruelty and save the wetlands, calls to prevent destruction of natural preserves such as the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge, and requests to help stop the approaching extinction of the spotted owls— plead with them to seek refuge in nature, to protect and nurture their bodies, to learn from the past mistakes. The youth must be severed from their parents' influence and made to understand the failings of the past and taught to fix them. Formal elementary education seems to teach laziness and the benefit of athletic ability and good breeding, in several cases, particularly in less affluent or privileged areas, letting children through its ranks who are unable to write simple sentences or, in many cases read, despite the No Child Left Behind program and standardized tests such as the Standards of Learning exams in Virginia.

Nevertheless modern poets try to write their own story. These writers say that organized religion preaches adherence to the old ways, to tenets long outdated. Social organizations exist to bask in self praise for their hard work and selflessness while those they seek to help never seem to break free of their inflections. Countless millions of dollars are raised at star-studded events to help find cures for all the terrible diseases in the world while victims of these diseases, many without health insurance or money to buy doctor's care or medication, die daily for want of a few dollars. The governing bodies glory in their greatness, sitting above the average man like nothing less than a Hobbsian Leviathan, Louis XIV, or Mussolini. The organizations of humankind, say poets, are corrupt and peopled with individuals satisfied to be corrupt as they wear blinders against reality. The only hope left is the infant generation, the untried ability of those who see the failure of the world and want to rectify matters. The poetry of Dylan

Thomas (1914-1953), Richard Wilbur (1921-), James Dickey (1923-1997), Charles Simic (1938-), Mary Oliver (1935-), Mark Jarman (1952-), and Billy Corgan (1967-) is meant to take the first steps toward offering the means of saving humanity and the natural world.

Childhood in Modern Poetry:

Dylan Thomas, Mark Jarman, and Billy Corgan

Daily reports tell of missing children, abused children: children who are stripped of their innocence. The simple joys of knowing neither fear, nor true hurt, nor death, of living halfway in one's imagination, end sooner with each generation. No answers are offered by the media and those others who despair over this growing trend of victimizing children. The loss of innocence is touted as permanent and unstoppable. However, the poetry of Dylan Thomas, Mark Jarman, and Billy Corgan offers answers to help halt and even reverse this trend.

Dylan Thomas refused to accept the cost of experience. Caitlin Thomas states myriad times in her biographies that, to his dying day, he remained a perpetual child, that change terrified him, and that aging was just a form of change. In fact, in many biographies of the poet, particularly his wife Caitlin Thomas', he is said to have claimed that he planned to die before he was forty. This he accomplished, dying eleven days after his thirty-ninth birthday.

Thomas' poetry reflected this innate fear of change and refusal to accept aging. He wrote his home into immortality, capturing in his inimitable style everything from the October sky to a hunchbacked vagrant. Not until after World War II did he venture out

from revisions of his original body of work, now housed in Buffalo University of New York and called the Buffalo Notebooks. “Only words caught his imagination” states Caitlin Thomas of Dylan Thomas (100). Thomas himself put it more eloquently in an interview. He stated that

You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it technically tick, and say to yourself . . . ‘Yes, this is *it*. This is why the poem moves me so. It is because of the craftsmanship.’ But you’re back again where you began. You’re back with the mystery of having been moved by words. The best craftsmanship always leaves holes and gaps in the works of the poem so that something that is *not* in the poem can creep, crawl, flash, or thunder in. The joy and function of poetry is, and was, the celebration of man. (xxii).

No matter how bleak the world got, Thomas always turned outward to nature and innocence, to the negative space in the words, to the spots of time he cherished. Caitlin Thomas suspected that he drank to escape from the burdens of adulthood and experience. She mentioned that “It was the drinking that gave him a life apart from his genius” (120). In drink he found the thoughtless, selfless innocence the Romantics touted and his contemporaries called irresponsibility. In the negative space, the absence of his self, he wrote poetry that sang to the soul of hope and something better.

In humankind’s defense, argued Thomas, its destructive force against its own kind and its world are, ironically, administered in innocence. It never stops to consider the ramifications of its work, to consider failure, that it may, in success, destroy all it cherishes. Humankind saw a goal, that of protecting itself and its species from oblivion

and discomfort, and set about achieving that end without thought of the means necessary to achieve it. It never considered that oblivion, instead of being defeated, would consume its life. The joy and glory of traveling its world—of experiencing first hand, not being taught how to experience, its life—would be lost, producing faded photographs in the dusty box labeled in crayon at the back of its mind. Like the child that tramples flower beds and ant hills in pursuit of the Tyrannosaurus Rex, humankind, according to Thomas, has trampled hope and the joy of knowing one's place in the world, of understanding the interconnectivity in all things that is the true immortality.

The British Romantics of old lamented this loss of innocence, this failure of humankind to know the results of its final act of innocence; the Neo-romantics lament, yes, but also warn. They try to teach those yet free— as well as those willing to let loose the shackles of experience (the consequences of “growing up and acting one's age”)— limitations imposed by the forced migration from innocence to experience. Dylan Thomas, the most well-known and widely acknowledged of the Neo-romantics, dealt with this issue in many of his later poems, when the blush of his own innocence faded with the ink in his original collection, now called the *Buffalo Notebooks*. “This Side of the Truth (*for Llewelyn*),” written from father to son, bluntly delivers this warning.

“This side of the truth,/ you may not see, my son,” (1-2) states the persona. The side of the truth Thomas' persona mentioned is the knowledge of experience. The truth of formal education is limited by human involvement in its conception and, therefore, to be warned against. The father in the poem is warning against the loss of innocence when formal education takes a hold. One moment humankind resides “In the blinding country of youth” (4), the next, “innocence and guilt/ . . . / Is gathered and spilt/ Into the winding

dark/ Like the dust of the dead” (7-12). Light fades, and darkness imposes its dominion over heart and mind as the wildness of Possibility is hobbled and fettered, forced to give way to Reason, that which Blake warned against in poem after poem.

In this surrender, the borders of the world shrink and become just the concept of “Good and bad, two ways/ Of moving about your death” (13-4). Thomas does not allow for a return to innocence, as did those who adhered to Romantic tenets, but sees a finality in atrophying into a creature ruled by Good and Bad, just rules set for how one ought to act while one of the walking, unwitting dead. For him, loss of innocence, joy in the world, and the beauty in all things was death in life. One who surrendered his connection to the world, his innocence, was doing nothing more than waiting to die.

In death, “the last element” (23), these human concepts of good and bad “Fly like stars’ blood/ Like the sun’s tears,/ Like the moon’s seed, rubbish/ And fire” (24-7). In death, all the society-made concepts and laws, all experience, ceases to matter, become as impossible as blood from a star, tears from the sun, become garbage. In the end, if one bows to and accepts the mantle of experience, life is a wasted venture and death, come sooner or later, is welcome as the end of the grey world of humankind.

In the end, all that is real is the connection to the world, the cycle of nature, that connection much of humankind cries against, the connection that is innocence. In the end, the only true evil is “the wicked wish” (29) that causes humankind, in innocence, to try to protect its kind, the wish that, when death finally visits, is shown to be hollow. In death’s embrace, the persona warns the subject who is drifting ever closer to losing his innocence, “All your deeds and words,/ Each truth, each lie,/ Die in unjudging love” (34-6). When all is over, when all the adherence to law and assimilation of “knowledge”

ceases, humankind's goal, its unwitting disconnection from the world—the desired trait it instills and calls maturity—is pointless. The corporeal being rejoins the cycle from which it attempted to sever itself.

Ploughshares: the Literary Journal at Emerson College offers the following information in a biographical sketch of Mark Jarman, author of seven volumes of poetry and two of essays, and contributor to many journals throughout his career. From these early years, he knew only motion and change. His religion was the only constant. He was born into a world of constant motion, where jobs were disposable and people rarely stayed in one place for very long. The result of this ebb and flow of life was his poetry (*Ploughshares*).

The religion with which he grew up, mention Gwynn and Lindner, only sporadically makes its appearance in his work. Unlike Oliver, he does not focus on the losing battle humankind is waging against itself, but rather on the battle the individual wages against that core, the innocence. Gwynn and Lindner also mention that much of his work deals with this passage of time and the inevitability of age usurping the purity of youth. Youth is, of course, the time where one is fully capable of accessing that wild, untamable center self, the space of Keats' negative capability. Jarman, in his poetry, seeks to teach the importance of remembering that this self exists, what it was like to be that free.

Childhood, for many Romantic writers, is the time when innocence reigns and the mind has not yet learned to limit its scope. To the child's mind, all is bright, clean, and endless. The child's eyes see everything as a whole, as part of a vast playground. The child's mind does not fear monster or pain, death or oblivion. Innocence is the state in

which the human mind understands its part in the cycle of things and rejoices in its consciousness instead of forgetting the nature of the life cycle and fearing the loss of self. For these reasons, the British Romantics encouraged one to protect children from the ravages of experience and the jaded adults to seek and resurrect the aborted innocence buried within their learning.

“What man has made of man,” say the Romantics, is not just the destructive force that has forgotten its roots, like “Nightmare of Moloch the/ loveless!,” (II.8-9) and “Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose/ blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers/ are ten armies!” (II.16-8) in Alan Ginsberg’s “Howl.” Moloch is the new Leviathan. Moloch is what awaits when innocence dies at the hands of experience.

From birth, children are taught “No,” “Hurt,” and “Fear.” They are taught to fear darkness, the unknown, and anything that causes pain. They are taught that self is all there is of the corporeal world that bears any meaning: all other life forms are beneath that self and, therefore, irrelevant. They are taught to worship and follow the teachings of an invisible, intangible, voiceless entity who, as proof of existence, is credited with several volumes writ in humankind’s hand. The journey from innocence to experience is one leaving a state of dancing through infinity to a place where one is huddling in a tightly stoppered glass bottle, forever watchful, fearful, separated from each other as well as the world without. Mark Jarman in “After Disappointment” examines just this loss.

The persona of “After Disappointment” states of a child’s room that “To fall/ Asleep, her books arranged above your head,/ Is to admit that you have never been/ So tired, so enchanted by the spell/ Of your grown body” (2-6). This fairy-tale-like state of

entering another's world and slipping from there to the dreamworld expresses the sloughing of experience for innocence. Adulthood becomes the state "Of blocking out the light" (7) and "Not knowing what you should or shouldn't feel" (8). When one forgets what one is carefully schooled to know, how one is so meticulously taught to react to stimuli, the light of life is allowed to shine forth.

Adulthood is more than being big: it is being restricted by words of humankind, the promises taught by school, church, and governmental agencies. To escape these restrictions, Jarman's persona urges one to "feel small instead/ Of blocking the light, to feel alone,/ Not knowing what you should or shouldn't feel" (7-9). After all, humankind is not disallowed access to nature, but many human beings, after their conditioning by society's laws and mores, eschew it as dangerous. Those grown-ups who brave her elements, as the poem states, who dare try her mettle, are called daredevils. They are said to have a death wish, or, called childish as if it were a curse. Human beings are chided to be responsible, to grow up and act like the adults they are. Chasing dreams, following one's heart, is akin to braving the Leviathan's maw. Innocence is believing anything is possible; experience is fearing anything is possible.

Much of humankind is trained to forget about, to leave in memory, "the cramped escapes and obstacles/ You plan and face and have to call the world" (10-1), to forget "That there remain these places, occupied/ By children" (12-3). The exploits of innocence— the discoveries of worlds behind trees and beneath rocks, the fearless attack of all tasks without ever suspecting one cannot reach his goal— are laughed off as the dreams of a simpler time. However, the children, the innocent, fail to achieve their dreams only when they are taught to do so.

One never hears of a truly innocent mind being disappointed by its inability to succeed. Failure is a learned skill, doubt a learned trait. An innocent being does not pontificate and conjecture “How?” and “Why?” and “Why not?”: it just acts as necessary to achieve its goal. True, very young children are noted for asking “Why” and “Why not?” but this question is in innocence. They seek to know the reasons, generally, why they cannot accomplish a goal, such as eating a cookie or staying up past their bed time. When they become slightly older, their questions seek answers for the reason why something cannot just be what it is without a reason. “Why is the sky blue?” does not need the “correct” answer concerning light waves, water particles, refraction of light, but just an assertion that it is blue because it is. The natural world needs no reason: the sky is blue because it is, whatever reasons the scientists and teachers discover. The child asking “Why?” does not want the mystery of the world stripped, but rather reinforced. It is the experienced human being who requires his world be broken down.

Abrams states that “The meditative mind [in Romantic poetry] disengages itself from the physical locale, moves back in time to the speaker’s childhood, still further back to his infancy” (Abrams 81). To learn to slough off the trappings of experience, to lie down in the bed and dreams of a child, to resonate through life once again as the innocent do, is to recall the possibilities and see how truly close the stars are if one but reaches.

Jarman’s persona in “After Disappointment” does just that, lying in innocence to dream of possibilities. The disappointment in the title is experience, the assimilation of the negative teaching of humankind, the assimilation of Cannot, Will Not, and Shall Not. After the disappointment, after the bleakness and despair of experience, only death remains . . . unless one fights to reclaim the lost trinity—Hope, Can, and Why Not?—of

innocence. The true tragedy of experience is not the shrinking distance between one and innocence, but the growing distance between one and life.

Billy Corgan is perhaps best known for his role as lead singer, guitarist, and songwriter for The Smashing Pumpkins. He has also written for other bands and individuals, including Courtney Love, fronted a second band, Zwan, attempted a solo career, and written a national best seller book of poetry called *Blinking with Fists*. Prato and Bekkala in *All Music Guide* note Corgan has been playing guitar and writing music and lyrics since he was a young boy, heavily influenced by his father, a blues guitarist. He is an accomplished, award winning musician from an era where music fed upon the bleakness and despair touted by the Modernists and Postmodernists, where song smiths wrote about suicide and pain, about loss and fear, about hopelessness and tears.

Prato and Bekkala show that Corgan's life was not one of happiness and hope. He grew up a depressed child who sought solace in music. He was incredibly close to his mother. His father left early in his life and was rarely a presence. A series of stepfathers who offered various forms of mistreatment from words to fists filled the role his father abandoned. And, for a time, he gave in to despair, but never lost sight of something better.

The beauty of Corgan's writing, however, is not that he could write his pain or explore in song the wounds his life inflicted, but that he never lost that bit of hope, a seed that grew as he aged and came to terms with life's failures. Instead of turning away from the world, he reached back beyond the losses and pain to the innocence of youth. Several of his song lyrics, which in themselves are nothing less than pure poetry, touch on this,

but the true revelation of this Dylan Thomas-like refusal to give up on himself under the weight of loss, is in his poetry.

Many of Corgan's poems celebrate the earth, nature, and love not as a created thing, but as something one cannot help. Even the darker seeming poems, like Thomas', express the something more to be had if one is capable of relinquishing the memory of past pain for the present hope. In the present, Corgan has embraced himself, his career, his loss and pain, and he has become something more, something better, that is distinctly Romantic in its refusal to abandon hope.

Children, like many animals, collect things. They collect toys, rocks, stickers, and insects. These items become their treasures, their value immeasurable. In the world of children, a shiny bit of rose quartz may be worth a red leaf and a yellow sea shell or a green beetle, and the loss or theft of any of these treasures is cause for grief, anger, and countless hours of search. The object and its loss are forgotten with the next discovered treasure. Children live in the moment, not the past, or in the future, that land of hazy consequences. Children are taught the worthlessness of their treasures as they become more immured in the world behind humankind's walls, more separated from the world as it is. The song of the earth is stifled and finally stopped as innocence mutates into experience.

The wildness and freedom of animals—the unpredictability of creatures driven by need, not want, by pleasure, not by law—is humankind's greatest fear, and what it strives to teach out of children. The call of nature is suppressed and the work of humankind inserted to supplant the emptiness. Billy Corgan in "the box" attacks this tendency of humankind to fill the hollowness of experience with things.

The persona has experienced the death of his mother and has reverted to the childlike tendency to collect things that remind him of her. However, this collection, unlike the child's innocent accumulation of things, has a purpose: it seeks to maintain a link to the deceased person through a collection of her things. The life that was once warm and real has been reduced, in the experienced heart of a grown man, to a box of useless detritus, his "mother's things" (2) but not his mother.

The persona does the expected, collecting her "false teeth/ 2 wedding rings" (3-4) and other reminders of the world of humankind she left: the teeth to replace the ones nature gave her, and the rings, symbols of humankind's control. One particularly notable thing he places in the box is "pictures of beautiful youth" (5), the actuality forgotten, but still a part of how she identified herself before death claimed her. The persona's mother was experienced, immured in the world of humankind, when the persona knew her, so these reminders of her fleeting innocence, coupled with the false teeth and "her worn out couch" (6) lose significance, becoming just something else in a list of somethings to discard when the memories are done.

Another unexpected addition to the box is "a razor voice like mine" (7). The voice is sharp, narrow, honed by experience and not the clear, bell-like tones of youth. Age has ravaged the entire being, from the mental to the physical, and here the part that communicates. And, again, the voice, so much a part of her identity and indicative of her immersion into experience, fades in worth with the other items.

When one's sentence in a life of experience is over, identity—that thing all experienced human beings covet, seek to build and throw out into the world—is worthless. All that careful building and planning left is akin to "75 clocks running backwards" (9)

from that point of death. The experienced living fail to see the future as part of the greater world; they see life ending with death and all that matters is what transpired before the clocks stopped ticking.

When human life ends, it becomes a box of things, “but there isn’t any music”

(11). Bernbaum states of this lost, silent, childlike state that it appears in Blake’s work:

[Blake’s] conception of mankind seemed visionary, because he proffered no suggestions as to how the chasm between actual conditions and his paradise of complete freedom might be bridged. . . . His pioneer work helped clear the way: he attacked philosophical and religious bigotry; he pointed to the beauty and truth in unexpected places; and he gave a new value to the imaginative, the childlike, and the humane. (Bernbaum 49).

The song of the earth died when innocence gave way to experience, joie de vivre to apathy. One can collect all the things that once belonged to the human being, but can never capture and box the lost innocence. The thrumming, humming, jangling melody of life, the silver clarion tones of a child’s laughter.

Nature in Modern Poetry:

Dylan Thomas, Mary Oliver and Billy Corgan

The modern world is one in which one may hear daily of natural tragedies. From the depletion of the oceans to the hole in the ozone layer, one cannot escape that the hand of humankind is destroying the only home it has. The news programs offer a bleak picture devoid of hope. Modern poets, however, reject this black forecast and, instead,

offer answers and cause for hope. Dylan Thomas, Mary Oliver and Billy Corgan are just a few who do so.

Nature is more than just the world beyond the gates of humankind's cities and houses. Nature is the state of being, free from law and constraint. Blake in "Garden of Love" from *Songs of Experience* shows how "The Garden of Love/ . . . / . . . /Where I used to play on the green" (1-4) has become, with age and experience, a place "filled with graves,/ And tomb stones where flowers should be" (9-10). The garden of innocence and natural freedom has been killed. Human monuments to its own dead sprout where once nature's blooms held sway. The playground has become anything but. Human beings are forgetting their place in their world.

Each human being is just another of nature's creatures and, thus, has no right to exert dominance or assume control of the world in which he or she lives. Beers, writing in a time just into the Victorian era, said of Romanticism: "In vain you grasp a butterfly's wing; the dust which gives it its color is left upon your fingers. Romanticism is the star that weeps, it is the wind that wails, it is the night that shudders, the bird that flies and the flower that breathes perfume . . . it is the infinite and the starry" (Beers 21). The British Romantics saw and wrote against the tendency of humankind to separate itself from the world that nurtures and cried against it. They saw the limitations that organized religion, government, and formal education imposed on natural instincts, and they wrote to awaken the public to the truth that these forces sought to control and corrupt. With the Victorian era the need to be and do good arose forcefully. While the Victorians revered science and searching for answers, the Bible and human law were turned to as the consummate sources of terms of goodness. However, this drew humankind further away

from its roots, and eventually contributed to the darkness of the modernist writers. This darkness ensued to some degree as a result of humankind's severance from nature.

Many human beings, unable to live without light and hope, turned back to the lessons of the Romantics. Dylan Thomas is frequently acknowledged as one of the first Neo-romantics. His work as a whole embodies astounding similarities with the Romantic writers' tenets, particularly their reverence for nature as the supreme law of humankind. Many modernists like Eliot, most notably in *The Wasteland*, saw the fall of religion in people's lives as a tragedy; Neo-Romantics saw it as positive, as in the case of Dylan Thomas' "Morning, Space for Leda."

Yeats' modernist interpretation of the Leda myth in "Leda and the Swan" focuses on Zeus' rape of Leda, a focus that demonstrates the hopelessness and fatalistic nature of life. Thomas' "The Morning, Space for Leda," on the other hand, examines the hope and possibility by highlighting nature. Presented in this way, the rape of Leda by Zeus in swan form becomes not a sinister act of power and control, but rather not a crime at all, just an extension of the natural world, an inevitable function.

This poem, published in 1931 and one of Thomas' earliest works, exhibits a lush landscape stage for Leda. This focus on her in a raw, primal environment creates in her a Mother Nature figure. "The morning, [is] space for Leda" (1) in which she can indulge herself while the surrounding environment praises her with an "interlude for violins" (3) and "A fishing bird [that] has notes of ivory" (6). And "Between the moon and sun/ There's time to pluck a tune upon a harp" (15-6). The "shadows from the glassy sea" (11) also hearken to her, "wet the sky with tears,/ And daub the unrisen sun with longing" (12-3). This description lends human traits to nature without usurping its true essence

and fully humanizing it; Thomas further expands this juxtaposition of nature and humankind with his metaphor for Leda.

Leda is more fully transformed into a being of nature when the persona talks of

Spring

who hath under her cloth of trees no sorrow,

under her grassy dress no limbs—

and winter follow like an echo

The summer voice so warm from fruit

that clustered round her shoulders,

And hid her uncovered breast. (22-7)

The reference to seasons with female characteristics identifies Leda as nature and, as such, a power like none other. Humankind is simply a small part of nature, its works fleeting and insignificant; with the passage of seasons, humankind ages and passes on while nature perseveres. The poem itself even negates the concept of an absolute god in its diminishment of Zeus from aggressor to hapless victim.

The swan, the fierce, wanton villain of myth, is reduced to a helpless creature, forced to “make strings of water in her wake” (14). Leda has the power in that natural world, and the swan becomes the victim of desire. He praises such innocent, naked power the only way he knows how, in perhaps the most natural way of all. Leda, in her element, “upon a toe of down/ Dances a measure with the swan” (29-30). A measure is just a small bit of a symphony, and the swan’s interlude with Leda, far from the world-changing, fatalistic, and destructive act perpetrated by Yeats’ Zeus in “Leda and the Swan,” is just a moment.

While Yeats was a contemporary of Thomas and did, particularly in his fifth period, exhibit a Neo-romantic theme in much of his work, it was not as prominent as that expressed in Thomas'. A degree of the Postmodernist apathy remained in several pieces, "Leda" being one. Yeats' desire for hope is crushed by the largeness of the god in his poem. In Yeats' version of the Leda story the persona asks the question:

Being so caught up,
so mastered by the brute blood of the air,
did she put on his knowledge with his power
before the indifferent beak could let her drop? (11-14)

The implication is that, whether or not she had a shadow of the inevitable future, she could do nothing to prevent its coming. Yeats' Zeus is reduced to animal in form, but retains the omnipotence of his true nature: god. Leda, in Yeats' work, never had a chance, never had a choice, never had hope for escape from her present situation and the coming consequences. This failure to offer even the potential for hope is where Yeats' poem fails at being Neo-romantic.

Thomas' god, however, is reduced to owning only a moment in time against the force of nature. Zeus is an element used only to culminate the connection that occurs between god, humankind, and nature. The consumption of all by nature is in the end when "darkness, hand in hand with light/ Is blind with tears too frail to taste" (32-3). The swan, a creature of dark and light coloring, loses its godlike powers in its need to connect with nature. Human beings, creatures, as taught by Christian belief, are also ones of darkness and light, always struggling for the perceived light. Instead of accepting religious doctrine and law as constructed by humankind, society fails to learn to live in

harmony with natural urges. Society has become so enmeshed in its mythologies that it fails to see that the laws that limit its actions and restrict its natural inclinations are its own creations. Instead, human beings fight their urges for physical love and freedom, unwilling to admit their own culpability in their fate and their unhappiness. Humankind, therefore, for fear of sin staining its eternity, chooses a victim's status.

Pulitzer Prize winning poet Mary Oliver was born in 1935. She is writing in a time where the neo-Romantic movement is more firmly established. Not being a veteran or witness of a world war, she is unused to the first-hand horrors. While Vietnam was televised, bringing the horror to the home front, the distancing of televised versus actual dead and dying men and women served its purpose. It allowed one to comment on the terror without actually smelling it, feeling it, tasting it—fearing it. In this absence of real fear, Oliver and her contemporaries could focus on the larger picture: what humankind was doing to itself and its world, and ways to fix it.

Her poetry deals with nature in much the way the Romantics did. It does not seek to complicate it, showing, instead, its simplicity. She shows the truth in nature, not trying to hide its destructive elements, but instead depicting them as part of the cycle. Gwynn and Lindner state that she “is widely respected for the clarity and precision of her poetry, which often explores the relationship between human beings and the natural world” (215). In Oliver's work, humankind is a force that defies the cycle, denies its mortality. As more of humankind's evils against its world are discovered—such as the ozone hole, extinction of several animal and plant species, and the pollution of the oceans—poets such as Oliver are crying out against them. Oliver, living in a world much like the Romantic one, where technology is finally able to determine the actual damage,

is trying to show this same lesson. She is apparently aware of the destruction of life, the fall of Man, even if Man as a whole does not care.

Nature has been desecrated by Man since it discovered tools and formed societies designed to block out the world. Cities rose where once trees flourished, and people travel, safe in their constructs of metal, glass, and rubber where animals once trod. The abundance of nature's food was forced to grow in rows and patches across fields stripped of trees and flattened, forced to submit to humankind's paddocks and fences, to its whim. Humankind's exertion of control over the world appears absolute. Yet, history tells us otherwise. History shows the effect of nature on the works of humankind in buried cities and societies, such as the pyramids and the carefully excavated Native American sites; in the Titanic and other disintegrating hulks buried in the depths of oceans; in those common roadside scenes of sagging plant-smothered and insect-ridden buildings and rusted hulks slowly being reclaimed by plant and animal life. More profoundly it shows in the bones of human beings, turned to dust and forgotten under weather-smoothed stones that once boldly and proudly wore the names humankind gave its individuals. For all the preserved remains archaeologists unearth, one must wonder at the thousands that never lasted to be discovered, or nature's jokes like Pompeii, the dead society perfectly preserved in ash down to the corpses of sleeping dogs.

The modern Romantics discuss nature not as an entity to which humankind must return if it is to be connected to its world and lead a satisfying life, as Wordsworth taught. In the shadowed twentieth and twenty-first century world, humankind's degradation of nature is too complete for a simple reconnection. Instead of showing a return to nature, many of the neo-Romantics show that nature will win despite the travesty of

humankind's hand. They argue that answers are yet to be found in nature's grip and that peace is there for those who seek it. Nature is fighting back and always has been. Mary Oliver's "The Black Snake" exhibits this darker lesson as clearly as Wordsworth's "Lines Written in Early Spring" called forth a warning.

The persona in Oliver's poem witnesses a black snake who falls victim to a "truck [that] could not swerve" (3) and the result: "*death*, that is how it happens" (4). The snake was acting as it was wont, "flashed onto the morning road" (2). This description denotes speed, but however fast the snake could move, it was not able to evade the construct of humankind. Significant is Oliver's careful wording that made the truck at fault, not the unmentioned driver. Wording her passage in such a way, she makes the works of humankind the cause of death and destruction, not humankind itself.

The second interesting facet of the snake's death is how, once lifeless, "he lies looped and useless/ as an old bicycle tire" (5-6). This line likens the prematurely dead snake to a work of humankind, material ripped from nature before its time to serve the thinking animal. Thus, not only is the world suffering Wordsworth's lament concerning "What man has made of man," but these things humankind has made of itself are extending beyond the borders of immediate influence and imposing suffering on other creatures. Bodies are left as garbage on the roadside and in the grills and undercarriages of humankind's inventions.

The persona pities the snake and removes him from the road, "beautiful and quiet/ as a dead brother" (10-1). This acknowledgment of the snake, so alien in shape from human beings, as a brother links humankind to nature. It reminds one of one's place in

the world, not as the ultimate power, but as brethren. A human being is just another animal who was cursed with intelligence and the ability to regret.

The persona reminds the reader of the interconnectivity of all creatures by discussing the “light at the center of every cell/ [that] sent the snake coiling and flowing forward” (21-2). The light mentioned is not defined. More than any other faction of human kind, perhaps, the Romantic writers decried the limitations imposed by defining an object or force. They instead admitted to the power that connected all things without seeking to attribute any titles or qualities to it. The power they admitted to simply was, and that was enough. The snake in the poem shares that something with all living things. This power lies “under reason” (15-6) where it “burns [as] a brighter fire, which the bones/ have always preferred” (17-8); it is a fire, a force that “says to oblivion: not me!” (20). The fire, and the light drive life and are part of nature, the only truly enduring entity. Instead of being reduced to garbage, the snake, for this persona, will rejoin the world, defying grey oblivion— consumed and reborn. Whereas other human beings continued to believe what their doctrines mandated and failed to recognize their responsibility to their world as being an integral part of it, for Romantics, the link to nature is obvious. This link is the only true way to defeat oblivion. In the end, regardless of philosophy, law, religion, education, or the way one might seek to shut her out, nature emerges as victor, renewable and undefeatable.

The earth and nature as the ultimate power are the basis for much of the British Romantic philosophy. Human beings have throughout time searched for the meaning of life and have concocted elaborate answers and woven meaningful stories with all-powerful entities in an effort to find this answer. But they have only succeeding in

ameliorating their fear of what comes next, of that formlessness. Out of the myriad thoughts and ideas arose the Romantics who have their answers. The meaning of life, of consciousness as humankind experiences it, is to know the vastness of what it is a part, of what it cannot escape. Bernbaum states that Romantics believe “Man was gifted with a higher reason, called the imagination, which enabled him to see that the good, the true, and the beautiful were not removed to a sphere unattainable to him in this life, but were interwoven with its human existence and earthly environment” (Bernbaum 304). This imagination is what humankind uses to justify itself and deny its mortality. In seeing beauty, it is able to create a reason for being. Humankind is able to ask questions and determine where to find its answers.

Answers can be found in nature’s embrace, for she is all there is, all there was, all there ever will be. The earliest gods were nature beings; the earliest single god, the White Goddess, according to Robert Graves, was nature with the three forms of new life, creator of life, and death: the cycle of nature. Billy Corgan addresses the power of earth and humankind’s role not as dominator of her, but part of her in “the song of the earth.”

The first two stanzas begin with the pronoun “I.” This persona “live[s] in memory/ But I am not any such thing as you can touch” (1-2); it is “a lazy river forgotten within you/ But I am not any such thing you can deny” (5-6). The riddle set forth in the first lines of these two stanzas begs the reader to question himself, as the lines address something personal. What lives in the mind, but was never tangible, flows thorough us, but is undeniable? The answer is offered when the persona beseeches the reader to “Sing the song of the earth and know everything” (4). The song of the earth is the melody, the harmony, and the rhythm of all life. It is the thud of ocean waves, the flickering dance of

fireflies, the intimate tap and spread of rain on skin. The song of the earth is there, immediate and irresistible for one who chooses to let go the fetters of humankind's law and listen.

The persona changes to "We" for the next three stanzas. Where the "I" is nature, the "We" is humankind. This persona denies the power of the earth's song, stating that "We rumble our feet to no response" (14). Humankind teaches that God lives above and that prayer needs to be offered up to Heaven. Rumbling feet against the earth's skin are attempted communication with it, and no answers are perceived, although the answers lie all about one, in the interminable cycle of life, birth, and death. The persona is so intent on being given the answer that he fails to seek it himself; he has forgotten how to discover without being told the answer in advance. This persona states: "Sing the song of the earth and millions die/ Telling stories backward" (12-3). He fails to see death as a beginning of a new song; he only sees the time spent as a human animal as valid and their histories the only stories worth telling.

The "We" persona does not see that the bodies of humankind are just a bar in the song of the earth, a piece of the whole, and "Children are allowed to forget/ So we live as memory and they live tomorrow" (20-1). Humankind fails to see outside itself, its works, and in so doing is denied the song of the earth ringing in its being, but the true sin is that the children of humankind are denied the chance to discover for themselves the truth in life. They are doomed to learn from the works of humankind, not the song of the earth. They will seek their answers in destruction as they "Cut down every tree to count the rings" (15) and "Hollow to the core [nature's] supple body" (16). Humankind is taught

its place is not as a handful of notes, but as conductor of the earth's song, destructor of nature's body.

Life is finite in each form, infinite as part of nature. "The song of the earth is never done" (22) the "I" persona states, then warns the reader to "sing it as it must be sung" (23). To forget one's role in nature is to doom oneself, and all of the earth to silence. Unlike Wordsworth's lament over "What man has made of man," Corgan warns of what continued abuse of the cycle will achieve, or, what man is making of man, and the rest of life. Humankind has exceeded its limits, had added a discordant pall to the song of the earth. And, while his persona does not offer specific punishment, the threat is clear when she, nature, declares of her raped and battered body, earth, that "Into my ear she'll listen/ confessing all" (24-5). The connectivity between body and the thing that is often called the soul is specified, as is the concept that nature has been hiding her eyes from the atrocities of humankind, as her body must confess all it has endured. No specific punishment need be offered at all, for the atrocities of humankind will form their own, and that ultimate punishment is the end of the song of the earth, the silence of ignorance.

Social Rebellion in Modern Poetry:

Charles Simic, James Dickey, and Richard Wilbur

As the world tumbles further into turmoil, the hand of humankind is ever more evident in this decline. Notably, its social institutions own much of the blame. These institutions—particularly governments, organized religions, and formal education systems—seek firmer control of society. They fail to accept blame for any of the

malfunctions evident throughout the world. The outlook is dismal. Hope is lacking in Modernist and Postmodernist writing and art, sure doom inescapable. Modern poets, however, have a different view. Unwilling to accept the notion that we are helpless in the face of these institutional giants, such poets as Charles Simic, James Dickey and Richard Wilbur offer answers and a glimmer of hope in the bleakness of this modern world.

Charles Simic was born in Yugoslavia and lived there during World War II before immigrating with his parents to America. He had a childhood that was anything but easy. His parents were barely able to make ends meet, and unable to afford college. Diva Desai notes that Simic's father, however, "was an optimist who thought that the money for college would one day appear" (Desai). Simic worked to put himself through the University of New York and achieve his father's dream for him (Desai). He now teaches at the University of New Hampshire.

Desai also states that "Simic's first interest in poetry came from his close friends and began 'when [he] noticed in high school that one of [his] friends was attracting the best looking girls by writing them sappy love poems'" (Desai). As he grew older, he discovered he had a gift for the genre and wrote for a broader audience. His experiences growing up colored what he wrote. However, instead of portraying a grey Postmodernist world, he wrote with an eye for the future, for what once was and could be again if humankind would awaken to its erroneous ways.

Whereas Eliot's "Part IV: Death by Water" of *The Wasteland* leads the reader to where

In this decayed hole among the mountains

In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing

Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
 There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
 It has no windows, and the door swings,
 Dry bones can harm no one. (IV. 325-30)

This scene, despite the evidence of nature's reclamation of the human edifice leaves many torn whether it represents future hope or the last bastion of dying hope. Simic quietly depicts the former. His youth in terror was followed by a time of hope, no matter how poor his family was. His father's optimism infected him, and Simic grew up to write from that optimism, to generate poetry that gently castigated humankind's sins and failures while reminding his readers that there is more one can do to attempt to save the world.

Social organizations are, for the Romantic, only extant to control humankind's natural inclinations and sever itself from nature. The need to control, to prove its power, drives humankind to lock out the law of nature in an attempt to exert its own and, in so doing, defeat her. It creates laws that require one to abandon the green world and defy their animal urges and instincts. It usurps nature's role of guide and provider by forcing her into boundaries of its choosing, believing itself a better judge of how her bounty should be tended and distributed. Education is meant to deliver a carefully determined line of so-called truths that omit that which it finds distasteful or counterproductive to its agenda; religion enforces the idea of evil being indulgence in one's instincts by promising dire punishment for eternity in the afterlife; government promises dire punishment in life for failure to adhere to its edicts.

The Romantics, seeing the falsity in this regime, sought to educate against its tight hold on humankind, to show the absurdity in the laws of humankind. Of Blake, Keynes states that his artistry

was being affected by his increasing awareness of the social injustices of his time which directed his thoughts to the composition of a series of lyrical poems forming the sequence known as *Songs of Experience*. . . .

The *Innocence* poems were the product of a mind in a state of innocence and of an imagination unspoiled by stains of worldliness. Public events and private emotions soon converted Innocence into Experience, producing Blake's preoccupation with the problem of Good and Evil.

This, with his feelings of indignation and pity for the sufferings of mankind as he saw them in the streets of London, resulted in his composing the second set. (Blake 12)

Charles Simic was, clearly, also affected by these same impetuses. In "Stone" he depicts a life free from the laws of humankind, its gods, and its so-called education.

In a world totally corrupted by the works of humankind and their byproducts, a world where pure nature is harder than ever to find, the persona sees the one last refuge from the travesty of humankind's tyranny to be "inside a stone" (1).

The stone is free from all law, is satisfied to be what it is. "From the outside the stone is a riddle" (6) mentions the persona, and "No one knows how to answer it" (7). It cannot be forced to believe humankind's law and is, in its core, unfathomable and unimpressionable, "though a cow steps on it full weight, / Even though a child throws it in a river" (9-10). The law of humankind cannot determine what may reside within, so

relegates the stone, as it does animals and vegetation, to outside of its god's grace and its own law. The stone is, therefore, worthless, a toy for children and a stepping place for animals.

The difference between humankind's indifference to the stone and the child's and cow's treatment of it is that difference between innocence and experience. Innocence is an egocentric state in which one's world revolves around the self. Consequences of actions are not ignored, but rather, unknown and unknowable. The innocent minds of child and cow can only comprehend those actions which affect self; they are unable to grasp the concept that what affects the self will also affect others in a similar fashion. The child throws the stone for the pleasure of the throwing; the cow steps upon it because it steps on all in its path, regardless. These innocent actions against the stone cannot be faulted.

The experienced being, with his knowledge of cause and effect deserves to be faulted. With experience, after all, comes a necessary loss of egocentrism as one realizes others are affected by actions. This egocentric state, therefore, becomes a choice, and a fault. Experience's refusal to accept one's place in the world, to respect the individual aspects of that world, to treat its components with dignity and respect, is a choice. These choices are the difference between the blame placed on the refusal of one to acknowledge the stone, and the child's and cow's inability to understand its possible potential.

The stone is secure in itself, resting on "the river bottom/ Where the fishes come to knock on it/ And listen" (12-4). Not being constrained by humankind's knowledge and law, the innocent fishes do not know to disregard the silent stone and are drawn by the call of the interconnectedness of all things. Outside of humankind's myopic world,

the stone is a thing of endless possibilities, a thing which, the persona pontificates, might have, inside itself, “a moon shining/ From somewhere, as though behind a hill” (18-9). Inside the stone exists another a world, a different one, with “strange writings, the star charts/ On the inner walls” (21-2) where humankind has never been.

This perceived evidence of an alternate world where humankind cannot or will not look evinces a dissatisfaction with the current world. The use of children and animals alerts the reader to a desire to escape the corruption of, once again, “What man has made of man” and of humankind’s world. Unlike the modernist and Postmodernist perspective that humankind’s world is ruined, bleak, hopeless and doomed, the neo-Romantic suggests another world, a place where all might change, a world inside nature’s bosom.

In the heart of the stone is not God, or law, or knowledge delivered like propaganda, but rather, direction. In the heart of stone, the heart of nature, the rejection of all its efforts to control, is humankind’s answer, should it ever awaken and seek it. A map of the stars and words unknown rest in silence to guide when the time arrives, if it does. The stone is content to wait for the end of humankind, or the end of humankind’s reign, not caring which.

James Dickey was born in Atlanta in 1923. He, according to Gwynn and Lindner, “wrote poems that daringly explored the gray areas of morality” (39). He attended Clemson university, playing football for them, until he enlisted in the Army Air Corps, where “he served in the South Pacific as a radar observer and navigator during World War II, and as a flight training instructor during the Korean conflict” (39). When World War II released him, he returned to complete his college education at Vanderbilt

University. After graduating, Gwynn and Lindner note, "Dickey spent years in the advertising business, in his own words, 'Selling his soul to the devil in the daytime and buying it back at night'" (Gwynn 39).

Like Thomas and Simic, Dickey was involved in World War II. He witnessed first hand the tragedy of humankind's hatred for itself, the culmination of humankind's hunger to consume its world and force all those in it to its way of being. He witnessed the broken and torn bodies of those once alive, now dead for a seemingly hollow cause. And, instead of bemoaning its own tragedy to live in such a world of man-made monsters, Dickey, like Simic and Thomas, turned back.

Dickey re-examined the past and the present, arriving at the conclusions many of the Romantics did. The world itself, nature, was not inherently evil and not just a backdrop for humankind's atrocities. Nature, in fact, was salvation, and the answers to halting humankind's downward spiral lay in her embrace. By depicting scenes of destruction and scenes of what could be, Dickey embraced the Romantic notion of turning away from the world of humankind to find the answers.

British Romanticism did not deny the idea of a higher power, but rather the concept that organized religion had it wrong. Greenblatt notes of the Romantics that "the diffusion of knowledge tended to identify a rational citizenry and not God as the moving force of history . . . "; they "were just as convinced as their predecessors were that the Revolution had marked humanity's chance to start history over again (a chance that had been lost but was perhaps recoverable)" (Greenblatt 7). Church teaching, for the Romantics, was just a means of scaring obedience from its followers by dangling a

promise of deathless eternity in front of their mortal eyes. Instead, the belief in nature fostered by the Romantics stresses that the higher power exists in the connection between all things, obviously living and otherwise. The cycle of nature—of resurrection and eternal life as part of that Otherness when one's corporeal self is absorbed back into the world—was the evidence and the power. Dickey stresses these beliefs in "The Heaven of Animals."

Humankind's arrogance is undeniably evident in its refusal to allow animals into its god's heaven. In so doing, it defies its connection to nature. Humankind agrees with its religious writings that its gods made the animals before making human beings, yet relegates them to chattel there for only its own use: expendable. The inclination of animals to live by the instincts with which they were born— instead of shaping, molding, killing those natural inclinations as humankind does—is seen by humankind to make them lesser animals than it and, thus, of no consequence. Why promise its utmost reward, its ultimate bargaining chip for adherence to its law, to those unable, or unwilling, to follow it?

The very title of this poem proclaims that there is an ultimate reward for animals. This paradise for animals does not include humankind, says the poem, insinuating that humankind is, for nature, the ultimate evil, if the Christian corollary of supreme reward and punishment is carried through. Dickey's poem is a neo-Romantic act of defiance against many of the religions of humankind and their denial of nature's dominance.

The choice to parody the Christian concept of an afterlife negates any question concerning Dickey's ultimate objective. The animals' paradise mirrors the natural world

they inhabited in life: for instance, “If they lived on plains/ It is grass rolling/ under their feet forever” (4-6). This choice reinforces the importance of nature in life; the “soulless” animals having “come,/ Anyway, beyond their knowing./ Their instincts wholly bloom/ And they rise” (7-10). When they arrive in their paradise, unlike the undefined haven of cloud and pearly gates promised human beings, “To match them, the landscape flowers,/ Outdoing, desperately/ Outdoing what is required” (13-4). Again, the importance of nature— the timelessness and perseverance of nature in rising above the wanton acts of humankind to return better, stronger, when it is finally defeated— belies the Christian promise that humankind is ruler of the world and will, in the end victorious.

In the animals’ heaven, nature holds them in the lushness of her bosom, welcoming and familiar, and allows them to indulge their instincts, not suppress them. The hunters become the best of their kind, in paradise “Grown more deadly than they can believe” (22). Yet, for the victims, they “Know this is their life,/ Their reward” (30-1). In Heaven, the animals are granted knowledge of an Other, an awareness of perfection. The prey are content, “feel no fear” (34) as the hunters “Fulfill themselves without pain/ At the cycle’s center” (36-7). By this, the cycle of nature, of life, is central to the knowledge of the animals in their heaven; it is the key to perfection, peace, eternal bliss—not the human God.

Unlike the human edict—mandated by human religion, education, and law, to suppress their instinctual urges if one desires to achieve perfection and eternal peace—nature’s laws allow the animals to be the best of their kind. They are allowed to live free as “They fall, they are torn,/ They rise, they walk again” (40-1). After

forecasting the end of the world, humankind's god promises the righteous resurrection and eternal life in his kingdom. The idea of resurrection for animals denotes the cycle of life, the wheel of nature in which all things are born, live, die, and are consumed to be born again and, thus, never die.

Like many of the other poets of the time, Wilbur served in World War II. Gwynn and Lindner write how the senseless death and violence broke in him the belief in the righteousness of his leaders and their organizations. The world of humankind was seen by those so close to the horror of war to be teeming with those intent on control. If not Hitler, another would have risen to perpetrate similar atrocities. The answer to defeating humankind's self-inflicted suicide lay not, saw those who served like Wilbur, in war with other men, but in finding the answers in the past, in a time before humankind's taint had spread out of control.

Many of the British Romantic poets relied on rigid, classical forms as well as content. They used the control of fitting words to meter, rhyme and structure to discuss the freedom they advocated from the corruption of humankind. Wilbur's use of these stylistic elements serves a similar function, advocating release from humankind's stranglehold. By offering his words in a format humankind can understand—a controlled one—Wilbur ensures the reader will pay attention. Contrary to those modern poets who advocate simplicity of style—a technique that often leads to jarring, discordant phrasing—Wilbur offers a smooth, liquid element in which his words thrive.

Nature continues her course heedless of the law and self-proclaimed emperorship humankind has exerted over her demesne. Where humankind's law corrupts, sickens,

and ultimately destroys that which it chooses to proclaim enemy, nature cherishes, cradles, and nurtures all in her path. Humankind's law severs him from this cycle; nature's, ultimately, draws him back. Despite all humankind's efforts to the contrary—all its myriad laws and heaps of knowledge, its names and concepts of a higher power—in the end, it is nature's child and bound by her law to return to her bosom for rebirth.

Intelligence and reason, traits many human beings cite as proof they are the highest life form, are not gifts, but curses. Humankind is cursed with the knowledge that consciousness is a finite state. Unable to accept the loss of the conscious self, many human beings, therefore, have throughout time spent countless reams of paper, bottles of ink, and hours of speech denying this eventual cessation of being. Toward this effort, humankind created law, an ultimate power, and devised a negation to loss of self in government and religion. In its efforts to manipulate and control others of its species, humankind has lost track of its essence, its naturalness; in these efforts to deny oblivion, it has forgotten that human beings are eternal in the cycle of nature, reincarnated over and over again. This interconnectivity in nature, of a single force that runs throughout all of the natural world and makes a whole of all the separate entities, is the central idea of the British Romantic Naturalism, and the idea addressed in Richard Wilbur's "Year's End."

Wilbur's poem begins "Now winter downs the dying of the year" (1), and ends "The New-year bells are wrangling with the snow" (30). In the beginning is death, yet the end is the promise of life rising from winter's bed with clarion clamor. Death is not

the end, but the beginning of something new, something bright and shiny. In the
winterscape the persona notes these wombs of life,

. . . the rooms of houses show[ing]

A gathered light, a shapen atmosphere,

Like frozen-over lakes whose ice is thin

And still shows some stirring down within. (3-6)

Within the grip of innocence lies promise, but not the promise of the Christian god, of a
place where one maintains, presumably, its consciousness of self while residing in
Paradise of burning in the fires of Hell. Instead, the new life rises from the death of the
old.

The tenets of organized Christian religion mandate denial of self and instinctual
(animal) urges if one is to proceed to their desired form of immortality, such as the
Christian Heaven, while avoiding the undesirable one, such as the Christian Hell. While
the exertion of law and order is to a degree desirable, no other animal excepting
humankind seeks to force their number to deny their instincts and become other than
what they are. And in being what they are, non-human animals need no rationale for why
they are and what comes next; their place in the cycle of life is set. Perhaps, instead of
being, as it insists, the highest life form, humankind is cursed by its reason, its intellect,
its need to explain.

“There was perfection in the death of ferns/ Which laid their fragile cheeks
against the stone/ A million years” (13-5) states the persona, reminding that images of
once-life remain scattered throughout the world, even the preserved remains of human

beings, their “loose, unready eyes/ . . . expecting yet another sun” (22-3). These preserved remains exist outside nature’s cycle, their selves cursed in stasis, never to enjoy the thrill of life. These remains mimic the preserved remains of humankind trapped in its lead-lined box in its concrete-lined hole carved from nature’s mantle—forever in, but never part of, her perfection. Humankind is condemned by its religion and law to wait aeons for reclamation and readmission to the cycle of life, to “do the shapely thing they had not done” (24) and rise again from the ashes.

Consciousness can be gift or curse. It can lead to a fuller understanding of one’s part in the vast organism of life, or a cold, brittle tightrope dance into isolation for an endless time. “We fray into the future” (26), leaving pieces of ourselves scattered behind us as our sentence of gift in the guise of human beings unravels toward the beginning of another life, or series of lives. Wilbur’s “Year’s End” reminds one that to deny this interconnectivity, the immortality in the power of nature, by relying on the law of humankind, is to sever oneself from life, to condemn oneself to a small, empty, rigidly controlled space not unlike the one in which they tried to order their time as conscious beings.

Chapter Three: Conclusion

Modern poets such as Dylan Thomas, Billy Corgan, Mark Jarman, Mary Oliver, Richard Wilbur, Charles Simic, and James Dickey have all offered clues to stopping and reversing the fall of humankind. All have shown how humankind is to blame for its world and that the responsibility to fix it is its own. All offer the one thing the Modernists and Postmodernists failed to: hope. Their poems are just a small sample of the steps being taken to inform society that the plight in which they find themselves is of their doing and that the solution can only be had with concentrated effort. And, this trend is not limited to poetry.

Before poetry was printed on paper, it was sung. In this modern world where the written word is anathema to many, what many think of as poetry largely goes ignored. Except for one thing: the bards are back. The modern poets are the songwriters. The medium through which listeners are offered hope and answers for defeating the bleakness and despair of the man-made modern world is music. And musicians are the newest in the rise of modern Neo-romantic poets. Orange Avenue writes of the fatalistic viewpoint fostered by the Modernists and Postmodernists in "What's Coming Next." They state:

It's the common cause of everything you spend your life regretting.

It's the road with obstacles when you can't rely on second guessing.

It's all your choice.

You have your voice. (Anderson).

This phrase embodies the message of the Neo-romantics: humankind's answers lie in its choices. It can complain and bemoan the surety of fate, or it can face the obstacles presented to it and rise to the challenge.

Many musicians today sing of this same point while addressing the prominent Romantic themes of respecting nature, revering childhood and innocence, and suspecting and rejecting the agendas and actions of many social organizations. These tenets are explored by many established, major label groups heard daily on television and radio. A few of these are: The Smashing Pumpkins with "Disarm," a song concerning child abuse; the Dixie Chicks with their anti-establishment song "Not Ready to Make Nice"; and Red Hot Chili Peppers and "Snow (Hey Oh)" in which the persona is turning to the natural world to escape the evils of the man-made one. These bands have been in the public eye for years. They have, despite any possible resistance, been shaped and molded to a degree by Society. Simply, supply-and-demand economics force these established groups to cater to an audience if for no other reason than to make a living. Even the rebellious are swayed, taught which lines can be pushed, which cannot. Yes, many current bards are still getting their messages out, still teaching their lessons, but they are suspect, being the work of experienced human beings reliant upon society for their livelihood.

The small label and unsigned, rising talent have not yet bowed to the Leviathan, not yet learned (been trained) to couch their messages and curb their condemnations. Their idealism and need to make a difference surpass all else. They still believe that the power of their passion and belief will be enough, will convince even the most resistant

listener. Hundreds of these bardic groups pepper the world, struggling for a foothold to a larger audience. They have seemingly unlimited stores of drive and raw talent as well as the innocent perspective of the neophyte. Their words arise from the core of the self where hope resides—from, perhaps, within Simic's stone.

Orange Avenue out of Daytona Beach, Florida is one such group. They are just one of many hundreds of groups exhibiting a definite and obvious Neo-romantic tone. Most notable is a predilection in most of their lyrics for natural imagery and seeking of answers in nature. This group also urges one to seek one's own answers— not relying on what social institutions preach— and finding that childlike state where all fear was assuaged with a nightlight and a favorite toy. This trait is exhibited in “Stormy Weather,” where the speaker states: “I’m not afraid of the dark,/ I’m more afraid of the light” (Anderson). The dark is once more a comfort, a place where imagination and possibility live, and the light exposes the lies with which society has lulled them into a sense of hopelessness and apathy. In another lyric, this same group expresses another fear of the unknown in “Hearts of Men.” The female subject states “I don’t know what evil lurks in the hearts of men” but insists that, despite this unknown, “I want to give this world a chance” (Anderson). Here, clearly, is the hope, the willingness to try, that is the primary characteristic of Neo-romanticism. The theme Orange Avenue expresses is not unique, although their way of stating it is. Their delivery, as with so many other small, neophyte bards, is blunt, simply stated, and impossible to ignore, possibly even to a degree didactic. The Neo-romantic lesson is demanding an audience in modern music, and, despite their failure to conform to industry standards, to curb their didacticism, they

succeed. They are not chasing the dollar, like so many established musicians, but the dream—and this is a trait to which the lost and bleak hopelessness in modern society is responding.

Another genre where this Neo-romantic trend is prevalent is in full-length literature— notably children's and young adult literature. Many of the new novels for young readers offer a positive message about taking control and fixing what the bad adults did to the world. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy is a perfect example. In it children must fight society to save it and are, in fact the only ones capable of doing so. In the end, they find their answers in the natural world. More than that it is their innocence that allows them to succeed. The seven volume *Keys to the Kingdom* series by Garth Nix also is a prime example of Neo-romanticism. His characters are all children and must battle the corrupt establishment. Nature's corruption is part of the damage they are destined to correct. As with Pullman's trilogy, these children also succeed because they maintain their innocence and link to their imagination, an integral force in battling the challenges they face. These stories are showing young readers that the darkness of their mind can conquer armies. Instead of relying on the spoon-fed images the media presents, the thoughtless, two-dimensional worlds and characters, readers are being asked to reach into their own minds, to create their own images, and take a ride along the story's path.

Overall, the world is turning back to the past for help in fixing its future. When the only choices we have are to accept defeat or fight, the lessons of the past gain sudden relevance. Yes, the Romantics had their trials, resistance, and other problems. Yes, their

answers were not foolproof. However, distance grants perspective. After all, perspective is everything. An interesting percentage of popular songs today, in fact, turn their lyrics outward and upward to the night sky and the stars for answers. In a time where the world itself is failing, the ageless glimmers above, witnesses to eternity, seem to embody the solutions humankind so desperately needs as it accepts its failure to save itself from itself. Humankind is turning from the light of experience to the darkness of innocence and possibility. Like the lyric words from “Glorious Day” declare: even “the stars look so perfect from so far away/. . . the earth is a set of keys/. . . there’s no wrong or right ” (Anderson). And, perhaps, the world will have pity on humankind and provide it answers as it looks away from itself and into its world for help in reversing “what man has made of man.”

The end result of the Romantic effort is lessons from which one can learn today. Despite the trials and failures the first Romantics suffered, they never gave up. That is the lesson most relevant today, when looking back: despite the pitfalls, the bumps in the road, the effort was made and something good came of it, for a time, and can again.

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