Romanticism

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45 Environmentalism

Timothy Morton

Environmentalism is a set of cultural and political responses to a crisis in humans' relationships with their surroundings. Those responses could be scientific, activist, or artistic, or a mixture of all three. Environmentalists try to preserve areas of wilderness or 'outstanding natural beauty'. They struggle against pollution, including the risks of nuclear technologies and weaponry. They fight for animal rights and vegetarianism in campaigns against hunting and scientific or commercial experimentation on animals. They oppose globalization and the patenting of life forms.

The Romantic legacy

Environmentalism is growing broader. You can be a communist environmentalist, or a capitalist one, like the American 'wise use' Republicans. You can be a 'soft' conservationist, sending money to charities such as Britain's Woodland Trust; or a 'hard' one who lives in trees to stop logging and road building. And you could, of course, be both at the same time. You could produce scientific papers on global warming or write ecocritical literary essays. You could create poems, or environmental sculpture, or ambient music. You could do environmental philosophy (ecosophy), establishing ways of thinking, feeling, and acting based on benign relationships with our environment(s).

The scientific, political, ethical, and aesthetic worlds are coming under the sign of the environment. Even postmodernism, held in suspicion by much ecocriticism, may eventually appear as a moment in the process of including the environment in thinking, doing, and making. Two hundred years hence, people may recognize in the Romantic period the beginning of environmental ways of understanding and acting. There are many legacies of Romanticism in current environmental movements. The trouble is not that these legacies are obscure; rather, there are *too many* connections. The relationships are overdetermined—a sure sign that we are in the warped space of ideology.

The period literary historians define as Romantic—1780–1830, roughly—witnessed the birth both of animal rights and anti-racism, and of fascism and eugenics. In 1809 Lord Erskine gave the first speech in Parliament supporting animal rights. Social experiments such as Coleridge's Pantisocracy included animals (see *Oxford Companion*

to the Romantic Age, p. 635). Nationalisms emerged, invoking an environing nature as a powerful image of the nation as land. Thinking mapped the ways in which culture was shaped by nature, for instance in Alexander von Humboldt's idea that different places had different forms of cultural-conditioning *Stimmung* ('mood', 'atmosphere'). The new term 'culture', hovering somewhere between nature and nurture, evoked a surrounding world. Moreover, Romanticism has persisted in the growth of industrial capitalism; nationalism; the idea of organic form; colonialism, imperialism and globalization; changing attitudes towards children and animals; and the modern idea of *nature* itself. Let us consider these in turn.

Industrial society and its discontents

In industrial society, with its symptoms of alienation and pollution, the logic of unintended consequences plays out such that, despite class differences, risk becomes increasingly democratic. In 1986 a disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in the Soviet Union spread radiation across a vast expanse of Asia and Europe. Radiation is ignorant of national boundaries. In a bitter irony, the equality dreamt of in the 1790s has come to pass—we are all (almost) equally at risk from the environment itself. No matter what our nationality or class affiliation is, we share the toxic legacy of Chernobyl.

Romantic writers were aware of the perils of industry and its philosophy of reason. Coleridge and Shelley noticed that, despite the promises of republicanism and democracy, the unequal distribution of wealth generated famine, disease, and crime. Industrialism gave rise to rationalization, the ordering and control of social and natural systems, and utilitarianism. Yet animal rights emerged from utilitarianism: Jeremy Bentham opposed cruelty to animals. Evolution, whose first hints appeared in the later eighteenth century, displaced humans from their position at the top of a great chain of being, compelling them to acknowledge their entanglement with other species. Along with discoveries by geologists such as Charles Lyell of the astonishing age of the earth, the Darwins (Erasmus and grandson Charles) diverted thinking from the supremacist idea that humans were exceptional beings existing outside the world.

Some opposed reason, promoting mystical-participatory forms of holism or anti-rationalist celebrations of life lived on the pulses—in short, political versions of aesthetic experience. Romantic pantheism—believing that the universe and the godhead are one and the same—informs religious and ontological varieties of environmentalism. Some embrace a strong version of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, the idea that the self-regulating systems of the biosphere constitute an entity, if not a personality. Ecofeminism holds that the ecological crisis results from long-term patriarchal social structures and beliefs. Ecofeminists observe that the domination of women is a symptom of a larger oppression: nature has been objectified, turned into an other, a mute object of sexist sadism.

Let us consider a potent example of anti-rationalist environmentalism. Like nature, Englishness seems mysteriously more than the sum of its parts. It exists, apparently, alongside monarchs, checks and balances, strawberries, and bluebells, irreducible to them yet somehow caught up in them. Organicism, that peculiarly English form of nature ideology, paints society as a non-systemic heap of classes, beliefs, and practices, as ramshackle and spontaneous as a pile of compost. This is a rich, compelling, and finally authoritarian fantasy—there is no arguing with it. Many environmentalist values—complexity is good, the world cannot be totalized though it is a whole—are slices of Romantic organicism typified in Edmund Burke's reactionary prose. But environmentalism need not be organicist, not even in the Romantic period. *Frankenstein* shows how organicism fails. Incapable of loving his creature spontaneously, Frankenstein would benefit from a more rational and planned social structure that treated all social actors as equal participants with equal rights.

Nationalism, a quintessentially Romantic ideology, motivated the re-enchantment school of environmental poetics. The nation-state remains a real yet fantastic thing. As the idea of world (*Welt*) became popular in German Romantic idealism, so the nation-state was imagined as a surrounding environment. The idea of the nation as homeland, as in American Homeland Security or the German *Heimat*, demanded a poetic rendering as an ambient realm of swaying corn, shining seas, or stately forests. Nature appeared sublime, 'there' and yet fundamentally beyond representation, stretching beyond the horizon and back into the distant, even pre-human past. It was a suitable objective correlative for the *je ne sais quois* of nationalist fantasy. Walter Scott's invention of historical novels, realist fictions generating an entire world in a bubble of past-tense narrative, did as much for environmental nationalism as explicitly Romantic criticisms of modern society and technology.

The Shire in J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* depicts this world-bubble as an organic village. Tolkien narrates the victory of the suburbanite, the 'little person', embedded in a tamed yet natural-seeming environment. Nestled into the horizon as they are in their burrows, the wider world of global politics is blissfully unavailable to them. Tolkien's trilogy embodies a key nationalist fantasy, a sense of *world* as real, tangible yet indeterminate, evoking a metonymic chain of images. *The Lord of the Rings* establishes not only entire languages, histories, and mythologies, but also a surrounding world (*Umwelt*). If ever there was evidence of the persistence of Romanticism, this is it.

Like some 'nature writing' and ecocriticism, Tolkien's *Umwelt* edited out those significant moments in Romantic literature (even and especially in Wordsworth, the icon of 'nature writing') involving hesitation, irony and ambiguity. Consider Romantic irony: how the narrator becomes the protagonist, unnervingly aware that the world they have constructed is a fiction. Must ecological and ecocritical worlds be absolutely self-contained, utterly sincere—and how Romantic is that? Irony involves distancing and displacement, a moving from place to place, or even from homey place into lonely space. 'Ecology' comes from the Greek *oikos*, 'home', and early ecological science developed terms resonant with the idea of home, such as 'niche'. Science itself can be

Tolkienesque. Where does that leave migrating birds, hominids, pilgrims, gypsies, and Jews? If irony and movement are not part of environmentalism, such beings are in danger of exclusion, ostracism, or worse.

While we are on the subject of self-containment we should clarify the Romantic idea of holism. Holism constitutes the 'feel' of nationalism—'we' are interconnected in a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The struggle between individualism and holism offers an attenuated choice between absolute liberty and absolute authority—in other words, the dilemma called America. Americans are caught between the constitution and a militarized state, between placards and pepper spray, just as models of nature give to organisms with one hand, while taking with another. Organisms are politically all-important, and yet they are easily sacrificed for the sake of the greater whole. The ideological supports of American capitalism have gradually shifted away from individualism and towards corporatism. Holism is not as oppositional as some environmentalists claim. It may be better for environmentalism to think in terms of *collectivism* rather than *holism*. A collective does not imply an organic whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

In the Romantic period, capitalism moved from its colonialist to its imperialist phase. Intense war, plunder and slavery spread over the earth. Monocultures appeared: unfeasible ecosystems where business produces only one crop. Ireland was the test case, its potatoes transplanted from South America. In the resulting potato famine, countless people died or emigrated to America. Language blanketed places from Kingston, Jamaica, to Calicut, India, as 'spice islands', 'the Indies'. This alone indicates how Europe was thinking. English, Portuguese, and French psychic and political maps of the world included special open, empty places (empty of society and/or Western social norms), soaked with desire, producing goods spontaneously, a fruit machine in permanent jackpot mode. Poetry caught wind of the coordination of imperialism and ecological destruction.

Nevertheless, one did not have to oppose capitalism to have environmental awareness. Indeed, global commerce gave rise to poetry that celebrated the global. We think of globalization as new, but it is just the most recent form of social processes that existed in the Romantic period. Powerfully depicted in Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', empty wilderness spaces owe something to imperial geography and the 'because it's there' attitude of Everest climbers: imperialism in the abstract, the attempt to grasp the pure space, the abstract spacious*ness* of the environment. We are now witnessing a reverse, internal colonization: the insides of life forms provide new products such as patented genomes. In the language of the exhilarating rush to the new genetic frontier it is not hard to detect the strains of the Romantic voyage.

Private property aided ecological awareness, however strange that may sound. In eighteenth-century Britain the enclosure movement privatized land held in common, obliterating feudal and communal relationships with the earth (see *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp. 496–7). Some ecological movements have since been trying to get it back, materially and/or symbolically. In returning to Romanticism, ecocriticism

highlights those aspects that celebrated the bygone life of feudal hierarchy. Primitivist environmentalisms yearn for a lost golden age of interconnectedness with the environment. They look to pre-feudal, sometimes prehistoric, pasts to discover forms of primitive communism. Futurist environmentalisms have also appeared. Beginning with the notion that the golden age has not happened yet, they acknowledge that, despite the medievalist glamour, most people never had much of a relationship with their land under a feudal hierarchy. These futurist environmentalisms are also distinctively Romantic, in the tradition of William Blake and the Shelleys.

By the Romantic period the nuclear family had become a dominant form of kinship. On the one hand, this dominance isolated people from one another and from their world. On the other hand, it created, in the negative, a desire for connection. Individualist environmental awareness emphasizes the sublimity of open space, potential value, and, in Wordsworth's phrase, 'something ever more about to be'. The texts of contemporary nature writers are obsessed, in Romantic fashion, with the act of writing alone in the wilderness. Wordsworth, John Clare, and Henry David Thoreau each promoted this idea, inscribing the aloneness deeply into their poems and prose. The legacy continues: a recent scandal revealed that Edward Abbey's wilderness literature was not written alone, as claimed—his wife accompanied him as amanuensis.

Society began to value children differently, as beings possessing basic intrinsic goodness embodied in the imagination. They were little versions of the 'noble savage', more attuned to that gigantic concrete abstraction, nature. From an ecological point of view, social relations include relationships with animals: pets became very popular; vegetarianism was no longer a medical fad or mystical radicalism but a growing movement; animal rights was on the rise.

'Nature' is a key Enlightenment and Romantic term. Nature can be an abstract principle, an intrinsic value including a widening circle of beings: 'man', woman, child, slave, animal . . . plant? mineral? 'Nature' is used and abused. It is no comfort to see the word 'natural' in front of the word 'flavourings', since 'natural' carries no legal weight; the very term 'organic' has been appropriated for describing foods that contain no pesticide residues or genetically modified ingredients. The history of modernity is partly the story of the fortunes of 'nature'. On the one hand, nature continues to have politically progressive significance as natural rights extend towards more and more beings. On the other, postmodern theory and philosophy, for example disability studies and queer theory, have contested the idea of natural and unnatural altogether.

Frankenstein is about the origin and properties of life. It poses the basic mythological question of 'where we came from' (the earth or ourselves?) in a distinctively modern, biological, and sociological way. No wonder then that the story has come to embody contemporary anxieties about technical and scientific forms from nuclear power to genetic engineering. *Frankenstein* serves as a template for the nature debate. The creature is both utterly natural (made of pieces of other life forms) and unnatural—and perhaps the most monstrous thing about him is his plangent Enlightenment eloquence. Students never fail to be touched and disturbed by the eloquent voice of

the creature requesting that Frankenstein make a mate for him and that they depart for a peaceful vegetarian exile in South America.[1] The creature is literally a talking piece of butcher's meat, made from pieces from the slaughterhouse as well as bodies from the grave. But his speech transcends his physicality. He may *appear* an unnatural monster, but, at heart, he is more human than humans. In the key Enlightenment diction, he is *humane* (essentially human).

Romantic consumerism, green consumerism

In 1988 Prime Minister Thatcher 'greened' herself, proclaiming something like 'The first thing we have to do is get this country really, really *tidy*'. It was the force—the tidiness—of that 'tidy' which grated. As if ecology were about rearranging the furniture. Thatcher, like Hitler, was thinking in terms of living rooms; Hitler proposed that the destiny of Germany was to increase and purify its *Lebensraum* ('living room'). The 1980s had witnessed one of the least tidy critiques of modernity in the transgressive form of the Greenham Common women, who camped outside a proposed cruise missile base in the UK and practically created an alternative society. Thatcher was not reacting directly to the Greenham women, whom, like the rest of the establishment, she dismissed as dangerously marginal, probably witches (ironically some *did* consider themselves witches). Thatcher was reacting to a growing pile of 'environmentally friendly' products. Green consumerism made it possible to be both pro-capitalist and green, repeating the Romantic struggle between rebelling and selling out.

Thatcherite 'tidiness' included processing the world's nuclear waste at Sellafield, a concern so lucrative that British Nuclear Fuels now has an interest in the clean-up at Rocky Flats nuclear bomb trigger factory near Boulder, Colorado. Rocky Flats was renamed, temporarily, an 'environmental protection site'—which means removing enough plutonium to accord with 'safe' levels for the establishment of an open space wilderness reserve; not safe enough for suburban houses, but safe enough apparently for microbes that will eventually enter the ground water. Against such crass co-opting of green politics, a Romantic scream seems entirely justifiable. Romantic cultural artefacts usually take the form of a rage against the machine of modern life. This is why Alan Ginsberg's 'Plutonium Ode', commemorating an action on the rail tracks towards Rocky Flats, is a gigantic paratactic list deriving from Romantic experiments with expansive lineation by William Blake and Walt Whitman.

And yet—and this is a big 'and yet'—Romanticism *is* consumerism; consumerism is Romanticism. Notice the word 'consumer*ism*', not 'consuming': a particular style of consuming that arose as a result of the growth of consumer society throughout the long eighteenth century.[2] One can take this notion too far. Other forces were in play: the rise in the price of meat, for example, meant that working-class food actually deteriorated. In the seventeenth century the high cost of bread was not vitally

important to the lower classes: they lived on other sorts of cheap food and occupied the land. By the Romantic period they could hardly afford meat, while tea and white bread had become necessities. But consumerism is indeed a Romantic development.

Consumption became *reflexive*. This reflexivity generated such roles as that of the bohemian, the consumer who consumes for the sake of experiencing some general essence of consumption itself. As consumer society developed, more and more divergent groups evolved Kantian, self-reflexive bohemian forms of consuming. Now many people behave like Thomas De Quincey or Charles Baudelaire, both in the precise sense that drug use is rising, and in the broader sense that those writers typify Romantic consumerism. For the sake of a clear image we could reduce this to the notion of window shopping—aesthetic consumption without purpose or purchase.

It became possible to *be* a consumer: to highlight one's consuming role through self-reflection. One available role is refusal: that of the abstainer, the boycotter. These are quintessential Romantic, bohemian roles: they reflect upon the idea of what it means to be a consumer altogether. Romantic-period sugar boycotts and vegetarianism exemplify a style we would now recognize as ecological. The same forms confront today's green consumers as confronted the earlier Romantic consumers. Will buying organic food really save the planet? Romantic consumerism at once broadened and narrowed the idea of choice. The sense that we have a choice, while giving rise to utopian desires, indicates social deadlock as well as possibility.

Romantic consumerism influenced the construction and maintenance of the actually existing environment. Consider how Wordsworth's Lake District became the National Trust's Lake District; or the American wilderness. Environments themselves were caught in the logic of Romantic consumerism. Wildernesses embody both soft, shallow Romanticism—a provisional getaway from the mechanical or totally administered hurly-burly—and, in deep terms, a radical alternative. Wilderness therefore expresses various kinds of negative: fingers wagging, strongly or weakly, at modern society. To the extent that wilderness spaces and the laws that created them persist, we are still living, literally, within the Romantic period. It is strange to discover a secret passage between bottles of detergent and mountain ranges. But there is one, and it is called Romantic consumerism.

Ecological criticism

To be a consumerist is not simply to be caught in the stuff-your-face logic of capitalism, but to have the potential to resist and challenge it. One could use one's refusals to consume certain things in certain ways as modes of critiquing modern society. Without doubt, there are those green Romantic consumerists who have gone so far as not to consider themselves consumerists at all. A deep ecologist such as Julia Butterfly Hill will surely protest that she is not a consumerist, and activists in the Earth First! group

would be shocked to find that its tactics derive from consumerism. When *Adbusters*, the American fashion magazine for the tortured anti-consumerist, proclaims itself a journal of 'the mental environment', it is promising something beyond consumerism. But this promise typifies the paradox of the Romantic avant-garde. If we could just get the aesthetic *form* right, then we could crack reality, open it up and change it. The *Adbusters* approach is simply greener-than-thou consumerism, 'outconsumerisming' other consumerists. Surely this is why deep ecology names itself in opposition to what it calls 'shallow ecology'. Those shallow ecologists are just day-trippers, from the deep point of view.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with avant-garde consumerist forms. Like art, they embody what Theodor Adorno—a great Romantic in his engagement with Hegel—calls the negative knowledge of reality. This negativity is negative not in the sense of 'bad', but in terms of a dialectical moment of negation. Romantic consumerism embodies what has been negated, left out, excluded, or elided. It shows just how far one would need to go really to change things. Boycotting and protesting are both ironical, reflexive forms of consumerism. By *refusing* to buy certain products, by *questioning* oppressive social forms such as corporations or globalization, such activities point towards possibilities of changing the current state of affairs, without actually changing it. They are a cry from the heart in a heartless world, a spanner in the works (Dave Foreman's term for green direct action is 'monkeywrenching'). They thus have not only a practical, but also a religious aspect. Many religious practitioners are involved in environmental movements: nuns who hammered on Colorado's nuclear missile silos, the Church of Deep Ecology in Minneapolis. The nuns did not change the missiles into flowers, but did draw attention to these weapons of mass destruction lurking almost literally in people's backyards.

We may usefully understand the process of green consumerism via Hegel's dialectic of the beautiful soul, a moment in his history of different kinds of consciousness.[3] The beautiful soul maintains a split between self and world, an irresolvable chasm created by the call of conscience—or 'consciousness raising', as an activist might put it. This is despite the fact that the beautiful soul also yearns to close the gap. The title of a popular ecological book in the late 1980s, by David Icke, the erstwhile deputy secretary of the British Green Party, says it all: *It Doesn't Have to Be Like This*. (Since then, Icke has embraced a more extreme refusal, to the point of paranoia.) Modern art and green consumerism have this refusal stamped on them: rage against the machine. Just how deep the stamp goes is the issue. Integrity and hypocrisy become the ways to calibrate commitment.

Nature remains a reified object, 'over there'. As Marx maintains about his university experience, 'the kingdom of poetry glittered opposite me like a distant fairy palace and all my creations dissolved into nothingness'.[4] The Romantic environment twinkles and glitters like Bambi's blinking eyes. We could think of a thousand ecological examples of what Marx meant. But the name of many of them, in America, is Thoreau. The choice for engagement appears as a strong tension between, and blending of,

quietism and activism. In the mid-nineteenth century, Thoreau practised both—he was prepared to go to prison and advocated non-violent resistance, and wrote about the importance of contemplating the natural world.

At its extreme, beautiful soul syndrome can lead to fascism. The composer Richard Wagner, who had a bad case of it, dramatized his life as a resistance to the inexorably commercial, capitalist aspect of the music business. In part this consisted in anti-Semitism. The core of Wagner's 'beautiful' resistance was a fantasy object of hate around which he generated all kinds of biological essentialist (racist) thoughts. But beautiful soul syndrome can also lead to hippiedom: if we think hard enough, the rain will stop, as the MC said at the Woodstock festival in 1969. Likewise, there are fascist and New Age versions of environmentalism.

The beautiful soul distinguishes between theory and practice so sharply that reflection and hesitation is seen as inane cloud-castle building, and pure action becomes solidly material and absolutely, guilt-inducingly vital. Or it comes to the same conclusion in reverse: reflection becomes ethereal transcendence, action a rather grimy thing that other, less enlightened, people do. The notion of *praxis*, however, is that reflection can be a form of action; and that action—such as a non-violent protest—can be theoretical, reflexive. Ecocritical *praxis* could strangely invert beautiful soul syndrome. If ideology relies upon enjoyment as well as disguised truth claims, one could adopt a paradoxical strategy towards ideology's fantasy spaces, images, and objects. Instead of spitting them out, or refusing to inhabit them, one could instead identify, over-identify, or paradoxically inhabit them, like the Latinos who have recently begun to transform cities such as Los Angeles.

Current environmentalist literary criticism (ecocriticism) is thus drastically limited. Ecocriticism is another version of Romanticism's rage against the machine, a refusal to engage the present moment. Like imperialism, ecocriticism produces a vision of the text as a pristine wilderness of pure meaning. Some are beginning to theorize ways in which pure celebration of the pristine wilderness is only one facet of an ecological-political spectrum of responses. Although among ecocritics themselves there has persisted the survival mentality of the small group, turning ecocriticism into ecoideology, ecocriticism now has greater potential to become a contested field: a healthy symptom of arrival or legitimation.

Ecocriticism wavers between the apolitical or quasi-political spilt religion of a call to care for the world, and the New Left inclusion of race, gender, and environment in socialist thinking. Both have significant ties to Romanticism. While capitalist ideology had been formulated by Adam Smith in 1776, out of Romanticism there emerged, eventually, figures such as Karl Marx and William Morris. Some right-tending ecocriticism, in its return to Romanticism, regresses to a historical state in which precisely these socialist and communist developments had *not yet happened*. Moreover, the regression is redoubled in championing an anti-modern, medievalist form of Romanticism. Regression can assume the form of rousing environmental rhetorics seeking to convey a *sense* of the empirical in an aesthetic of the touchy-feely, combined

with a motivational sense that ecocriticism is good for us. Both empiricism and its experiential equivalent, specialized components of capitalist ideology itself, act as correctives to 'tarrying with the negative' and seeing the shadow side of things. If ecological criticism is to progress, it must engage negativity fully rather than formulate suppressants against perceiving it.

Ecological criticism must face up to the radically different senses of Romantic *nature*. All in all, 'nature' has two distinct meanings: *essence* and *substance*. As *essence*, nature is the inalienable rights of a sentient being, akin to private property: a kind of ghost that haunts the world like a possibility or a promise. This essence is ethical, political, and scientific. In the Romantic period, 'natural history' became 'biology' (a term coined simultaneously in Germany and England). There was a fundamental change in what counts as an object of knowledge. Natural-historical facts consist in classifications along a pre-established grid, such as Linneaus' system of genus and species. Biology, on the other hand, seeks to discover the essence of life itself.

As *substance*, nature is a thing, indeed a fantasy 'thingy', palpable, squishy, and self-generating—it *is* life, one might say. Substantialism usually underpins reactionary, nostalgic, or conservative forms of Romanticism. And yet essentialism has often proved lacking, an empty set, an oppressive blankness. This blankness is reproduced in the very postmodern criticism that pretends to deconstruct Enlightenment thinking. The trouble with this sort of criticism is not that it ignores the substantial realities of nature, as if what postmodernists need is a night out in a thunderstorm in Kansas. Some contend that Mother Nature herself should punish postmodernists with the tornado from *The Wizard of Oz*.

The real problem is not the debate between postmodernism and ecocriticism, which sounds like two sides of the same warped record. The trouble is that as intoxicants go, clichéd post-structuralist relativism, even chic nihilism, is no match for something more religious: it is indeed religion's inverted form. Believing in nothing, while strictly untenable, is still a form of belief. Both sides miss seeing that it is not so much technology and language that are the issue, as oppression and suffering. Both bypass earthly conditions: one by cancelling it, the other by preserving the mere idea of it, in however compelling and squidgy a shape.

Instead of serving up lashings of guilt and redemption, might ecological criticism not engage the ideological forms of the environment, from capitalist imagery to the very ecocriticism that partly opposes capitalism? Such 'ecocritique' would serve the establishment of collective kinds of identity that included other species and their worlds, real *and* possible. It would subvert those fixating images of 'world' that inhibit humans from grasping their place in an already historical nature. Subverting fixation is the radical goal of the Romantic wish to explore the shadow lands. The hesitations of a Wordsworth, the unreliable narrators of a Mary Shelley—the whole panoply of irony and linguistic play is not marginal, but central to Romanticism.

The environment was born at exactly the moment at which it became a problem. The word 'environment' still haunts us, because in a society that took care of its

surroundings in a more comprehensive sense, our idea of environment would have withered away—hence 'environmentalism'. Society would be so involved in taking care of 'it' that it would no longer be a case of some 'thing' that surrounds us, that environs us, and differs from us. Indeed, humans may return the idea of the 'thing' to its older sense of 'meeting place'. In a society that fully acknowledged that we were always and already involved in our world, there would be no need to point it out.

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NOTES

1. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*, ed. James Rieger (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974, 1982), p. 142.
2. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1982).
3. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V Miller, analysis and foreword by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 383–409.
4. Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 8.