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what exceeded such boundaries, Romantic works are often difficult to engage and hence it is understandable that their significance has been variously construed. As Bate and Oerlemans convincingly demonstrate, however, critical engagement with Romantic works can be an important stimulus for reflection on nature and religion of particular relevance to the concerns of modern environmentalism.

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- See also: Romanticism in European Literature; Western Esotericism.

Romanticism in European Literature

European Romanticism's complex understanding of the word "nature" must be seen against the background of the eighteenth century and the growth of the industrial city, which gave rise to a new understanding of the beauties of nature as these ceased to be a mere backdrop to human activity and became the place where human beings could be closest to themselves and to God. Appreciation of the grander landscape beauties of nature and a fascination for

the "sublime," encouraged by the popularity of artists like Salvator Rosa (1615–73), resulted in a new "aesthetics of the infinite" that coincided with changing religious views of nature.

Behind the Latin tags *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* lie roots extending as far back as Classical times, but now revived in complex ways. The latter consists of the "forms of nature," laid out to be investigated and observed. The former, literally "nature naturing," is nature experienced as active, dynamic and constantly changing. It refers to that animating principle that gives life to the objects of nature, which may remain at the disposal of God, or else be regarded as a pantheistic "presence" or a "power of harmony" that in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" "rolls through all things" without God's help. For the Anglican priest John Keble, however, the Book of Nature is precisely to be "read" as an indication of the workings of God. In Keble's poems in *The Christian Year* (1827), nature is a book "which heavenly truth imparts" to the Christian "reader." In a very different Romantic portrayal of Christianity, Chateaubriand's *Genie du Christianisme* (1802), drew his experience of nature from his visit in 1791 to America, where the "cultivated fields" of Europe, which "everywhere meet with the habitations of men," are replaced by virgin forests and the "abysses of cataracts" where alone the unknown "Supreme Being manifests himself to the human heart" and we can find ourselves solely with God. Nature is only truly appreciated where it has escaped the destroying hand of human cultivation.

In the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Wordsworth claimed to be writing in the "real language of men," deliberately giving attention to rustic life lived "among the natural abodes of men, Fields with their rural works" (*The Prelude* XIII, 102–3). It was here that the poet sought to recover the roots and affections of human nature. For the young Wordsworth, at least, and certainly for Shelley and Rousseau, human nature is fundamentally good, and most truly discovers itself as it recovers an affinity with nature that the city-dweller has lost. Though their aspirations remained highly idealized, the Romantic poets at least abandoned the classical literary conventions of Theocritus or Virgil, so beloved of the eighteenth century, and donning their walking boots gave minute attention to "the mighty world / Of eye, and ear," and "the beauteous forms / of nature" ("Tintern Abbey"). Yet, at the same time, they were not blind to the heartlessness of nature's creatures, and Keats, even while he celebrates the "flowers gay / Of periwinkle and wild strawberry," laments the "fierce destruction" wrought by the shark, the hawk or even the "gentle robin" as "ravening," as it attacks the worm. For William Blake, this same worm is a canker which destroys the rose by its "dark secret love." Nevertheless, though we live in a fallen world (an acknowledgment which awaited the advent of Darwinian theory later in the nineteenth century), still, for some Romantics the goodness of nature

is seen as a proof of the goodness of its creator, while for the pantheistic Wordsworth (Lucy, though her name is not mentioned in the brief lyric of 1799, "A slumber did my spirit seal"), death returns us to an absolute unity with the natural world of rocks, and stones, and trees. Blake, who can "see a World in a Grain of Sand" (a remarkable though probably unconscious echo of Julian of Norwich's hazel nut that is the whole of creation), also sees heaven in a rage at a caged bird ("Auguries of Innocence").

It is typical of the Romantic awareness of the active principle in nature (*natura naturans*) to be conscious also of the universal in the tiny specifics of natural things, a symbolic acknowledgement of what Coleridge calls "the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal" (*The Statesman's Manual*, 1816). At the same time, and concurrently with German Idealist thought, Coleridge and Wordsworth celebrated the shaping spirit of the imagination, recognizing the mind's power to participate in the creation of what we see in a noble interchange of nature and the human. In Coleridge's words, "we receive but what we give / And in our life alone does Nature live" ("Dejection: An Ode"). In an ancient tradition, drawing upon both Greek mythology and Judeo-Christian thought, the German philosopher of Romanticism, Friedrich Schelling, claims a profound kinship between the human spirit and nature. In his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), Schelling affirms "we do not want that nature only accidentally correspond to the principles of our spirit." Thus for the poet Novalis (1772–1801) the true being of nature and the true being of humans are analogous and one, each revealing the truth of the other. Goethe's young Werther, at the beginning of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) writes, with absolute truth,

My whole being is filled with a marvellous gaiety,
like the sweet spring mornings that I enjoy with all
my heart. I am alone and glad to be alive in sur-
roundings such as these, which were created for a
soul like mine.

Even at his death, Werther remains one with nature and the Eternal One: "Through the storm clouds flying by, I can still see a few stars in the eternal sky. No, you will not fall. The Eternal One carries you in his heart as he carries me."

For Goethe and Romanticism there is no final reconciliation between the spirit *in* nature, of which we are a part, and nature *as* spirit, often seen in terms of the ancient Mother-Goddess, and there is a complex, eclectic coming together of Christian theology and mythological references. Later in nineteenth-century literature, the Mother-Goddess may be personified in such figures as Mother Carey in Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863), a parable of the purity of nature set against the life-denying

city as the chimney sweep Tom becomes conscious of his grimy body, falls into a river and is transformed into a water-baby.

But there is more to Goethe's view of nature than *Werther*. He was also fascinated with scientific observation of plants, animals, rocks, light and color, holding an idea of evolution that, unlike Darwin's later theory, is nonlinear. For Goethe, what evolves in nature is timeless, a spiral development of endless motion, at the heart of which is a central Romantic concept – polarity: the idea that natural processes live by the interaction between opposites. Without this, as Blake said, there can be no progression. The Romantic fascination with science and nature (which often fed a highly mythological viewpoint), finds a later devotee in John Ruskin (1819–1900), who approached art entirely through nature. In some ways a successor to Wordsworth, Ruskin took a far more intelligent interest in nature, and, with his strict religious upbringing, regarded nature, like Keble, as a holy book. He sometimes described himself as nature's priest. As he looked at the minute particulars of nature, Ruskin was both a poet and a scientist, and, like Goethe and the artist Turner, he was fascinated by the quality of light and color. Ruskin regarded nature as a moral being, for both good and ill, objects in nature often "speaking" to us as moral tutors. In *Modern Painters* (vol. 5), the pine tree has "a tremendous unity [which] absorbs and moulds the life of a race. The pine shadows rest upon a nation."

The complex Romantic view of nature has continued to influence our thinking. Aware, long before Darwin or Tennyson's evolutionary version of "Nature red in tooth and claw," of the cruelty in nature, Romanticism nevertheless regarded nature as a primary source of our education and was deeply aware of the dangers of our neglect or destruction of its delicate balance. In the symbiosis between nature and the human spirit, the destruction of the former, symbolized, for example, by the albatross in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," was also, inevitably the demise of the latter.

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See also: Blake, William; Philosophy of Nature; Romanticism in European History; Romanticism – American; Western Esotericism.

Romanticism – American

American Romanticism is the general term used to encompass the intersections among several philosophical, theological, political, and artistic movements that occurred in the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century, a period characterized by American territorial expansion and industrialization on the one hand, and sweeping religious and social reforms on the other.

Like its earlier European counterparts, American Romanticism represented a reaction to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment values of order, rationality, scientific method and urbanity. While not fully rejecting the gains of the Enlightenment – which included a critique of orthodox Christianity and religious “superstition” that many Romantics shared – Romanticism sought to reinvigorate those aspects of human knowledge and experience that the Enlightenment had pushed aside. These included: attention to mysticism and psychological supernaturalism and a thematic emphasis on the value of the imagination, sentimentalism, natural spiritualism, and pastoralism.

A prominent theme in this intellectual and artistic movement was a renewed attention to nature, not simply as a system of laws to be interpreted (an Enlightenment trope) but as a source of spiritual and psychological renewal. Like the British Romantics (such as Wordsworth and Coleridge), the American Romantics saw experience in nature as a means to return to a childlike state of innocence, unsullied by civilization. Regained innocence, in turn, could lead to a higher level of insight into the nature of the good, the true, and the beautiful (and for some, also, the nature of God). The responsibility of the Romantic artist was not only to advocate for such a return to nature, innocence, and moral purity but also to convey it to others through poetry, essays, paintings, and related arts. Because the American landscape was already steeped in symbolic associations (America as “the new Eden” or “New Canaan”), it is not surprising that the American Romantics would emphasize the uniqueness of American nature in particular. Such emphasis built on the already established symbolic importance of American nature, while also contributing to the Romantic agenda of shaping a new national identity.

American Romanticism is traditionally thought to have begun in the late 1820s and to have ended by the 1860s, the period of the Civil War (1861–1865). Several important historical events and trends were associated with these middle decades of the nineteenth century. Perhaps most importantly, the Romantic era saw a movement away from – and calls for a return to – the Jeffersonian values of agrarian republicanism that had dominated during the preceding Federalist period. Thomas Jefferson had argued that the moral, spiritual, and national integrity of American culture rested upon the citizenry’s relationship to the natural landscape and its gentle cultivation, and he had imagined a nation of small farmers. By the 1830s and 1840s, however, industrialization had begun to spread across the American landscape in the form of railroads, steamboats, and agricultural machinery. According to historian Leo Marx, this led to a consciousness of what has been called the “machine in the garden” – the recognition that the utopian and rural values of early American identity were being challenged by industrialism, expansion, and urbanization.

The middle of the nineteenth century also marked a change in American self-perceptions in two important ways. Perhaps most importantly, the question of slavery and abolition became increasingly urgent as the economic and social climates of the urban North and the agricultural South diverged radically and as the opening of the western frontier shifted the balance of political power. At the same time, the territorial expansion of the United States westward also changed the way Americans came to understand and to construct their identity. During this period, characterized by the philosophical imperatives of expansion known as “Manifest Destiny” and shaped by the war with Mexico from 1846–1848, the settlement of the American west was advancing rapidly, so that by 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner could claim that the frontier was closed and that it had irrevocably shaped what it meant to be an American. In the “Frontier thesis,” Turner had completed the idealization of the west that had begun during the presidency of Andrew Jackson (1828–1836), and the settlement of the west brought with it new mythologies, stereotypes, and images of progress. American Romanticism may be understood as an alternatively nostalgic and progressive response to these shifting values and as an effort to negotiate the tension between different models of the American relationship to the landscape.

These changing attitudes toward the American landscape and its relationship to national identity are reflected in the art of the Romantic period, particularly in the works of a group of painters known as the Hudson River School. Established during the 1820s and working until about the 1850s in the United States, these painters represented in their images the tensions surrounding American attitudes toward nature and the unsettled wilderness. While earlier paintings of the American landscape had emphasized the