

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

NCLC

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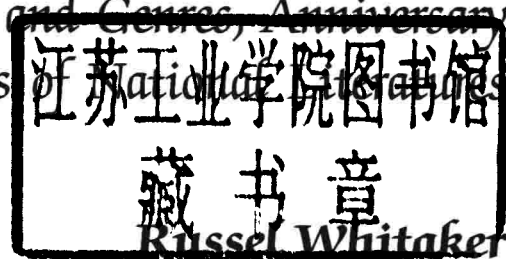
TOPICS VOLUME

Volume 140

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Topics Volume

Criticism of Various
Topics in Nineteenth-Century Literature,
including Literary and Critical Movements,
Prominent Themes and Genres, Anniversary
Celebrations, and Surveys of National Literatures



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Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, NCLC has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as NCLC.

Scope of the Series

NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, NCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in NCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of NCLC is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC).

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An NCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *NCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *NCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xv

Ecocriticism and Nineteenth-Century Literature

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Representative Works</i>	2
<i>Overviews</i>	3
<i>American Literature: Romantics and Realists</i>	20
<i>American Explorers and Naturalists</i>	76
<i>English Literature: Romantics and Victorians</i>	123
<i>Further Reading</i>	167

The Emergence of the Short Story in the Nineteenth Century

<i>Introduction</i>	169
<i>Representative Works</i>	170
<i>Overviews</i>	171
<i>The American Short Story</i>	174
<i>The Short Story in Great Britain and Ireland</i>	214
<i>Stories by Women in English</i>	235
<i>The Short Story in France and Russia</i>	245
<i>The Latin American Short Story</i>	266
<i>Further Reading</i>	277

Luddism in Nineteenth-Century Literature

<i>Introduction</i>	280
<i>Representative Works</i>	281
<i>Overviews</i>	281
<i>The Literary Response</i>	322
<i>Further Reading</i>	365

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 369

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 467

NCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 479

Ecocriticism and Nineteenth-Century Literature

Ecocriticism is the study of representations of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment.

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism as an academic discipline began in earnest in the 1990s, although its roots go back to the late 1970s. Because it is a new area of study, scholars are still engaged in defining the scope and aims of the subject. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in the field, has defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” and Laurence Buell says that this study must be “conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis.” David Mazel declares it is the analysis of literature “as though nature mattered.” This study, it is argued, cannot be performed without a keen understanding of the environmental crises of modern times and thus must inform personal and political actions; it is, in a sense, a form of activism. Many critics also emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the enquiry, which is informed by ecological science, politics, ethics, women’s studies, Native American studies, and history, among other academic fields. The term “ecocriticism” was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” Interest in the study of nature writing and with reading literature with a focus on “green” issues grew through the 1980s, and by the early 1990s ecocriticism had emerged as a recognizable discipline within literature departments of American universities.

While ecocritics study literature written throughout history and analyze its relationship to the environment, most scholarship has focused on American and British literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The nineteenth century especially saw a number of developments in literature that ecocritics view as significant. American and British Romantic writers took a particular interest in nature as a subject; Victorian realists wrote about industrialization, which was changing the natural landscape; explorers and natural historians began to write about newly encountered places and wildlife; and pioneers and other travelers wrote of their experiences with an emphasis on setting. Probably the defining work of nature writing, and the ecologically oriented work that has been the subject of most literary analysis, is Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854). This

classic of American literature is a poetic narrative describing the two months the author lived in a small cabin in the woods near Walden Pond, in Massachusetts. In his work, Thoreau observes all around him with a keen eye and a philosophical spirit, describing the ordinary but remarkable creatures and happenings he encounters in the natural world and discussing the meaning of living in harmony with nature and one’s soul. Some critics have argued that the American tradition of nature writing stems from Thoreau’s masterpiece. Another landmark American nonfiction work about nature was Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature* (1836). This essay is the writer’s statement on the principles of the philosophy of Transcendentalism, which he describes as “a hypothesis to account for nature by other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry.” In this work, Emerson talks about the mystical unity of nature and urges his readers to enjoy a relationship with the environment. Other American writers of the period whose work has been seen as important by ecocritics include William Cullen Bryant, James Kirke Paulding, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, and a number of minor writers who wrote stories about the Wild West. Some scholars have pointed out that much of the focus of ecocriticism has been nature writing by white men. They note that the response toward the landscape is far different in works by African-Americans (such as Frederick Douglass), Native Americans, and women. A related but distinct field of literary study, ecofeminist literary criticism, examines the representations of nature by women and reveals how they often overturn dominant male images and attitudes toward the environment.

Nineteenth-century American naturalists and explorers are often credited by ecocritics as having initiated the conservation movement. These writers differ from “literary” authors because their work focuses more on scientific descriptions and speculations about nature. However, as many critics have shown, their writings are imbued with a poetic spirit that makes their ideas accessible to lay readers. The two great nineteenth-century American naturalists, most critics agree, are John Burroughs and John Muir. Burroughs’s early work was influenced by Whitman, particularly the essays collected in *Wake-Robin* (1871) and *Birds and Poets*. (1877). After reading Charles Darwin and John Fiske, Burroughs turned to scientific speculation about nature and then later in life took a more spiritual view. Muir, a native of Scotland, traveled extensively around the United States and documented his observations in hundreds of articles

and ten major books. He also worked to prevent the destruction of the environment, and he is credited with being primarily responsible for preserving the Yosemite Valley in California, which became the second national park in the United States.

In Britain, in the nineteenth century, the Romantic poets reacted strongly against the eighteenth-century emphasis on reason and sought new ways of expressing their thoughts and feelings. William Wordsworth, considered by many to be the spokesman of the movement, celebrates the beauty and mystery of nature in some of his most famous lyrics, including "Michael" (1800), which portrays a simple shepherd who is deeply attached to the natural world around him. Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1850) records the poet's evolving understanding of nature, and *The Excursion* (1814) is a long philosophical reflection on the relationship of humanity and nature. The poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Percy Shelley also includes emotional descriptions of the natural world and features some of the best-known nature verse in English. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," to cite one example, has been called the most inspired lyrical poem describing nature in the English language. The Romantic interest in nature is particularly significant to ecocritics because these poets were revolutionary in their politics, and the preservation of the natural world was one element of their radical thinking. A Romantic poet who used his understanding of nature to protest against the new capitalist machinery was John Clare, who, unlike the others, was himself a laborer and worked on the land. Later nineteenth-century English writers of note include Thomas Hardy, in whose novels the sense of place always takes center stage, and Matthew Arnold, whose love poem "Dover Beach" (1867) is said to offer one of the finest descriptions of place in English poetry. Victorian essayists who wrote about nature include John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, both of whom lamented the destruction of the environment due to industrialization.

While ecocriticism had its official beginnings as a discipline in the 1990s, important critical essays that fall into the ecocritical mold appeared as early as the 1800s, many of them responding to works by writers such as Thoreau and Emerson. Two important books of criticism from the mid-twentieth century include Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950) and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964). The latter work examines the tension between the "pastoral" and "progressive" ideals that characterized early nineteenth-century American culture and is considered a classic text in American studies. Such pioneering works show that ecologically oriented criticism is not a new phenomenon but, like the literature it analyzes, is a response to the urgent issues of the day. As critics have pointed out, one of the

reasons that ecocriticism continues to grow as a discipline is the continued global environmental crisis. Ecocriticism aims to show how the work of writers concerned about the environment can play some part in solving real and pressing ecological concerns.

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

John James Audubon

Ornithological Biography (nonfiction) 1831-40

Matthew Arnold

"Dover Beach" (poetry) 1867

William Bartram

Travels (journal) 1791

William Cullen Bryant

"Thanatopsis" (poem) 1817

"A Forest Hymn" (poem) 1825

"The Prairies" (poem) 1833

John Burroughs

Notes on Walt Whitman as a Poet and a Person (criticism) 1867

Wake-Robin (essays) 1871

Birds and Poets (essays) 1877

George Gordon, Lord Byron

"Byron to Lord Holland, 25 Feb. 1812" (poetry) 1812

George Caitlin

Letters and Notes on the North American Indian (nonfiction) 1841

Thomas Carlyle

Reminiscences of My Irish Journey in 1849 (reminiscences) 1882

John Clare

Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery (poetry) 1820

The Village Mistrel (poetry) 1821

The Shepherd's Calendar (poetry) 1827

The Rural Muse (poetry) 1835

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"Kubla Khan" (poem) 1797

"Frost at Midnight" (poem) 1798

"Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (poem) 1798

James Fenimore Cooper

The Pioneers (novel) 1823

Frederick Douglass

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (autobiography) 1845

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Nature (nonfiction) 1836

"The Young American" (lecture) 1844

Thomas Hardy

Far from the Madding Crowd (novel) 1874

The Return of the Native (novel) 1878

The Mayor of Casterbridge (novel) 1886

Tess of the D'Urbervilles (novel) 1891

Jude the Obscure (novel) 1891

Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Scarlet Letter (novel) 1850

The Blithedale Romance (novel) 1852

John Keats

"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (poem) 1816

"Ode to Autumn" (poem) 1820

"Ode to a Nightingale" (poem) 1820

Clarence King

Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada (nonfiction) 1872

John Muir

The Mountains of California (nonfiction) 1894

James Kirke Paulding

The Backwoodsman (novel) 1818

John Ruskin

Modern Painters (criticism) 1843

The Eagle's Nest: Ten Lectures on Natural Science to Art: Given at Oxford in 1872 (lectures) 1872

The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century (nonfiction) 1884

Percy Shelley

"Alastor" (poem) 1816

"Mont Blanc" (poem) 1817

"Lines Written among the Euganean Hills" (poem) 1818

"Ode to the West Wind" (poem) 1819

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

In Memoriam (poetry) 1850

Henry David Thoreau

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (nonfiction) 1849

Walden; or, Life in the Woods (nonfiction) 1854

The Maine Woods (nonfiction) 1864

Journals (journals) 1881-92

Mark Twain

Roughing It (novel) 1872

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (novel) 1885

Gilbert White

Natural History of Selborne (nonfiction) 1789

Walt Whitman

Specimen Days (nonfiction) 1882

Alexander Wilson

American Ornithology; or The Natural History of Birds of the United States. 9 vols. (nonfiction) 1808-14

William Wordsworth

Lyrical Ballads (poetry) 1798

The Excursion (poetry) 1814

The Prelude (poetry) 1850

OVERVIEWS

Karl Kroeber (essay date 1994)

SOURCE: Kroeber, Karl. "Feminism and the Historicity of Science." In *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind*, pp. 22-36. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

[In the following essay, Kroeber stresses the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to an ecologically oriented literary criticism, noting especially the need for an understanding of scientific ecology.]

In calling for an ecologically oriented criticism I appeal to intensified awareness of the historicity of all our intellectual disciplines. It would seem banal so to appeal, but that Cold War critics, even new historicists, have paid minimal attention to the evolution of our understanding of the natural world, despite their fondness for the truism that conceptions of nature are cultural constructs. An ecological criticism must be historically more self-conscious, if only because ecology is a relative newcomer in the world of science. Such self-consciousness, moreover, is a requisite for any kind of useful interaction between scientific and humanistic studies. It is the dangers of metaphysical universalizing (some of whose disguised self-mystifyings recent feminist critiques have exposed) from which ecologically oriented criticism principally offers to liberate literary studies.

To understand better how this might come about, we need to understand how ecology came into being. The word *ecology* was coined by the zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866. Haeckel needed a name for a new science, one just then coming into its own as a systematic discipline. Ecology, he said, was

the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature—the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and to its organic environment; including above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact—in a word, ecology is the study of all those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence.¹

Although today there are many diverse forms of scientific ecology whose practices require refinements or expansions of Haeckel's definition, its two key features remain undisturbed: ecology treats of total interrelationships of organisms and their environments, and ecology depends upon Darwinian evolutionary thinking.²

These features explain why ecology as a scientific discipline could not fully emerge before the middle of the nineteenth century. It required the development of other scientific disciplines. The word *biology*, after all, entered our language only in the first years of the nineteenth century, just when chemistry in the form we recognize was attaining its first successes. Until these studies had achieved systematized efficacy—until, one might say, there was matured genetics, physiology, and biochemistry—it remained impossible effectively to develop encompassing studies of the total interrelations of individual organisms and their environments.

Haeckel asserts ecology's dependence upon Darwin's articulation of the theory of evolution, which of course emphasizes the temporal dimension in biological processes. The struggle for existence is a historical struggle, survival of the fittest being survival over time. This view of nature as temporalized, as existing historically, produces the seeming paradox of the evolutionary stress upon individuality. Individuality of course had loomed large in Lamarck's evolutionary ideas about the inheritance of acquired characteristics. The subtler paradox in the Darwinian focus on variations within populations is illuminated by an old joke among biologists that *The Origin of Species* destroyed the idea of species. The joke refers to Darwin's insistence that evolutionary survival depends on any species' being composed of a number of varied individuals, so that the species can adapt to whatever changes in environment may happen to occur over time. Scientific ecology follows Darwin by building on the axioms of natural history that every organism is unique but that all organisms and environments are essentially interdependent.

This understanding of phenomenal reality as constituted of a shifting interdependence of unique historical enti-

ties has infected an ever-widening range of disciplines, although humanists have remained until now relatively immune. It is not accidental that the best-known image used to illustrate recent "chaos" theory (which I have already cited) is that of a weather prediction distorted when at a particular moment a single butterfly flaps its wings. Ecological literary criticism would adapt to humanistic studies conceptions of wholeness that—in fashions appropriate to imaginative activities—reaffirm the significance of individuals and individual actions.

So to adapt is not difficult because humanistic interests and humanistic research contributed to the development of ecological ideas. The steady growth from the Renaissance onward of historical studies, especially the development in the eighteenth century of environmental historicism, fostered ecological attitudes. Even the emergence of modern linguistics may have played a part when William Jones at the end of the eighteenth century defined the historical relationship of Sanskrit to Greek and Latin, thereby demonstrating what could be called an evolutionary significance for "extinct species" of languages.³

It should not be surprising, therefore, that in British romantic poetry we find significant anticipations of ecological ideas.⁴ The anticipations are significant in part because they helped to train imaginations toward receptiveness to ecological conceptions, including the significance of contingency in what Darwin later called the "economy" or, even more strikingly, the "polity" of nature. Because these anticipations did not then (could not then) coalesce into a systematic discipline of thought, they also offer a valuable vantage point from which to question our present, more articulated thinking about the relation of human polities to the polity of nature—including current assumptions about the functions of literature and the responsibilities of its professional critics toward the health of the societies to which they belong.

The special value to literary scholars of such a perspective on their own position is illustrated by the fact that, however extensively ecological ideas have penetrated a variety of sciences, at least one of the principles central to it has been resisted by most contemporary literary critics. They refuse to concentrate attention on the uniqueness of works of art, now symptomatically referring to poems, plays, and novels not as "works" (which is regarded as foregrounding their individuality) but as "texts." This tendency, which reflects a valuable awareness of the difficulty in rigorously distinguishing text from context, nevertheless requires reexamination, because works of art may fairly be described as the most unique phenomena in all human experience.

Ecological literary criticism, in fact, begins from the presupposition that an essential characteristic of all significant literary works is their uniqueness, not as au-

onomous artifacts, as the New Criticism regarded them, but as dynamic participants in a constantly self-transforming historical environment—a major component of which is the diverse interpretations to which outstanding works are subjected. Without this premise, it would be impossible to identify in the literary realm the interplay of individuality and interdependence that is the central object of all ecologically oriented studies. The oddest paradox of my insistence on proto-ecological features of British romantic poetry, therefore, is its revelation of how contemporary literary criticism is enfeebled by reliance (largely unconscious) upon postromantic but now obsolete scientific ideas. Such antiquated presuppositions include those that depend on simplistic distinctions between subject (mind) and object (nature), or ignore principles of probability and uncertainty, or fail to recognize the importance of either uniqueness or chance in all life processes. What might be called the premodern “scientificness” of poetry of two hundred years ago, therefore, can help us to understand that humanistic endeavors today have no more powerful (even if often unwitting) supporters than our most innovative scientists, who have overturned cruder, anti-imaginative scientific ideas constituting the concealed intellectual foundation for the principles espoused by many contemporary literary critics.

Let it be absolutely clear, however, that ecological literary criticism does not try to transfer methods of biology, biochemistry, mathematics, or other disciplines to the analysis of literature. It only directs criticism toward examination of the adaptability to humanistic goals of fundamental conceptions that make contemporary ecological studies so important. That examining, however, requires us to reassess the fundamental presuppositions undergirding recent literary theorizing. Such reassessing will, in turn, inevitably compel us into some self-questioning as to the ultimate justifications for our work—for example, what may be the special preciousness (or perniciousness) of specific works of literature and of particular systems of critical commentary that describe and evaluate them.

There is now an enormous literature on scientific ecology, the best orientation into which is provided by Robert P. McIntosh's *The Background of Ecology: Concept and Theory*.⁵ McIntosh's work is particularly valuable for its lucid demonstration of why pre-nineteenth century forerunners of ecological thinking remain forerunners of the decisive breakthrough that came during Charles Darwin's lifetime. McIntosh's clarity on this matter is needed. Recent popularizings of “ecology” have encouraged the misapprehension that ecological views have been propounded in Western culture well before the nineteenth century, even by ancient Greeks. Donald Worster, for example, finds the roots of “ecology” in several eighteenth-century writers, including the founder of Methodism, John Wesley. Such “roots”

can be found in many places if, like Worster, one uses the term *ecology* in a vague, generalized, and normative sense.⁶ Although Clarence Glacken's impressive and comprehensive *The Rhodian Shore* has been used for the same kind of imprecise and inflated ecological rhetoric, Glacken himself explains that he stopped his study at the end of the eighteenth century because “with the 18th century there ends in Western civilization an epoch in the history of man's relationship to nature. What follows is of an entirely different order, influenced by the theory of evolution, specialization in the attainment of knowledge, acceleration in the transformation of nature” (704-5).⁷ Current overly generous, if often well intentioned, expansions of “ecology” beyond all specificity of meaning reduce its significance and block our recognition of the potential importance to criticism of developments of the scientific disciplines involved in ecological studies. These developments in the past century have been spectacular. McIntosh's long book, in fact, is little more than a series of condensed descriptions of the varieties of scientific ecology that have begun to flourish in this century. Crucial to all these, it seems fair to say, is “the emphasis upon an holistic approach, which involves the concept of the ecosystem” as “a group of organisms of different kinds . . . with reciprocal relations to the nonliving environment and, especially, having mutual relations of varying kinds and degrees among themselves.”⁸

The extraordinary range and vitality of the various kinds of ecological research suggests that, despite the present popularity of “ecological causes,” humanists still tend to underestimate the true effects of the emergence of scientific ecology. That conception makes a strong claim to being one of the supreme accomplishments—perhaps finally the greatest—of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western civilization. As an admirer of ancient Greek civilization and for some time now a student of Native American cultures, I have been impressed by these “early” cultures' sensitive understanding of interrelations between human activities and the natural environment—as well as their perceptions into the workings of natural systems. Exemplary is the northern Native American observation that caribou *need* wolves—since wolves are capable of hunting down only ill or weak caribou. But neither ancient Greeks nor Native Americans, nor anyone before the nineteenth century, had, or could have had, a systemically ecological understanding of nature—as the barrenness of the Greek landscape and the abandoned cliff dwellings in the Southwest poignantly testify.

A genuinely ecological understanding is founded on an intricate interplay of sophisticated specialized theorizing with knowledge of detailed scientific facts that could not have been assembled and given unified meaning until well into the last century. Haeckel, for instance, identified four thousand new species of marine protozoa

and, like Darwin, made a long voyage on which he became intimately acquainted with the fantastic variety of organisms and meticulously analyzed the often minute but decisive differences between them. Although the spotted owl has served as a means for protecting (at least temporarily) some of this country's virgin Northwest forests from being lumbered off for sale to Japan to make plywood concrete forms, the true environmental importance of the "old" forests is down among their roots, not among their branches. In the decaying of older timber in such forests chemical substances are produced that are necessary to the roots of young trees if they are to absorb nutrients essential to their full maturation. The elimination of older trees makes it impossible for younger ones to grow to maturity. Both the chemical analyses and the knowledge of fundamental biochemical processes required to reconstruct this sequence of causes and effects result from detailed scientific analyses that only a few decades ago became possible through improved technology and the cumulative effect of years of systematized research.

Unless we recognize the complexity of scientific ecology, we fall into cheap sentimentalism that may, in fact, be destructive of our natural environment. Recognizing that ecological thought must be founded on the most advanced, sophisticated, and continuously self-challenging scientific research helps us to assure that scientific work will be productively beneficent. Various sciences have in the past wreaked much destruction on our world, even while doing much good. Especially in our economically globally unified world of the oncoming twenty-first century, the more ecological well-being is made a primary sociocultural aim, the more scientific work can be expected to produce beneficial rather than destructive effects.

Once more a romantic work provides insight into our circumstances by its representation of a situation that foretells with some helpful inaccuracy the problems we confront. Mary Shelley's romantic novel *Frankenstein* (1818) displays the terrible effects of its protagonist creating a "monster" that is a kind of anthropomorphized version of the atomic bomb. The monster may be so described because Victor Frankenstein decides that he will not create a "mate" for the original monster (a hydrogen bomb, so to speak), because the pair might well destroy his species. As I have pointed out elsewhere, this is the first literary presentation of an ethical decision founded on the practical possibility of destruction of the entire human species.⁹

Mary Shelley was able so effectively to foreshadow our fears because in the romantic era for the first time the enormous physical and cultural potency of systematized scientific work had begun to become visible. Her prototypical "mad" scientist begins with a conscious desire to do good. The novel leads us to believe, however, that

the terrible consequences of his idealism are rooted in repressed ambiguous impulses and aspirations deriving from unresolved psychosocial problems in his upbringing and education. Victor Frankenstein's "madness" (he is represented as literally "sick") expresses his society's incapacity to direct such idealistic intellectual endeavors as his into paths that will be healthfully useful for both the individual scientist and for his community. The physical "illness" of Shelley's scientist is expressive of the unresolved moral/intellectual contradictions rending him and his society. The kind of contradictions by which Victor Frankenstein is ripped and the kind of ethical struggles in which he is engaged were, in fact, experienced by many physicists associated with the development of nuclear weaponry.

Yet despite this continuing moral relevance of *Frankenstein*, which accounts for the story's sustained popularity and the absorption of its protagonist's name into the common vernacular, Mary Shelley's story strikes many intelligent readers as somewhat silly—a characteristic that helps to explain why the story has been kept alive as much by comedic and parodic versions as by the novel itself or its "serious" dramatizations. Although the conception of Frankenstein's project was not possible before the beginning of the nineteenth century, today his "madness," more significantly than his technology, seems archaic. The simultaneous strength and weakness of Shelley's novel is that in it she displays with perspicuity a central ethical problem endemic to scientific research as it had developed since the Renaissance. But the very progress of science since Shelley's time has to a considerable degree rendered her definition of that problem obsolete.

The underlying ethical dilemma intrinsic to "pure" science deriving from Copernicus and Galileo was that its purity could not exist without absolute freedom. In Shelley's novel the scientist obtains that "freedom" only by surreptitious and basically "subversive" techniques of self-isolation. The significant truth within this melodramatic representation is that scientific practice *is* intellectual experiment and speculation pursued entirely for their own sake. But sophisticated science is also dependent for its full efficacy on the uninhibited flow of information between practitioners, and it is in this regard that Frankenstein's self-isolation, though representative of a psychological truth about scientific research that Wordsworth had already insisted upon,¹⁰ undercuts the relevance of his actions to modern scientific practice.

The development of post-Renaissance science, as I have observed, depended upon its "purity," its freedom from responsibility to the ramifying implications and secondary consequences of its activities. That continued to be the situation into our own century, when the progress of various sciences, especially their increasing need for technological devices requiring economic expenditure