

**English Romanticism and
Modern Fiction
A Collection of Critical Essays**

Edited by Allan Chavkin

AMS Press
New York

**English Romanticism and
Modern Fiction
A Collection of Critical Essays**

Edited by Allan Chavkin

AMS Press
New York

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

English romanticism and modern fiction: a collection of critical essays / edited by Allan Chavkin.

(AMS studies in modern literature; no. 21)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-404-61591-0

1. English fiction—20th century—History and criticism.
2. American fiction—20th century—History and criticism.
3. American fiction—English influences. 4. Romanticism—History—
20th century. 5. Modernism (Literature). I. Chavkin, Allan Richard,
1950- II. Series.
PR888.R73E54 199
823'.9109—dc20

91-3404
CIP

All AMS books are printed on acid-free paper that meets the guidelines for performance and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

COPYRIGHT © 1993 BY AMS PRESS, INC.

All rights reserved

AMS PRESS

56 East 13th Street

New York, N.Y. 10003, U.S.A.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

English Romanticism and Modern Fiction

AMS studies in Modern Literature, No. 21

ISSN 0270-2983

Other titles in this series:

- No. 1. Richard E. Amacher and Margaret Rule, compilers. *Edward Albee at Home and Abroad: A Bibliography, 1958 to June 1968*. 1973.
- No. 2. Richard G. Morgan, editor. *Kenneth Patcher: A Collection of Essays*. 1977.
- No. 3. Philip Grover, editor. *Ezra Pound, the London Years, 1908-1920*. 1978.
- No. 4. Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes, editors. *Irish-American Fiction: Essays in Criticism*. 1979.
- No. 5. Iska Alter. *The Good Man's Dilemma: Social Criticism in the Fiction of Bernard Malamud*. 1981.
- No. 6. Charles L. Green, compiler. *Edward Albee: An Annotated Bibliography, 1968-1977*. 1980.
- No. 7. Richard H. Goldstone and Gary Anderson, compilers. *Thornton Wilder: A Bibliographical Checklist*. 1982.
- No. 8. Taylor Stoehr. *Words and Deeds: Essays on the Realistic Imagination*. 1986.
- No. 9. René Taupin. *The Influence of French Symbolism on Modern American Poetry*. 1985.
- No. 11. Clifford Davidson, et. al., eds. *Drama in the Twentieth Century*. 1984.
- No. 12. Siegfried Mews, ed. "The Fisherman and His Wife": Günter Grass's "The Flounder" in Critical Perspective. 1983.
- No. 14. Arnold T. Schwab, ed. *Americans in the Arts, 1908-1920: Critiques by James Gibbons Huneker*. 1985.
- No. 15. *Parisian Review Fifty-Year Cumulative Index: Volumes 1-50, 1934-1983*. 1984.
- No. 16. Amy D. Ronner. *W. H. Hudson: The Man, the Novelist, the Naturalist*. 1986.
- No. 17. John H. Stroupe, ed. *Critical Approaches to O'Neill*. 1989.
- No. 18. Mason Cooley. *The Comic Art of Barbara Pym*. 1990.
- No. 19. Stephen K. Land. *Challenge and Conventionality in the Fiction of E. M. Forster*. 1990.
- No. 20. William Pratt and Robert Richardson, eds. *Homage to Imagism*. 1992.

To Nancy and Laura

Contents

Introduction	1
Allan Chavkin	
Journeying Westward: Romantic Nature Rhetoric and Lyric Structure in Joyce's "The Dead"	7
Craig Buckwald	
Orlando's "Caricature Value": Virginia Woolf's Portrait of the Artist as a Romantic Poet	39
John W. Moses	
Proletarian Byronism: Alan Sillitoe and the Romantic Tradition	83
William Hutchings	
The Romantic Imagination of Saul Bellow	113
Allan Chavkin	
Marilynne Robinson's <i>Housekeeping</i> : Misreading <i>The Prelude</i>	139
Lorraine Liscio	
Romantic Tradition in Recent Post-Nuclear Holocaust Fiction	163
William J. Scheick	
List of Contributors	193
Index	195

Introduction

Allan Chavkin

The essential premise of this book is that there is a continuity from the English romantic era to our own. To understand properly some important twentieth-century writers of fiction, one must understand their connection with romanticism. Too often critics have examined these twentieth-century writers without looking at their roots in the literature of the previous century, with the result that the critics have presented simplified or distorted views of these writers. The essays in this book re-evaluate some major twentieth-century writers by explaining their proper place in literary history.

Scholars have established in general terms that romanticism marked a watershed in the early nineteenth century and then continued in subsequent years to shape the sensibilities of some important modern writers.¹ In particular, scholars have demonstrated the profound influence of the English romantic poets on twentieth-century poetry. While it has become commonplace to suggest that many important twentieth-century poets owe a large debt to romantic tradition, the relationship between English romanticism and twentieth-century fiction has been neglected.² With the intention of helping to correct this problem, this book shows the impact of romanticism on "modernist" writers of the first half of the twentieth century and

on "contemporary" writers who made their reputations in the second half of the century.

Craig Buckwald suggests that the view of Joyce as modernist has resulted in the failure of critics to recognize the influence of English romanticism on his fiction. Joyce himself makes clear his admiration of some of the romantic poets. In May 1905 Joyce writes to his brother Stanislaus: "In my history of literature I have given the highest palms to Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Shelley." The next month he writes in a postcard to his brother: "I think Wordsworth of all English men of letters best deserves your word 'genius'" (*Letters* 2: 90-91). Despite the critical assumption that romantic nature must be a foreign subject to a modernist such as Joyce, Buckwald shows that "The Dead" appropriates its rhetoric and structure from the nature poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. He demonstrates that Joyce's story enacts the process of the mind as it moves "from crisis to resolution through the visionary apprehension of nature's dominion over mankind." This process in which a marriage of mind and nature is finally achieved exhibits specific parallels with versions of this reconciliation in several romantic poems. Buckwald observes that Joyce later in his career revealed uneasiness with the formulations of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. While there may be hints of this uneasiness in "The Dead," the story does reveal a substantial debt to the language and lyric form of several seminal romantic poems.

John W. Moses analyzes the formative influence of a romantic aesthetic on Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. Although critics have remarked upon Woolf's debt to English romanticism, *Orlando* never has been examined with this influence in mind. The novel does contain much parody and fantasy and has been undervalued—in fact, some critics have not considered it to be a serious work. Yet the novel does portray Woolf's version of the romantic artist. In this complex work in which Woolf quotes from and alludes to Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Byron, *Orlando* is the work's chief exponent of romanticism. Moses analyzes Orlando's "progress toward a mature Romantic aesthetic" and the parallel development of "femaleness." Woolf does not want her readers to conclude, however, that the

romantic mind and the female imagination are equivalent, for it is an androgynous mind and not a single-sexed one that allows Orlando to succeed as an artist. Coleridge's observation in *Table Talk* that "a great mind must be androgynous" had a powerful influence on Woolf, and she concluded that male and female aspects of the mind must be combined for a truly creative imagination.

William Hutchings observes that an initial look at the fiction of Alan Sillitoe might lead one to believe that there can be little resemblance between Sillitoe's working class protagonists and Byron's aristocratic characters. Yet, in surprising ways, Sillitoe's early work transforms the Byronic anti-hero into a modern working class hero. In fact, in his fiction Sillitoe presents an iconoclastic proletarian Byronism. In an interview with John Halperin, Sillitoe has stated that "we're in a Romantic age rather than a Waste Land age." Sillitoe did not elaborate upon that assertion, but Hutchings does by explaining not only Sillitoe's specific borrowings from the English romantics, especially Byron, but also how the British novelist modifies romanticism for his own purposes. Hutchings shows the various ways Sillitoe's twentieth-century working class characters become counterparts to Byron's anti-heroes.

An early version of my essay on Bellow's romanticism was published in *Philological Quarterly*. The revised and expanded version in this book includes passages from Bellow's manuscript collection at the University of Chicago Library, where most of his manuscripts are located. The essay presents an overview of Bellow's canon from *Dangling Man* (1944) to his most recent full-length novel *More Die of Heartbreak* (1987) and demonstrates Bellow's allegiance to English romantic humanism and his hostility toward twentieth-century "victim literature." The focus of the essay is on *Humboldt's Gift*, perhaps the best work to examine to understand how Bellow transforms nineteenth-century English romanticism for his purposes. With its numerous references to the works of Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats, *Humboldt's Gift* presents a twentieth-century romanticism that can serve as an alternative to the nihilistic ideas gaining acceptance in a materialistic society. Wordsworth's romanticism is of special importance in the novel,

and there is little doubt that "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" was very much on Bellow's mind as he wrote the novel. Bellow presents the spiritual regeneration of his protagonist in terms similar to those in Wordsworth's poem. The novel is a desultory meditation upon both the perplexing reality of death and the reassuring possibility of immortality that underlie the "Ode."

Lorraine Liscio argues that Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* should be seen as an intertext of *The Prelude*. According to Liscio, Robinson's misreading of Wordsworth's poem shapes her "unique contemporary female account of vision and the sympathetic imagination." Liscio shows the use Robinson makes of the rhetoric of *The Prelude*. She demonstrates the relationship this novelist sets up between the romantic lyric and her contemporary lyrical realism. Liscio also reveals the importance of gender of the narrator/protagonist and the complex vision Robinson articulates. Although *Housekeeping* repeats some of Wordsworth's experiences in *The Prelude*, such as the ice-skating and the boat-stealing episodes, the female gender results in crucial changes in Wordsworth's male visionary experience.

William J. Scheick shows the impact of English romanticism on writers of nuclear holocaust fiction. These writers with a profound concern about the possibility of catastrophic nuclear destruction reveal an undeniable link to romantic tradition, especially in their belief that man must seek to overcome his divided self and achieve a positive apocalyptic revolution of consciousness, the inspired condition that the English romantic poets envisioned. These writers of nuclear holocaust fiction also call for new relationships to nature and for new roles for women. Scheick points out that, like their romantic predecessors, landscape becomes of central importance to these contemporary writers of nuclear holocaust. For these writers, a vision of a devastated landscape by nuclear war provides the impetus for profound reflection. The post-nuclear stories that depict the destruction of humanity might be the source by which we could be led to discover a change of consciousness that would enable us to overcome various kinds of divisiveness and to avert apocalyptic disaster.

We are still suffering from a warped view of twentieth-century literature as a result of the lingering anti-romantic prejudice of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and the Imagists, who, in their zeal to revitalize a literature stagnating in late Victorian imitation-romanticism, caricatured romanticism as softminded, thereby causing subsequent critics to ignore the crucial role of English romanticism in the development of modern literature. This collection of essays will help correct this distorted view by showing the centrality of English romanticism to modern fiction. The essayists in the book are sensitive to the subtleties of the works that they discuss, and they make clear that the modern writers do not merely imitate and repeat their romantic predecessors. While noting specific allusions to and quotations from nineteenth-century romantic works, the essayists focus on how the modern writers dramatically assimilate, transform, and extend romanticism as they forge their own unique visions. In addition to presenting new approaches to particular twentieth-century writers, this collection contributes to the expansion of romantic studies with its reassessment of the fundamental relationship between English romantic tradition and modern fiction.

Notes

1. See, for example, works by M. H. Abrams, Harold Bloom, Robert Langbaum, and Morse Peckham.
2. Three exceptions are George Bornstein, Charles Schug, and David Thorburn, whose books are pioneering studies on this largely unexplored area.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. New York: Norton, 1971.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971.

- Bornstein, George. *Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1979.
- Chavkin, Allan. "Humboldt's Gift and the Romantic Imagination." *Philological Quarterly* 62 (1983): 1-19.
- Halperin, John. "Interview with Alan Sillitoe." *Modern Fiction Studies* 25 (1979): 175-189.
- Joyce, James. *The Letters of James Joyce*. Ed. Richard Ellmann. Vol. 2 New York: Viking, 1966. 2 vols.
- Langbaum, Robert. *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1957.
- Peckham, Morse. *The Triumph of Romanticism: Collected Essays*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1970.
- Schug, Charles. *The Romantic Genesis of the Modern Novel*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1979.
- Thorburn, David. *Conrad's Romanticism*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1974.

Journeying Westward: Romantic Nature Rhetoric and Lyric Structure in Joyce's "The Dead"

Craig Buckwald

I

The snow in James Joyce's "The Dead" is an obvious and complex symbol that would seem to lie at the heart of whatever meanings the story fosters. Traces of snow help to shape the reader's response at several points in the story, but it is only in the final paragraph that the symbol, returning in the snow that Gabriel hears "falling faintly through the universe" (224), pushes into the background all that has come before to speak the story's last word in its own eloquent, enigmatic voice. Not surprisingly, the symbol, particularly in its final embodiment, has long inspired critics with its semantic potency. Allen Tate, in an article published in 1950, claims that as the story proceeds, the snow symbol "gradually expands until at the end it gathers up the entire action" (408). Nine years later, Kenneth Burke similarly describes it as a "'mythic' image" that finally "serves to cap or consolidate the story by letting us see the previous situation in a new light" (363).

Depending on the critic, of course, interpretations of the snow vary and even contradict each other as they contribute to the debate over whether the story is, once and for all, optimistic or pessimistic, and Gabriel's final epiphanic experience an occasion for admiration or pity. Among those arguing for optimism and admiration, Tate characterizes the final snowfall as "a symbol of warmth, of expanded consciousness . . . of humanity" (409); David Daiches claims, "The snow [at the end of the story] . . . is the symbol of Gabriel's new sense of identity with the world, of the breakdown of the circle of his egotism" (81); Virginia Moseley observes, "That the snow is heard [faintly falling through the universe] is especially meaningful because it indicates that Gabriel, like Dante, has become so transhumanized that he is now able to hear the music of the spheres" (433); Warren Beck asserts that the snow makes available to the reader's imagination "Gabriel as a living being at an expansive moment in his enlarging existence" (338); and most recently, Craig Hansen Werner writes that "the image intimates the melting of the frozen snow into the life-giving water" and thus implies "a liberating movement toward symbolic rebirth" (68). Even such optimistic readings, however, are implicitly balanced insofar as humankind's mortal fate is always recognized as a constituent of the symbol. Making the balance explicit, Florence Walzl contends that the snowfall is deliberately ambiguous, recalling "both the central paralysis-death theme of *Dubliners* as a collection and the rebirth-life theme of 'The Dead' as a narrative" (431); and Samuel Bogorad characterizes it as a climactic image of death, but one that holds some regenerative possibility (52). Approaching the story and symbol as purely pessimistic and ironic, Hugh Kenner regards the snow as an expression of the paralysis and spiritual death of Gabriel and the other Dubliners (62, 68); and Jack Barry Ludwig sees in the image Gabriel's "readying for" an "escape into death" (159, 162).

Critical elucidation of the symbol, however, despite its variations, coheres insofar as it curiously avoids an obvious line of interpretation. Why, we might ask, have so many sensitive readers of "The Dead" failed seriously to consider the possibility that the snow is not merely a symbol *from* nature but a symbol

of it as well? The question becomes even more compelling when, for example, Walzl observes in passing that "the cold fresh air and the great darkness outside" the Misses Morkan's house "seem to represent the vitality of nature" (433), or when Beck says of the snow's dissolution in the Shannon waves, "in its return to water the snow is also part of nature's cycle" (359). Of course, Joyce's artistic reputation, always influential upon our approach to his works, is important here. The reluctance of critics to recognize nature as an important topic in "The Dead"—or in any of his works, for that matter—unquestionably stems in part from a sense that such a topic would be fundamentally dissonant with the sensibility of an artist so disposed to the civilized and artificial. Indeed, as Irving Howe has inadvertently shown, the conception of Joyce as modernist may be enough to admonish potentially wayward readers. In a list entitled "Attributes of Modernism," he includes the sentence-heading: "*Nature Ceases to Be a Central Subject and Setting of Literature*" (30). Ihab Hassan, in a similar schematization, writes of modernism: "Nature [is] put in doubt, from Baudelaire's '*cit   fourmillante*' to Proust's Paris, Joyce's Dublin, Eliot's London, Dos Passos' New York, D  blin's Berlin" (35). Whatever the origins of the phenomenon, critics have effectively relegated nature to a circle outside of Joyce's serious concern, to a nearly extra-textual limbo for subjects merely peripheral to his civilized human comedy.

Joyce himself, however, seems to point readers in the other direction. As Richard Ellmann notes, Joyce's premeditation of "The Dead" during his brief and unhappy residence in Rome in 1906 coincided with a reconsideration of the Ireland and Dublin he had earlier indicted with such precision in the first fourteen *Dubliners* stories. On 25 September, in a letter to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce writes:

Sometimes thinking of Ireland it seems to me that I have been unnecessarily harsh. . . . I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality. . . . I have not been just to its beauty: for it is more beautiful naturally in my opinion than what I have seen of England, Switzerland, France, Austria or Italy. (*Letters*, II, 166)

Ellmann notes the importance of this letter for us when he remarks that Joyce "allowed a little of this warmth to enter 'The Dead.'" In his speech at the Christmas party Gabriel Conroy explicitly commends Ireland for this very virtue of hospitality" (245). But Ellmann fails to remark just what the formulations "ingenuous insularity" and "beautiful naturally" suggest as the source of Joyce's new-found warmth: Ireland's natural character: nature.

Other correspondence corroborates the possibility of nature as a Joycean topic as it suggests what use Joyce might make of it. Writing from Trieste to Stanislaus in May 1905, Joyce discloses: "In my history of literature I have given the highest palms to Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Shelley." And in a postcard to his brother the next month, he declares: "I think Wordsworth of all English men of letters best deserves your word 'genius'" (*Letters*, II, 90-91). Though there is no elaboration, one might well wonder if Joyce admired Wordsworth partly for his prominent and self-declared role as a "prophet" "of Nature" (*Prelude*, 1850, XIV, 446). This is not to say, however, that any critics *have* wondered about such a thing—at least in print. The question remains unasked, even though Robert Langbaum has remarked that "Joyce's epiphany of snow in 'The Dead' is . . . Romantically vital" and "exceptional in Joyce for the Wordsworthian and Burkean quality of its sublimity" ("Epiphanic Mode," 340, 351). If nature is an unlikely Joycean topic, a version of romantic nature can only be more so.¹

In this essay, I want to refute such accepted wisdom by demonstrating "The Dead's" appropriation of rhetoric and structure from the nature poetry not only of Wordsworth, but of Coleridge and Keats as well. Specifically, I will show how Joyce's story—preeminently the narrative of a mind's movement from crisis to resolution through the visionary apprehension of nature's dominion over humankind—not only enacts the desired reconciliation of mind and nature that is a central romantic trope but also exhibits broad and specific parallels with versions of this reconciliation in some important romantic poems.²