In recent years, as a result of broad concerns about climate change, food, the deterioration in the quality of natural and human environments, and the significant impact that human beings are having upon all aspects of our physical environments, environmental thought has taken on an increasingly important place in academic and public arenas. It has also undergone a sea change in theoretical terms, strengthening its perspectives and raising important new questions. Nowadays, we are much more aware of the degree to which natural environments are products of historical and cultural processes, and the list of new and important fields for the study of human and nonhuman environments continues to grow. This rising interest is reflected by this new collection of essays on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British and American ecopoetics. Including solicited papers as well as papers first given at various academic conferences and then revised for publication, the volume offers a fairly broad range of essays on Romantic ecocriticism of varying quality and importance.

The editor, Dewey H. Hall, has assembled a collection that speaks to both academics and students. The collection might have been a little more unified, however, if he had encouraged the authors to refer to each other’s contributions. Also, Hall somewhat overstates the focus of the book when he argues--in the introduction--that its orientation is uniquely *transatlantic* and *transhistorical*. What Hall appears to mean by these terms is not theoretical models that seek to think across periods and national boundaries, but instead comparative studies, made between authors living in different places (i.e. Britain and America) and different times (less clear, since *transhistorical* seems to be used even when writers are referring to their contemporaries). Nevertheless, in showing how literary writers drew upon science and natural history, these essays are clearly interdisciplinary. Overall, then, this volume is both a welcome addition to current scholarship on ecocriticism and a valuable contribution to Romantic literary criticism.

The collection is divided into two parts--"origins" and "legacies"--that are further divided into sections. These divisions seem primarily an effort to organize the wide range of topics addressed in the volume, but since many of the essays do not really address these topics directly, I found this organization relatively unhelpful. Therefore, I will focus here on the essays themselves.

One of the strongest shows how Romantic poetry provides a valuable model for a more positive ethical relationship with the nonhuman world. In developing what he calls a "poetics of acknowledgement," Gary Harrison argues that Romantic poets--such as William Wordsworth and John Clare--offer an important starting point for environmental practice. Seeking to shift the emphasis "from the claims of the other to the responsibilities of the self among others" (189), Harrison cites Stanley Cavell and Patchen Markell to help him argue that acknowledgement "gives rise to ‘making connections, seeing or realizing possibilities’ without resting upon claims of reason to affirm the identity or existence of a thing." Our commitment to nonhuman others does not depend upon our knowing them or identifying with them, but instead upon acknowledging our relationship to them and responsibility toward them. Environmental ethics is thus linked to self-knowledge, not to somehow knowing or sympathizing directly with nonhuman others. In other words, more precisely in words Harrison quotes from Markell, what most matters is "what we do in the presence of the other, how we respond to or act in the light of what we do know" (qtd. 189). Romantic writers, Harrison suggests, exemplify this kind of moral acknowledgement. They "foreground the responsibility of the self in the presence of [the nonhuman other], recognizing the presences of things, whether sentient or not, and extending to them a sense of agency, autonomy, and moral personhood even as they recognize and respect their mystery and difference" (189). Literature is an ideal locus for the exploration of connectedness and the responsibilities that attend these connections. By a strange irony, the famous egocentrism of Wordsworth is thus also the means by which he was better equipped to being *ecocentric*.

One of the things that makes Harrison’s poetics of acknowledgement so valuable and so suitable for understanding Romantic literature is that our acknowledgment of others is deeply bound up with our knowledge of ourselves. What makes Wordsworth and Clare’s poetry a model for ecological thought and practice is that they reflect upon the self not in isolation but in its interaction with the world: "the poet," writes Harrison, "is interested in portraying the affective orientation of the subject toward the object, conveying to the reader his or her feeling or disposition toward that object. It is that feeling--that disposition, even love for or toward the other--that may be the first spark of a sense of wonder, of appreciation, or of respect that is the first step to an ethical stance that could lead--and I emphasize the conditional here--the poet and his or
her readers to imagine the claims that the other may have upon us as an interdependent member of the biotic community” (193).

Probably the most unreflective character in Romantic literature, and also the one who understands himself the least, is Victor Frankenstein, so it is not surprising that the two essays here on *Frankenstein* examine the ecological devastation that results from Victor’s lack of self-awareness in dealing with others. In the concluding essay of the volume, Lisa Ottum aptly likens the titular hero of Mary Shelley’s novel to Chris McCandless, the young man who—after reading Thoreau, Thoreau, and Jack London—perished in Alaska while trying to live off the land and to lose himself in the wild. Like McCandless, Victor and Walton are also bad readers, which suggests to Ottum that the Romantic insistence upon the positive value of experiencing nature accompanies a correspondingly negative assessment of media and its dangerously uncontrollable effects upon individuals. “*Frankenstein,*” she writes, “... grapples with some key problems that confront today’s environmental education, dilemmas reflected in the discourse that aligns media with negative feelings such as anxiety, disgust, and anger, and unmediated nature with positive feelings such as inspiration, love, and curiosity” (255-56).

But the opposition that Ottum sees between “unmediated nature” and “media” was not absolute. While it can certainly be found in the work of many writers of the Romantic period, they rarely seek to polarize the two elements. The “nature-writing” largely invented by the Romantics is itself a medium, and much of their legacy as environmentalists derives from their capacity to represent nature in words: using writing to teach their readers, in sophisticated ways, how better to appreciate the natural world. Starting with bad readers, they sought to create better ones.

Even *Frankenstein* seeks to teach this lesson, if only by negative example. Interpreting the Monster as “the face or genius loci of the Anthropocene” (125), Shalon Noble finds its monstrousity reflecting the hybrid manner in which nature and culture, during this period, have been stitched together. Fair enough: as a creature produced by human agency in a laboratory, the creature can reasonably be seen as a figure of the Anthropocene. But why must such a hybrid creature be seen as a monster? Though Noble has some interesting things to say about the role of the creature as a genius loci, it is not clear how this term—the spirit of place—suits an utterly new kind of creation that is composed of parts coming from many places and beings and that is utterly displaced and without roots. Throughout the novel, rather than speaking for a place, the creature seems intent upon finding his place in a world that denies him any recognition. Would *genius disloci* fit him better?

The concept of place also occupies Alicia Carroll, who examines Romantic and Victorian literary conceptions of the local. These conceptions, she argues, have complicated as well as fostered the antimodernist tendencies of contemporary localism, which often idealizes the local at the expense of recognizing the entanglement of localities within economic, cultural, and ecological conditions elsewhere. Nevertheless, my own sense is that the Romantic emphasis upon locality and place was never separated from broader global considerations, as is quite clear in the heated debate over slavery and the political economy: the idea Malthus developed in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). In Malthus’s view, which Hubbell also imputes to God in the play, the laws of nature inevitably make the population outgrow our capacity to feed it. Consequently, societies must be willing to sacrifice some of their members. In what Hubbell calls Malthus’s “lifeboat” ethics, one group of human beings is sacrificed for the security of the others, and this process is understood as a necessary aspect of natural order. In *Heaven and Earth,* Hubbell argues, Byron critiques a God who seems to have read Malthus and adopted his economic model as the law of nature. In this case, however, God sacrifices not only part of the human population but also the nonhuman creatures that also inhabit the earth. This decision constitutes the ecological dimension of the play. In Japhet’s declaration to Noah, “it cannot be a sin to seek / To save an earth-born being,” (Part I, Scene 3).

Turning to *Sardanapalus,* a play that has been studied for its queering of gender, Colin Carman finds Byron here engaged in “queer ecology.” *Sardanapalus,* Carman thought-provokingly argues, presents a “queer and ecological model of sovereignty” (236) that blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, rooting the effeminacy of the King in the Mesopotamian life forms around him. Like Carman, who finds Sardanapalus’ identity deeply and fluidly linked to the nature that surrounds him, two other essays in this collection argue that our biological interconnection in the world, itself defined by the evolutionary thought of Charles Darwin, can form the basis of an “ecological self.” In her rich and insightful essay on “Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Ecological Selves,” Kaitlin Mondello suggests that Emerson drew upon Goethe’s morphological studies of the unity and progressive development of all life forms and upon biblical typology and natural theology in order to develop a revolutionary conception of an “ecological self,” in which “humanity becomes analogous to all of nature” as the “intermixing of natural and human forms of expression redefines the cultural as natural in recognition of humanity’s shared formation not only with animals, but also with plants and shells” (112). Through typology, Mondello argues, Emerson came to see Nature as “no longer outside of him, but a part of his biological being” (113).

Turning from Emerson to one of his best-known compatriots, Ryan David Leach shows in rich detail how Henry David Thoreau sought to join the culture of empirical science with that of transcendental phenomenology by focusing on observation and sensation. Drawing upon William Howitt’s *The Book of the Seasons,* or *The Calendar of Nature* (1831), Leach explains, Thoreau developed “an ecocentered self—a self who places an experience of uninhabited nature at the center of what it means to be human, resulting in a practice toward preserving nature and improving the self” (168). Thoreau thus sought to create “an inextricable link between biocentrism and anthropocentrism, an ecocentric way of being in and for and because of nature that harmonizes humanity with the surroundings through science” (167).

Given the importance of natural history to the Romantic period, it is not surprising that a number of essays in this volume discuss its role in the development of a Romantic ecopoetics. Dorothy Wordsworth’s indebtedness to the parson...
naturalist Gilbert White, author of the *Natural History of Selborne*, is taken up by the editor. In what is essentially an influence study, Hall argues that Dorothy can rightfully claim to be a serious naturalist, especially because she read White and drew upon his work in her own writing. Though this essay is well researched and persuasive, I would like to have seen more discussion of the importance of Dorothy’s natural history writing and observations on its own terms.

Highlighting a single Romantic poem, Bryon Williams examines Shelley’s debt and contribution to contemporary geology in "Mont Blanc." Surprisingly, Williams says very little about the influence of the Comte de Buffon’s geological theories on the poem. Instead, Williams suggests, Shelley was primarily drawing upon and critiquing James Hutton’s ahistorical *Theory of the Earth* (1788) and anticipating the work of Charles Lyell.

Given the salience of both time and flowers in Romantic poetry, we do well to consider the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century interest in using flowers to tell time. In his intriguing study of this topic, Marcus Tomalin notes the increased role that "clock-time" played in eighteenth-century society after the 1650s, when the manufacture of clocks and watches was revolutionized. Tomalin then explores the cultural and literary interest in alternative forms of time-keeping--diurnal, seasonal, and annual--provided by nature, and particularly the interest in the "horologium florae," that is, a clock made entirely of flowers.

Though environmental history is not well represented in this collection, Judyta Frodyma finely demonstrates how Wordsworth and Thoreau associated the idea of the "West" with "wilderness" and "the future," an association that reflects the cultural centrality of the American frontier during this period. Juxtaposing Wordsworth’s 1803 poem "Stepping Westward" and Thoreau’s 1851 lecture "Walking," Frodyma shows how both authors linked westward movement with freedom and wilderness, and this imaginary conception, a wilderness within, served as the basis for “rewilding conservation ethics” (160).

Altogether, then, this volume provides a good range of essays exploring the importance of British Romanticism--and, to some extent, early nineteenth-century American literature--to contemporary ecological literary criticism.

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