

Romantic Nature **George P. Landow**

English Romanticism turns to external nature for inspiration and renewal. Whereas from the classical ages of Greece and Rome through the eighteenth century, the term nature generally referred to some universal system of order found throughout man and the universe, by 1800 Nature increasingly meant "external nature, scenery, particularly that characterized by wildness and ruggedness: mountains, oceans, deserts, virgin forests."

Igrimage (Canto IV, sections 178-184) opens with a perfect example of Romantic "Nature Feeling":

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and Music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more.

Immediately after these lines, the speaker, who is a fictionalized or idealized version of Byron himself, expresses another typically Romantic wish that he might "mingle with the Universe." Byron's choice here of nature over man, solitude over society, and experience and emotion over intellect and thought all embody what many take to be the essence of English Romanticism.

In "Tintern Abbey," one of the central poems of British Romanticism, Wordsworth presents a more complex attitude toward Nature. He first sounds much like Byron when he mentions that when he was young,

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love
That had no need of civilizing thought.

But the speaker next admits that "that time is past,/ And all its aching joys are now no more." This loss of nature feeling (and with it the poet's earlier imaginative power) becomes a major point of Romantic writings about Nature. In "Tintern Abbey" the poet finds consolation in several facts: (1) that Nature inspires him in a new way (what is it?), (2) that others, especially his sister to whom he addresses the poem, can benefit from his experience.