2019-09 Englit 1175: Nineteenth-Century British Literature  
Notes for covering Week 4

Syllabus for that period: <https://newtfire.org/courses/19cBrit/schedule.html#d2019-09-13>

Students will be working on this **Digital Sound/Video Interpretation I** assignment: <https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/284/assignments/6040>

* This will be due on Wed. 9/25 after I return.
* The day off on Friday the 13th should help give them some time on their own to browse the texts and consider which ones they want to try.

Students are also regularly annotating and chattering about the online readings before the class on which they are assigned using Hypothes.is. Joining the private hypothes.is group for the class will give you a steady impression of how they are responding and what they’re interested in and confused about. One thing they’re all interested in lately is the various writers’ views of religion, for example. (So, the nonconformist aspect of Coleridge’s writing may be worth discussing in relation to the ending of “The Eolian Harp”.)

How to join Hypothes.is group for our class (from our day 1 on our syllabus):

* [First, create a Hypothes.is account](https://web.hypothes.is/start/) for online annotations, with your pitt userid.
* Then, [join our class’s Hypothes.is annotation group](https://hypothes.is/groups/maEkRo6M/2019-upg-19cbrit)
* Set up Hypothes.is to run in your preferred browser, [following the instructions](https://web.hypothes.is/start/). There is an extension in Google Chrome, or a “bookmarklet” for other browsers.
* Begin annotating the assigned reading for next class. Turn on hypothes.is in your browser window, and change your group setting (at the top of the Hypothes.is panel) from Public to our class annotation group, **2019-UPG-19cBrit**, so you will be part of our class conversation.
* Annotations on passages can raise questions, provide information, point to related resources with links, provide illustrations, and be replied to by me and your peers. We will start a running informative conversation in the margins of our readings this semester.

### Prequel

We’ve been talking about Revolution (see [readings of Monday 9/9](https://newtfire.org/courses/19cBrit/schedule.html#d2019-09-09)), and I gave them a one-page handout of events in class on M 9/9. It may be handy to reference in discussing *Wat Tyler* by Robert Southey. We’re keeping a weather eye on milestone historical events surrounding the readings.

* *Wat Tyler* helps us to mark revolutionary time in a way, to indicate the difference between the 1790s, when Southey first wrote it, and the moment just after Napoleon’s defeat and the rise of English radicalism preceding the events of Peterloo.
* *Wat Tyler* also gives us an opportunity to talk about the radical press and piracy of texts, and the ways that texts outlive their author’s politics and intentions.

### This is the handout:

**FRENCH REVOLUTION CONTEXT  
  
Dates: 1688, Glorious Revolution in England, sends King James II into exile (divine right of kings advocate). Brings in constitutional monarchy: William of Orange and Mary**

--Protestant Dissenters (English Civil War...Puritans of New England...)—challenge the idea of monarch and religious state as representatives of divine authority. God-->individual conscience, morality. Idea of equal access to grace...and forerunner to secular idea of equality under constitutional law...

**1776-1783: American Revolution**

**1788:** founding of **London Revolution Society:** to commemorate 100 years of constitutional monarchy

**1789: July 14:** angry mob of Parisians storms the Bastille and liberates a handful of political prisoners.   
French National Assembly passes Declaration of the Rights of Man

printing presses carried in Paris streets  
October: arrest Louis XVI and queen Marie Antoinette  
(They are later released when they agree to support new constitutional monarchy)

**loyalists vs. radicals**

**end of year 1792—Jan 1793** (overthrow of Fr. Monarchy and guillotine Louis XVI)

**1793—**begins Maximilien de Robespierre’s “Reign of Terror”—no mercy to opponents of Revolution or moderates... **1794:** Execution of Robespierre by guillotine

**EARLY 1790s vs LATER 1790s, and post Napoleon: ENGLAND: repressive political climate  
  
late 1790s:** Napoleon fills power vacuum in France—rise to power through army

**1804: Napoleon Bonaparte crowns himself Emperor of France**—champions revolutionizing...modernizing the state, revolutionary principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, but a study in contradictions as an Emperor!

**1808:** height of Napoleon’s powers over Europe

**1814:** Napoleon exiled to Elba **1815:** Waterloo—decisive defeat...Napoleon exiled to St. Helena **Restoration of Bourbon Monarchy in France, restoration of monarchies across Europe**

**1819: Peterloo Massacre:** in St. Peter’s Field, Manchester England, 16 Aug. 1819: Brit cavalry charge into 60,000-80,000 protestors (led by a popular radical speaker, Henry “orator” Hunt) who wanted Parliamentary reform—a representation in parliament reflecting their population. 15 people killed / ~500? Injured.

**1832: Reform Act of 1832:** Parliament passes sweeping changes to the electoral system—districts by population: Eliminates centuries-old “rotten boroughs” (where ~30 people could elect 2 MPs!)

**1848:** new wave of Revolution in France / Europe

every 10 – 20 years...radical and “bonapartist” uprisings / royal repressions (Paris Commune of 1871/ crushed)

**late 19th- early 20th c:** France republic stabilizes...belle epoque

**Robert Southey’s *Wat Tyler*:**

Read all the background context stuff on Romantic Circles about how this poem was published against Southey’s will!

* 1794 vs 1817
* 1817 piracy: Southey attempts a lawsuit to stop it being further published. Note the basis for the ruling against Southey is that the text was deemed “injurious to the public” and there’s no reason to protect the author in such a case.

From Romantic Circles site:

When the case of *Southey v. Sherwood* was brought before the Lord Chief Justice Eldon in 1817, Southey, being more or less unaware of the intricacies of the case history of injunctions, applied to the Court of Chancery to prevent further piracy of *Wat Tyler* following its initial publication earlier that year. Southey was dumbfounded, then, when Lord Eldon refused his request:

I have examined the cases that I have been able to meet with containing precedents for injunctions of this nature, and I find that they all proceed from the ground of a title to property in thee plaintiff.  On this head a distinction has been taken, to which a considerable weight of authorty attaches, supported, as it is, by the opinion of Lord Chief Justice Eyre, who has expressly laid it down that a person cannot recover in damages for a work which is, in its nature, calculated to do injury to the public.  Upon the same principle this court refused an injunction in the case of Walcot vs. Walker, inasmuch as he could not recover damages in the action.  After the fullest consideration, I remain of the same opinion as that which I entertained in deciding the the case referred to. (qtd. in "Article VI" 127)

Here Eldon bases his decision on the case involving Dr. Joseph Priestly in 1791. Priestley had attempted to gain damages from manuscripts destroyed by a mob in Birmingham. In this case, the defense argued that Priestley "was in the habit of publishing works injurious to the government of the state" ("Article VI" 125). In light of this testimony, Justice Eyre had determined that any work found to be seditious or injurious to society could not be considered "property." And because injunctions were matters of establishing propriety, Eyre had ruled that one could not be granted in this case.

**Issues:**

What’s injurious to the public in this play, in the eyes of the government?

Radical archetypes in the play:

* Imprisoned priest: John Ball
* Wat Tyler and his daughter, victimized
  + Taxes
  + Violence from authorities (threat of rape)

**SUBLIME, BEAUTIFUL, and PICTURESQUE + Charlotte Turner Smith**

Work with my posted slides on the syllabus for convenient notes / imagery:

<https://www.slideshare.net/ebbondar/sublime-beautiful-and-picturesque>

* Funny: People got these terms confused as they were touring around Britain at the time : Coleridge’s nerdy joke on mixing up the terms “sublime, beautiful, and absolutely pretty” (30)

**Sublime and Beautiful Concepts in philosophy go back to Plato and Longinus**… very old

--Sublime—assoc. w/ greatness, profundity “echo of a great soul”… Beauty associated with pleasing the senses, truth, goodness

**Picturesque (more recent 18th-c. term):** suitable for painting--quality of nature worthy of being rendered in art. The word “picturesque” suggests interfaces btw nature and art—supposedly appreciating nature as alien to humanity, but really **rendering it in human terms**—framing it in **Claude glasses**, providing viewing benches, tinted lenses, etc. charging access,

**Tourist industry begins in wealthy estates w/ waterfalls, making money on the picturesque….** tourism/landscape art

**Late 18c** (Around the time Charlotte Smith is writing) : Revisiting and Updating the old Philosophical Concepts🡪

**Sublime:** Edmund Burke (1757) vs. Immanuel Kant (Critique of Judgment, 1790)

**Burke:** Excites, produces emotions assoc. w/ **“pain and danger,” “astonishment,” related to fear of death (p. 37)**

**Obscurity—not knowing how big the danger is**

**Power/Size and infinity…**

But at a safe distance, produces delight

**“strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (37)**

Burke’s ambiguity: Sublime is BOTH what we fear or react to, and the EMOTION it produces in us. (**p. 39:** “the great & sublime in nature”

--Burke re **WORDS as more potent than IMAGES**—simply b/c words convey emotion, not b/c of their descriptive capacity. **(42-43)**

**Beautiful:** Edmund Burke--small, smooth, polished, gradual variation

--“restful”, “contemplative,” PASSIVE

--NOT PERFECTION—Burke’s example: women’s bodies! Women’s behavior! (Perfection might be sublime?) **Burke on WHY women stutter, lisp, and PRETEND weakness (p. 41)**

--provokes emotions of physical pleasure, love as “melting languor”

**Wollstonecraft’s objections! (not assigned)-**-> **p. 52:** Ladies who have read Burke, and try to conform to his ideas of beauty by PRETENDING WEAKNESS

**Kant** criticizes Burke’s ambiguity: Sublime is **all created by us**—b/c we humans measure by INFINITY—**it’s all a mental construction—we imagine bigger than nature/reality**

Sensation/physical experience can evoke sublime or beautiful judgments/responses. **Imagination trumps nature**

**Sublime** : moving force in the mind: “The mind feels itself *set in motion*” (45), and our awareness/impulse to **exceed our own known limits, “transcending every standard of sense,” and REASON’s categories/standards (57)**

**Kant—(p. 58): last paragraph: (the point of philosophy? Learn our mental powers!)** “Sublimity therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us (as exerting influence upon us).”

**Picturesque:** William Gilpin

Picturesque is NOT the same as “beauty”—roughness

RUINS—see his description of Tintern Abbey (47)

Present pursuit, vs. recollection (drawing)—and transmission to others…

(See slides)

APPLY to Charlotte Smith: BEACH POET, proto WWian (82-87) and excerpt from “Beachy Head” (99-103) (fossil passage—p. 100)

CONNECTS 18th c. writing w/ Romantic:

--Themes in common with Coleridge and WW: btw humanity/human mind and nature, formulated differently from poem to poem.

--Nature in dynamic relationships w/ itself (moon/tides) and us… (**Beach a great place to locate interactions btw wild/alien nature and humanity**

--**Smith’s sea poety** exemplifies contrasts btw Sublime and Beautiful (Turbulence and Calm)

“Beachy Head”: What to see in nature! A Sublime location captured in Poetry. (also: rugged picturesque!)

**Read the opening from *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. 217: (and see footnote!)** (I haven’t assigned this poem but this passage is fun to share in class):  
“On thy stupendous summit, rock sublime!  
That o’er the channel rear’d, half way at sea  
The mariner at early morning hails,  
I would recline; while Fancy should go forth,  
And represent the strange and awful hour  
Of vast concussion; when the Omnipotent   
Stretch’d forth his arm, and rent the solid hills,

Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between  
The rifted shores, and from the continent  
Eternally divided this green isle”

very much an 18th c. Enlightenment excerpt—focuses on different **epistemologies** (ways of knowing) associated with the beach! Botanist, Geologist, Peasant/Rustic (vanity of all attempts at knowledge, Antiquarian

--all different ways of experiencing time depth on the beach!

**Sonnets:** (and Sonnet Revival) Smith’s use of 14-line form to **animate a scene!** --sonnet form—and quickness of mental movement we’ve associated with the sublime!

**“Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex”** She can’t let the dead RIP here! SUBLIME DEATH

**“The Sea View”** Peaceful beauty interrupted by sublime horror of war in sea scene!

--**“The Dead Beggar”** moon, sea, turbulent/tranquil, **dead beggar/rights of men leveled in Death! (re Burke’s sublime concept of fear of Death…and Kant—taking power over that, understanding power of our mental faculties in response to nature)**

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge:**

Some sweeping background that you don’t need to cover necessarily:

--Coleridge + WW + Southey: INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THESE WRITERS

friendships (courting the sisters of other poets’ wives)

Coleridge as impetus to Wordsworth’s poetry, LB project

--Opium (Laudanum) as painkiller for stomach condition—common 19th c. experience!

--Drugs🡪pain🡪numbness🡪high🡪withdrawal, no understanding of the dimensions of addiction!

--19th-c. enraptured by poems like the Rime and “Kubla Khan” 🡪essentially caught up in the same opium drug problem!

--“The Pains of Sleep” (poem addressed to Southey in a letter)🡪more direct comments on drug experience

--Poet of fragments! (Kubla Khan, Christabel)

--speakers are sometimes the voice of someone imprisoned/ in pain—yearning toward freedom! (Ancient Mariner, This Lime Tree Bower My Prison)

**Verse paragraphs—and Coleridge’s EXPERIMENTAL blank verse! Surprising sounds—**free us from conventional limits, restraints of expected rhythm and meter…Coleridge often repeats words and sounds (onomatopoeia)… “jug jug”

Uneven meter doesn’t mean NO meter. He just likes variegation! **A spontaneous, lively inconsistency**…

Even when Coleridge writes a rhyming poem, the rhyme scheme is usually inconsistent… (Kubla Khan)

Coleridge wants the sound to fit the sense, not have the sense be inhibited by sound.

On Coleridge’s distinctive blank verse, see Edward Zuk’s online essay: <http://www.expansivepoetryonline.com/journal/cult072004.html>

**Sound and Sense:**

Play the links of Eolian harps in class (on syllabus)

Comment on the legacy of this poem in music (Frederic Chopin).

**Frame structure:**

--Worth commenting on the dissenting/nonconforming aspect of Coleridge’s voice in the middle—radical view of fusing with the divine.

--Framed by Sara’s reproachful eye, comes away to a more humble perspective at the end.