

NATURE AND GRACE: WORDSWORTH'S THEOLOGICAL POETICS

Module: Literature

Term: Trinity 2023

Dr. Anthony G. Cirilla, Instructor

Course Description

Wordsworth is often depicted as a subjectivist, quasi-pagan poet, at the expense of his explicitly Christian writing. Assertions such as the lines in "Tintern Abbey," "all the mighty world/Of eye, and ear, – both what they half create," seem to support Wordsworth's elevation of the subject over truth. Phrases which seem to cloy with sentimentalism, such as in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," "To me alone there came a thought of grief:/A timely utterance gave that thought relief," appear to reinforce Wordsworth as weakly responding to Christian anthropology.

But as he wrote in "The Point at Issue," Wordsworth ardently believed in the Lord who "deigned to fill/The temples of their hearts who, with his word/Informed, were resolute to do his will,/And worship him in spirit and in truth". The Wordsworth who said he would shed blood for the Church of England, reflected in these lines, has been forgotten. This course will seek to recapture the Christian assumptions guiding Wordsworth's Romantic vision of the relationship between poetics and nature, examining familiar works such as "Tintern Abbey" and The Prelude as well as less read works such as The Ecclesiastical Sonnets.

Course Objectives

Objectives for this course include: (1) understand Wordsworth's literary methods and the place of each work within his corpus, (2) understand the theological, historical, philosophical and literary background to Wordsworth's poetry, (3) articulate the legacy of Wordsworth for 19th century Christian poetics and beyond, and (4) consider and develop answers to major questions surrounding the texts in question, especially as regards Wordsworth's Christian poetics.

Course Format

The format of the course will be predominantly one of mini-lectures followed by guided discussion. The instructor will lecture to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion, rather than in pure lectures. Thus, students will be expected to come having read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts and questions prepared to contribute.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate (link to Zoom and recordings posted to Google Classroom). Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on our **Google Classroom** discussion board (where assignments and materials will be posted) and on **Discord**.

Auditors are not required to attend class live or submit assignments, but may participate in Zoom meetings, Discord, Google Classroom, and access recordings. If the time does not work for you, you can switch to auditing or to another course. See the drop/switch policy on the Course Catalog or M.Litt. FAQ. Students are entitled to a full refund if the chosen time does not work for them. Please email Lynette Hughes at registrar@davenportinstitute.org with any changes, requests, or questions.

Course Requirements

1. Weekly readings (due before our meeting each week). ~35-40 pages of reading per week
2. Weekly interaction with fellow participants and the instructor in live class sessions.
3. Weekly writings in the Google Classroom discussion board, as pre-writing for integrated papers. Discord for further conversation.
4. For those taking the course for-credit: Composition of a 3k-5k argumentative essay that presents a thesis statement-driven position about Boethius’s work or its influence. The paper should be 12-point Times New Romans font, with regular margins and standard citations (either MLA or Chicago Style). Auditors participate to level of interest.

Assessment and Weighting Policies

Class Participation 25%

Discussion Forum 25% (for-credit & degree seekers, 2.5-5k words total)

Essay 50% (for-credit non-degree seekers) *or*

Oral Exam 50% (degree seekers)

Late work: -5% penalty per day late, with agreed upon exceptions possible

Attendance: 1 unexcused absence per course; -3% penalty per missed period without approved absence. For-credit students who must miss a substantial number of courses may be asked to submit short written responses to recorded lectures.

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
93	90	87	83	80	77	73	70	67	63	60	0

Course Texts

Required:

Wordsworth. *The Ecclesiastical Sonnets of William Wordsworth*. Wentworth Press, 2016.

<https://www.amazon.com/Ecclesiastical-Sonnets-William-Wordsworth/dp/1361963611>

William Wordsworth. *The Major Works, including The Prelude*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

<https://www.amazon.com/William-Wordsworth-including-Prelude-Classics/dp/0199536864>

Course Schedule¹

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics/Themes	Reading
1	01/9-15	Introduction: Poetic Method	<i>Preface to Lyrical Ballads</i> 595-615, "I wandered Lonely as a Cloud" 303, "My Heart Leaps up When I Behold" 246, Letter to Rev. H. Alford (on Google Classroom)
2	1/16-22	Poetic Vision	"Ode" 297-302, "Michael" 224-236, "Tintern Abbey" 131-135
3	1/23-29	Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Part 1	<i>Ecclesiastical Sonnets</i> 1.1-1.39, 120-139, "Scorn not the sonnet" 356 (in Oxford anthology)
4	1/30-2/5	Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Part 2	<i>Ecclesiastical Sonnets</i> 2.1-2.46, 139-162, "I only looked for pain and grief" 308-311 (OA)
5	2/6-12	Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Part 3	<i>Ecclesiastical Sonnets</i> 3.1-3.47, 162-185, "St. Paul's" 332-333
6	2/13-19	<i>The Prelude</i>	<i>Prelude</i> Books 1-3, 375-421, "We are Seven" 81-83
7	2/20-26	<i>The Prelude</i>	<i>Prelude</i> Books 4-6, 421-468, "Resolution and Independence" 260-264
8	2/27-3/5	<i>The Prelude</i>	<i>Prelude</i> Books 7-8, 468-508, "Nutting" 153-154
9	3/6-12	<i>The Prelude</i>	<i>Prelude</i> Books 9-10, 509-558, "Character of a Happy Warrior" 320-321
10	3/13-19	<i>The Prelude</i>	<i>Prelude</i> Books 11-13, 559-590, "On the Power of Sound" 358-365

¹ All readings are in the *William Wordsworth: The Major Works* anthology except for *The Ecclesiastical Sonnets*.