

English 232 (Spring 2007)
Dr. Katherine D. Harris

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: QUESTIONING A LITERARY LION

William Wordsworth, 1770-1850. Author of *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Prelude*. Husband to Mary. Friend to Samuel Taylor Coleridge (sometimes). Collaborator with sister, Dorothy. Father of five children and the Romantic Period.

We know these things about William Wordsworth, but what of the relationships, cultural change and social upheaval that surrounded him during his sixty-year career? Why is he lauded as the literary lion of the Romantic Period? Can we study the impact of his personal relationships with other authors? Does his literary genius impact the generations of Victorians who would live alongside and supersede his poetic triumphs? In this course, we will explore not only the life of William Wordsworth, but also his literary legacy. We will also question his reputation as this literary lion by reading the contemporary poets who influenced him, e.g., Charlotte Smith. In this seminar, we will not necessarily dismantle the hero worship surrounding Wordsworth but will instead re-orient his literary status. By the end of the semester we shall see that Wordsworth was not a single man, writing alone, fathering a literary movement. Instead, he is both a community and part of a community of authors who were responsible for eventually welcoming the Twentieth-Century Modernists. Readings include creative as well as non-fiction writings, including authors' letters, Coleridge's poetry, Wollstonecraft's *Letters*, Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journal*, Charlotte Smith's sonnets, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and a treatise on the 1842 Copyright Act (which Wordsworth helped to create). Both Marilyn Gaull's *English Romanticism: The Human Context* and digital representations of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century culture will orient our historical context. This course serves as both an introduction to Romantic studies as well as an exploration of particular themes within its literature. Assignments include a primary sources essay, short essay and oral presentation, long research essay and weekly reading responses (posted to our course listserv).