

English 3500, Nineteenth-century Literature in English
Paper 3, due in class Wednesday, December 5th
Five pages, double spaced, typed. Submit online. Cite any actual references used.

Select either option A or option B:

Option A: Nature: Shrine or Battlefield?

As rational a product of the Enlightenment as Thomas Jefferson wrote about the Natural Bridge:

Though the sides of the bridge are provided in some parts with a parapet of fixed rocks, yet few men have resolution to walk to them and look over into the abyss. You involuntarily fall on your hands and feet, creep to the parapet and peep over it. Looking down from this height about a minute gave me a violent headache. If the view from the top be painful and intolerable, that from below is delightful in an equal extreme. It is impossible for the emotions, arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing, as it were, up to heaven. The rapture of the Spectator is really indescribable!

Can it be argued that the literature we have read this semester has increasingly located God in the sublime of Nature? Why isn't that sort of Pantheism fully satisfying in spite of its "rapture"? What happens when Darwin's theories transform Nature from a shrine into a battlefield? What sort of abyss does it leave for the poets to try to invest with meaning? Do they succeed?

Option B: *Ars longa, vita brevis*

Wallace Stevens wrote, "Death is the mother of beauty." To what extent is the literature we have read this semester coaxed into existence in order to defy, in some senses, death? To what extent is it successful?