

Anne Milne

Enclosures: Liquid Landscapes, Canonicity, and the British Eighteenth-Century Laboring-Class Poet

Overall, my project highlights bioregionalism and local culture in eighteenth-century Britain as it is reflected in the literary and cultural landscape of the rural laboring-classes.

As Michael Williams suggests, the eighteenth century was a period during which a new landscape was deliberately created in Britain, “contrasting markedly with the slow, piecemeal, even haphazard, alterations of previous centuries.”¹ In this book-length project, I hope to reveal a new cultural and environmental history of “contested grounds” in and on local British soil, a history which I believe has been largely overshadowed by the more dominant scholarly focus on global Britain and the formation of a national literary canon. To this end, I engage in methodologies of the local using bioregional and sustainability paradigms to challenge the conceptualization that enclosed laboring-class poets as “natural geniuses” and subsumed representations of local culture and local poets into dominant urban ideologies, imperialism, and nation-building. My overall goal is to synthesize a body of work that has not been largely examined to assert the relationships between environmental history, agrarian studies, animal studies, and literary and cultural studies, as well as suggest that this historical perspective has much to offer current debates surrounding land use, local-cultures, and environmental sustainability.

The planned chapters of the project are as follows:

1. Liquid Landscapes: The Land and the Laboring-Class Local in Britain Circa 1730.
2. The Propagation of the Natural Genius: Mary Leapor and the Enclosing of Brackley, Northamptonshire.
3. What if Stephen Duck HAD been Poet Laureate?: Mapping the Literary Canon as Cultural Enclosure.
4. The Enclosed Local and the Genetically-Modified Gentleman: The Hedging and Hegemony of Romanticism.
5. Liquid Landscapes Revisited: Enclosing the Bioregional Imagination in the Twenty-First Century?

¹ Michael Williams. “The Enclosure and Reclamation of Waste Land in England and Wales in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 51 (Nov. 1970), 56.