ANNA E. MCFADYEN. Natural Romantics: The Influence of Gilbert White on *Lyrical Ballads* and English Romanticism. (Under the direction of Professor John Morillo.)

**ABSTRACT**

Gilbert White’s *The Natural History of Selborne*, published 1788, was both a scientific and popular success in British culture of the late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries. It revised the genre of natural history, enlivening and localizing the way that naturalists observed, recorded, and conveyed empirical data in publications. White turned the picturesque sublime into a study of the minute details at one’s doorstep and explained his lessons primarily in the vernacular, versus Latin taxonomy. He made natural history an accessible activity to all walks of life, with appropriate subject matter discoverable anywhere, in the most familiar of places.

I argue that White’s *Selborne* quietly shaped English Romanticism, too, as these innovative framing principles influenced *Lyrical Ballads*, a landmark that helped establish the literary movement. The work’s creators, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both read *The Natural History of Selborne* and appear to have drawn inspiration from specific images, lines, accounts, or concepts that are recognizable in White’s text. I propose that they incorporated these influences into their joint masterpiece of 1798. After tracing the way that they purposefully infused new science into literary pursuits from 1795 through the early 1800s, in order to inspire fresh, accurate metaphors and better descriptions of nature, I address how much textual and material contact the first generation of Romantic poets actually had with White’s work, as they formed their movement. In particular, the material evidence converges for the Wordsworths, Coleridge, and Southey in an undeniably personal and unified sense through a single, remarkable copy of *Selborne*. Gilbert White has been largely overlooked as a lasting influence beyond the sciences, but this evidence, presented in a new, comprehensive context, has
the potential to change the way we appraise White’s wider contributions as a Romantic catalyst and reveals his characteristic traits as a Romantic writer.