

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

January 11, 2012

[Andrea Estrada](#)

English Professor Receives NEH Grant for Humanities Bibliographical Social Network

If the poet William Wordsworth belonged to LinkedIn, his network might include colleagues Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey; his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth; and his former classmate, Robert James. It might also include [Alan Liu, professor of English at UC Santa Barbara](#), who edited a collection of Wordsworth's poetry.

As it is, Liu is listed on Wordsworth's profile page in the Research-oriented Social Environment (RoSE) that brings together social and bibliographical paradigms and allows for novel interactive research practices and a sense of social engagement with the past. With a \$50,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), RoSE, a program of the [Department of English](#), is moving from prototype to working model.

"RoSE is an attempt to model the bibliography of past humanities knowledge -- books, authors, and documents -- as a kind of social network environment that's connected to ourselves as live users," explained Liu. "The concept is that nobody is really alive in the system, and no one is really dead. Everyone has changing profile pages, depending on how research on him or her continues to be conducted."

The project is still in its infancy -- or, perhaps, toddlerhood -- but when the site is up and running, visitors will be able to click on the profile pages of thousands of books and authors, contemporary or otherwise. Metadata for the pages has been mined from larger publicly available documents and repositories, such as Project Gutenberg; YAGO; and Social Network in Archival Contexts, a new project currently being developed at the University of Virginia.

So, back to Wordsworth. A visitor to the poet's profile page would see how he is networked to a society of knowledge around him, including other authors, critics, and written works. In addition to Liu, Wordsworth's profile page includes connections to Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Butler Yeats, John Milton, and Robert Frost, among others. Clicking on any of these authors will take the user to a separate profile page and a list of that individual's connections.

Switching to the site's visualization format, the user will encounter what looks like an interactive navigable map of Wordsworth's connections, with Wordsworth at the center, and lines extending to individuals and works. Clicking on an individual connection will re-center the graph on that author, with all of his or her connections extending from that hub.

"It's a kind of orientation or landmarking system," Liu said of RoSE. "Students or scholars doing research on a topic don't necessarily know a lot about that field. It's not just that they don't know about particular authors or works, but they don't know how the field was shaped, or how it has developed over time. This is a system that allows them to get an initial sense of the density of the field, where the major structures are, and where people have been delving into new research."

At the end of the yearlong grant period, the researchers hope to make the site available to a larger test group, and, if additional funding can be identified, bring it to an even larger audience. "Ultimately, I have a dream of bringing the dead back to life," said Liu. "It shouldn't be the case that past authors are static entities. It should be the case that they have something like profile pages or wall pages that change as new knowledge about them is created.

"You can imagine that Shakespeare's page would feature quotations from his works based on what's been happening in the news today, as if the author were still interacting with us."

In addition to Liu, who leads the project, the research team includes co-directors Rama Hoetzlein, assistant project scientist in the Department of English, and Rita Raley, associate professor of English at UCSB. Graduate student research assistants on the team come from the English department and from the campus's Media Arts & Technology Program.

[Video interview with English Professor Alan Liu about RoSE.](#)

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.