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## ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

### Emanuel Papper's Ph.D.: Anesthesia's Romantic Ideals



Later in life, Emanuel M. Papper, M.D., Ph.D. (1915 to 2002), would describe his tenure as Chair of the newly independent Department of Anesthesiology at Columbia University as a time “as exciting as Camelot must have been in ancient Britain.” After 17 productive years, followed by 12 more as Dean of the University of Miami School of Medicine, Papper would seize a unique opportunity to combine two loves—anesthesia and British culture. At age 75, he received his Ph.D. in English at the University of Miami for a dissertation on British Romantic poetry and the birth of surgical anesthesia. Given the description of anesthetic gases like ether as early as 1540, Papper wondered why anesthesia was not “discovered” until 1846. He argued that British Romanticism, by celebrating individualism, the pursuit of happiness, and the beauty of nature, popularized the concept of freedom from suffering as an intrinsic human right. Thus, the Romantics prepared society to seek and to embrace the advent of anesthesia. Artist John Constable’s *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (1831, above) reflects Romanticism’s deep connection with nature—at times a symbol of turbulence (clouds, above), at others a wellspring of tranquility, health, and hope (rainbow, above). (Papper EM. *Perspect Biol Med* 1992; 35:401–15. Artwork © Tate. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0). (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology. [www.woodlibrarymuseum.org](http://www.woodlibrarymuseum.org))

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