



PROJECT MUSE®

Wordsworth in American Literary Culture (review)

Fiona Robertson

Romanticism, Volume 12, Number 1, 2006, pp. 63-65 (Review)

Published by Edinburgh University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rom.2006.0007>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/199847>

to Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register*, Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, the *Northern Star* and less well known Chartist papers, and the periodicals of social progress of the 1840s and 1850s. He concentrates of necessity on periodical literature and popular fiction, to the exclusion of poetry and melodrama, while acknowledging that a comprehensive history of popular literature must include the latter categories. One of the most valuable aspects of his study is the scrutiny of little known texts: More's popular tracts, 'The Death of Mr. Fantom' and 'The Delegate', both written in 1817, Harriet Martineau's 'The Rioters', Thomas Martin Wheeler's famous novel about Chartism *Sunshine and Shadow* (1849–50), plus issues of Lloyd's and Reynolds' popular titles. Individual tales are deftly summarized, and carefully chosen illustrations reinforce the vital connections between image and text in all of these mass circulation publications.

Realist fiction by women provides a common thread throughout the book, from Edgeworth's *Popular Tales* and More's tracts, through Harriet Martineau's serialized fiction, to the 'seamstress' narratives of Elizabeth Stone, Eliza Meteyard ('Silverpen') and Camilla Toulmin. Haywood is at his least convincing in his attempt to retrieve Hannah More from what he sees as the wrong-headedness of critics like Marilyn Butler, Kathryn Sutherland, and Anne Mellor who present her, very convincingly, as a counter-revolutionary 'feminist'. He is blinkered too, in his treatment of Harriet Martineau, presenting her as remorselessly and patronizingly making the case for political economy to her inferiors, while failing to acknowledge her own brand of compassionate feminism and the breadth and variety of her journalism.

Haywood's most important contribution to the study of popular literature is to link the period of radical print culture, the 1790 through to the 1830s, to the commercialism of the 1840s and 1850s, and to point up the continuities. The unstamped 'war' of the thirties paved the way for the Chartist literature of the forties, and the commercial triumphs of Edward Lloyd and Reynolds. The key was the heady mixture of politics and fiction, which Reynolds and the earlier Chartists had learned from the unstamped press.

The mass readership of the 1840s and the 1850s were not divided along class lines, as has sometimes been suggested. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, *Howitt's Journal*, and *Eliza Cook's Journal*, despite variations in price, were

competing for the same readers as Lloyd's and Reynolds' publications. They were all, as Haywood points out, courting the 'respectable artisan reader' as well as his or her middle-class counterpart. Equally, *Household Words*, established in 1850 and priced at 2d, was targeting a wide social spectrum of artisan as well as middle-class readers, as were the temperance publications of John Cassell, with whom Haywood ends his account.

Haywood's prose is not easy, and the links between chapters and sections occasionally show the signs of earlier publication as articles. Nevertheless this well-researched book makes us better able to recognize a continuum from the radical press of the late eighteenth century through the unstamped papers of the 1830s to the Chartist press of the forties, and the family magazines of the 1850s.

Joanne Shattock
University of Leicester

JOEL PACE AND MATTHEW SCOTT (eds), *Wordsworth in American Literary Culture*, with a foreword by Stephen Gill (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. xix + 247. £45 hardback. 1 4039 0133 3.

The defined point of origin of the eleven essays in this collection is Stephen Gill's remark in *Wordsworth and the Victorians* that 'the book waiting to be written' is on Wordsworth in America. Like Wordsworth under sentence of *The Recluse*, however, the contributors here have taken their own distinctive paths towards, or around, that grand project. Many important links and persuasive readings emerge over the course of the volume, as well as many intriguing evocations of Wordsworth: Theodore Parker's 'dear old poetical Betty'; Thoreau's embodiment of 'a simple pathos and feminine gentleness'; the champion of 'the real language of men' supporting Owen Wister's 1895 essay 'The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher'. For many American writers, Wordsworth seems to have served as a substitute for the image of nature offered in some of his own poems: restorative, sustaining, nutritional (William James's father describes him 'feeding upon' Wordsworth). In many ways, however, the most significant questions the collection raises are about scholarly methodology. Two sets of ideas are central: the viability of Bloom-derived models of influence, and the more recent approaches offered in studies of 'Transatlantic Romanticism'.

In their introduction, Joel Pace and Matthew Scott begin to 'worry' (their elision) the intersections of

these ideas, before providing summaries of the eleven essays. Although Pace's and Scott's later essays clearly have in view the metanarrative of the work as a whole, a return to the ideas raised in their introduction would have been welcome at the volume's close. The main part of the collection opens with contributions by two prominent scholars of transatlantic exchange, Susan Manning and Richard Grivil. In "'Grounds for Comparison': The Place of Style in Transatlantic Romanticism", Manning argues that transatlanticism is perfectly placed to promote 'a wider stylistics of comparison based in "thinking across"' (p. 28), an endeavour which involves a rethinking of traditional 'vertical' and hierarchical models of influence. Her identification of 'a rhizomatic transitive organism which maps a lateral undergrowth of connection' (p. 35) is an exciting start, but not one which the volume as a whole entirely follows through. Several essays share Manning's interest in the methodology of influence and in the larger implications of 'thinking across'. Matthew Scott's closing essay, for example, addresses the possibility that literature might *not* speak, across or otherwise. Others are more attentive to the different model of transatlanticism suggested by Stephen Gill's foreword: that is, to the Wordsworth created by American editors and interpreters. Richard Grivil's essay, 'The Wordsworthian Metamorphosis of Natty Bumppo', combines Gill's attention to context with Manning's emphasis on change. The dynamics of Grivil's essay prove in practice that Wordsworth's influence is seen most clearly as it changes within the work of another writer, but Grivil's ease with the complexity of transatlantic Romanticism also draws attention to one difficulty affecting the collection as a whole. Grivil writes at different points of 'a consciously Wordsworthian or Bryantesque stance towards nature' (p. 46) and of an 'Edgeworthian or Wordsworthian character' in Catherine Sedgwick's work, and complicates Wordsworthianism with reminders of Byron, Blake, Burke, and Cowper. The difficulties of isolating Wordsworth from the impact of his British contemporaries, both followers and antagonists, are faced by other essays, though not always explicitly. Bruce Graver's 'Discord at Pennacook: Whittier and the Problem of American Picturesque', for example, usefully extends our knowledge of poems in the 1843 volume *Lays of my Home* and 'The Bridal of Pennacook', dwelling on elements of the picturesque, the elegiac, and the historical; but what Graver calls 'Wordsworthian' seems, to me at least, just as strongly marked by

echoes of Scott's, Hemans's, Cowper's, and Campbell's poetry; more precisely, in the case of 'The Bridal of Pennacook', by the frame narrative of Scott's *The Bridal of Triermain* and the reworkings of Hemans in Lydia Sigourney's poems.

As Joel Pace emphasizes in 'Transatlantic Gothic and Race: Wordsworth, Hawthorne, Poe, Chopin, Cable and Chesnut', America's Wordsworths are created by many different communities of interpreters, by 'many choirs of voices' rather than by Bloomian 'duets'. 'Tintern Abbey', 'Michael', and *The Prelude* lead him to the ruined structures of plot and character in Poe and Hawthorne, ruins linked to the play of race and hybridity in American Gothic. 'Contextualizing a study of the call and response between Wordsworth and Poe as well as that of Wordsworth and Hawthorne attempts to place dialogue among these authors in the context of the (many) (trans)national conversation(s) in which their writing participated' (pp. 93–4). Pace's suggestions are furthered by the more precisely focussed work of Adam Potkay's 'Wordsworth, Henry Reed and Bishop Doane: High-Church Romanticism on the Delaware', which delineates the different 'Wordsworths' beloved of different American communities. For his friends George Washington Doane and Henry Reed, Wordsworth's career was 'perfectly integrated, and integrally High Church' (p. 102). In 'Henry David Thoreau as Wordsworthian Poet', Lance Newman likewise emphasizes the different shape of Wordsworth's career as viewed from across the Atlantic, showing that 'many of New England's bourgeois radicals in the 1830s felt that the turn to nature was a turn to the people' (p. 123).

Essays in the second half of the collection have to deal with more elusive forms of influence, and do so in contrasting ways. Karen Karbiener's approach in 'Intimations of Imitation: Wordsworth, Whitman and the Emergence of *Leaves of Grass*' is to work with small but resonant detail, principally the use of 'We Are Seven' in Whitman's story 'The Child at the Tomb' (1846) and the 1844 sketch 'My Boys and Girls'. Richard E. Brantley details his method in 'The Wordsworthian Cast of Dickinson's Romantic Heritage' as follows: 'As I fill in some of the background to her 1789 poems, and as I develop readings, I name or allude to Wordsworth in each one of my paragraphs' (p. 161). The aim is capture mood and association, to establish 'just how Dickinson the Romantic stands on the broadly experiential common ground between sensationalist epistemology and

testimonial heart-religion. She stands there quietly, yet sturdily, with no rigidity.' (p. 174). This is indeed a form of influence 'Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart'. A different approach again is adopted in Elizabeth Fay's 'Wordsworth, Bostonian Chivalry and the Uses of Art', which argues that *Lyrical Ballads* was 'one of the most influential publications supporting the medieval aesthetic and its implicit ethical system' (p. 177). Fay persuasively sets up Wordsworth's courtly advances on and development of the reader's social conscience and 'honour', a readerly contract compelling the reader 'to uphold and preserve, carrying everywhere relationship and love' (p. 188). This high social purpose is then carried forward to Edwin Austin Abbey's murals for the Boston Public Library, an associative move which raises more questions than it answers about the diffusion of Wordsworthian contracts in the course of nineteenth-century America. That Wordsworth's individually and socially curative role was consolidated by the end of the century is confirmed by James A. Butler's 'Home (at Grasmere and 'On the Range)': Wordsworth and Owen Wister's *The Virginian*', which finds 'Romantic values' at the heart of modern American myth. Wister's move west was a cure for neurasthenia, a modern 'American' disorder which Butler links to Wordsworth's experiences. Wordsworth is again a therapist in the final essay, Matthew Scott's 'An Ethics of Wonder and the Cure of Poetry: Wordsworth, William James and the American Reader'. Scott uses Don McCullin's photographs of killings in Beirut in 1976 and Susan Sontag's 2003 *Regarding the Pain of Others* to set up reflections on wonder, distance, and the limits of sympathy. Scott's essay can be read as an indirect response to Susan Manning's. It raises the problem of intellectual and affective remoteness, in which Wordsworth's poems are both close to 'us' and marked by a 'feeling of immovability' (p. 221).

Despite this implicit responsiveness, however, *Wordsworth in American Literary Culture* stands more in need of a Postscript than a Preface. Several contributors emphasize the importance of received ideas about Wordsworth's life rather than, or in conjunction with, readings of his poetry, an element of misprision alien to the Bloomian model of the text, though constantly invited in to that model by Bloom's emphasis on 'strong poets' rather than 'strong poems'. To what extent does America's 'Wordsworth' challenge Bloom? Or is that challenge already incorporated in Bloom's work; or, indeed, in American literary history as an independent subject, always

wary of influence as an intellectual model? Reading this collection straight through, one notices that certain poems seem to have been especially important in the construction and consumption of America's Wordsworth – 'We Are Seven', 'The world is too much with us', 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'. The same lines from 'Tintern Abbey' direct Susan Manning's and Richard Gravid's investigations. Some closing comments might have made more of these special resonances: did American readers construct a significantly different Wordsworthian canon? Or is modern criticism particularly attuned to these Wordsworthianisms in American writing? On a more practical note, there are signs of editorial haste – contradictory citations of the same works in different essays, missed words, and an intermittent suppression of the definite article which at least made me reflect on how expressive it is in Wordsworth's own writing. Despite these minor flaws, this is an interesting, varied, forward-looking collection which will fulfil the editors' hope that it should 'offer points of contact, contestation, intersection and departure' for subsequent studies.

Fiona Robertson
University of Central England

GERAINT H. JENKINS (ed.), *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg (Iolo Morganwg and the Romantic Tradition in Wales)* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. xviii + 516. £45 hardback. 0 7083 1971 8.

A Rattleskull Genius is not merely an immensely long and carefully articulated collection of essays on Iolo Morganwg but announces itself as the precursor of an entire series devoted to that remarkable stonemason, agricultural consultant, self-proclaimed heir to Wales's bardic tradition, autodidact, artisan poet and scholarly forger of both the poems and the consciousness of his nation. The collection is made somewhat more wieldy and reviewable than a set of twenty-two disparate essays might otherwise be, by its helpful division into four sections.

After a thorough introduction, which previews the volume's territory in a helpfully discursive fashion, Part 1, 'Contexts', contains two essays situating the hero vis-à-vis Wales and Central European forgery. Branwen Jarvis describes Iolo as playing the parts of 'both Macpherson and Dr Johnson' in his own version of the Ossian scandal, and relates Iolo's work both to