

Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 868. £110. ISBN 9780199662128.

Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Invisible World: Lectures from the Wordsworth Summer Conference and Wordsworth Winter School*, selected and ed. Richard Haynes. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015. Pp. 280. Pb. £14.99. ISBN 9781503290259.

You need both hands to steer the tanker of an *Oxford Handbook*. The series of Oxford Handbooks aims to provide new essays from a range of key perspectives including leading directions in current research. This volume on William Wordsworth goes for full comprehensiveness, arranged into very general sections, rather than exclusive selectivity, and represents an enormous compilation in book form, which only a reviewer is likely to read from cover to cover. Researchers and students can consult areas of particular interest from the wide coverage and will find detailed and often original essays (forty-seven in all), mostly of around sixteen pages. All the major poetic works are addressed together with many other poems, sequences, and the most significant prose works. You would have to work hard to find any obviously relevant topic that has been omitted, and the editors even acknowledge their own supposed lacks: the northern Wordsworth, 'Wordsworth and the Victorians', and the writer's 'broader cultural presence' (which is a significant gap). To encompass the vast array, the book's six parts have to be of general purpose: Life, Career, and Networks; Poetry; 'The Recluse' (the whole project, mainly *The Prelude*); Poets and Poetics; Inheritance and Legacy (particularly an *omnium gatherum*); and Aspects of Reception.

Given the gargantuan framework for the book, so different from the comfortably sized and arranged *Cambridge Companions*, the editors are to be congratulated on assembling an extraordinary cornucopia of uniformly authoritative and often freshly stimulating contributions. The dizzying scope – the editors 'find no surface where [their] power might sleep' – challenges organisation. Though the volume is scrupulously edited, the thematic contents of the indexing are sparse. The introduction helps, with brief surveys of running themes and subjects within the sections, though they can seem a little haphazard. It begins with an account of Wordsworth's nineteenth-century reception, interestingly via Dickens, to represent some of the poet's Victorian impacts, and proceeds to address his later influences as the poet of feeling and nature, extending to the domestic and social concerns which manifest themselves in the Victorian novel and up to Lawrence. When it comes to fixing the leading landmarks decade by decade in the later twentieth-century (Geoffrey Hartman predictably looms largest) clearer focus and selectivity enter in. Significant trends evoked are textual scholarship and the vaguer 'experimental' poet, and other groupings which begin to lose shape, apart from the Marxist assault. More about the historicisms might have been expected, and there is no account of feminist and gender or religious and psychological approaches (though there are equally excellent individual essays on all these subjects). The attention to ecology and formalist approaches is more assured, and new shoots are necessarily individually indicated. The book ends with a section on Recommended Reading.

A reason why the introduction does not incorporate any pinpointed treatment of modern critical approaches is that that job is done brilliantly by Andrew Bennett in one of the useful survey essays on reception in the final section which also discuss Wordsworth's presence for his contemporaries and in the US. Some idiosyncratic features serve to offset the book's monumental inexorability. It starts off with an *hommage* to Hartman, the Wordsworth critic for all seasons, in the form of his poem on Helvellyn, and a 'Prelude' of what seems

disarmingly to have been a late addition of an essay on two poems, ‘Daffodils’ and ‘Yew Trees’, that had not shown up elsewhere. The editors have decided that ‘the Tintern Abbey poem’ should now be called “‘On Revisiting the Wye”, “Lines on the Wye”, or simply “The Wye”” (13).

There is no room here to engage with individual entries, except to respond to the final survey on ‘Editing Wordsworth in the Twentieth Century’, where Bruce E. Graver delivers the Cornell view of the Cornell Wordsworth. It is a fascinatingly unbuttoned account of the genesis and development of the series founded on the generous donation of the Wordsworth family’s manuscripts by the ‘curious fellow’ with a ‘degree from Eton’ (819), Gordon Wordsworth, the poet’s grandson, from which so many academic careers have prospered. The history as told represents Jonathan Wordsworth personally as a break-away ‘rival’ of the Cornell project, here conceived as everyone and everything concerned with the innovatory tendency towards recovering the earliest versions to which Jonathan Wordsworth was originally and would remain integral. I think it would be better judged to present his editorial approach as driven by compelling alternative aims – relatively modestly resourced and not best defined simply in relation to an advisory role for the Cornell series – of making the texts more generally available in readable form by students and others. His was another, different path within the editorial diaspora which had been opened up and which may be argued over time to have generated very different clusters of sub-editions in the evolution of the Cornell series itself. The vindication and dissemination of Jonathan Wordsworth’s approach is best gauged in the Norton edition of *The Prelude*, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, Stephen Gill and M. H. Abrams and in the independently edited versions for several widely disseminated Romantics anthologies, some of which Graver names.

Jonathan Wordsworth, who died in 2006, was the single most influential presence in Wordsworth studies of his time through the variety of his activities which are summarised in the Author Note at the close of the posthumous collection reviewed here. Apart from his critical books, he inspired and supervised a large number of now leading Romantics scholars at Oxford and chaired the Wordsworth Trust at Dove Cottage for over a quarter of a century, making it the Mecca for British Romanticism, particularly through the summer conferences and winter schools, which he came to direct and at which he was the leading light. The Grasmere gatherings helped provide a productive context for the encounters of American and British academics, both young aspirants and major reputations. The ten lectures included are transcribed from recordings by the Wordsworth Trust at Grasmere from ones delivered at the Wordsworth Summer and Winter Schools, 1989–2004.

The collection includes four on Wordsworth (Revolutionary positions, *The Excursion*, sympathetic imagination, ‘transformations’), three on Blake, and one each on Keats, Burns and James Macpherson, and Coleridge and Cowper. As a major editor intimate with the manuscript evidence of Wordsworth’s creativity, his criticism is unashamedly glued to the texts. These lecture-talks, which reflect the diverse audiences of the Grasmere schools – academics, students and enthusiasts – demonstrate wonderful powers of reading the text, sometimes in various versions (see especially his discussion of ‘Frost at Midnight’) and reveal sound and sometimes surprising cross-referencing over the comparative field of Romantic literature. There is no index, but a lucid introduction offers detailed summaries of the individual arguments.

The style is personal talking, based on common-sense intelligence leavened with analytic shrewdness. It can be challengingly opinionated, but is always sure-footed. His own associative method matches the compositional movements within the poetry, pacing the experience of the poetry. Seemingly naïve openings can lead to revelatory guidance, as

especially in 'Understanding Blake: the First Book of Urizen'. The lecture on Keats's verse-letter to Reynolds is a luminous unwinding of Keats's imagination.

The summer schools were started by Jonathan Wordsworth's cousin, Richard Wordsworth, and his own direct descent from the poet's brother, Christopher, gave him an unusual standing of family prestige and the suspicion of proprietorship. One thinks of Sir Charles Tennyson; some thought of Bayreuth. In fact, he was an exceptionally generous and humane scholar whose entire career was dedicated to spreading his passion for Romantic literature on many levels. His concern for the common reader was related to what interested him most in Romantic literature, namely, as he describes in the lecture on Blake's 'Doors of Perception', 'what the great writers of the period seem to have in common, despite their differences in age, education, class and temperament' (144), seeing them as 'Platonists all questing for confirmation of the oneness of existence' (169). That motivation lay behind his series of over 180 Romantic works, each with a re-arousing introduction, 'Revolution and Romanticism', and his gratification at the blockbuster success of his exhibition, *William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism*, which he co-devised and co-catalogued. It attracted 'two hundred thousand people' to major American libraries and 'two million more in the form of poster panels' (145). Romanticism students and readers generally who want to get close to the poetry itself could still hardly do better.

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