

Brian R. Bates, *Wordsworth's Poetic Collections, Supplementary Writing and Parodic Reception*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012. Pp. 236. £60. ISBN 9781848931961.

Even in private, Wordsworth was a jealous and overbearing reader of his own work. When Charles Lamb complained about the dictatorial turn of poems like 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' – 'the instructions conveyed in it are too direct and like a lecture [...] An intelligent reader finds an insult in being told, I will teach you how to think upon this subject' – the poet responded with *another* lecture, 'a long letter', Lamb noted wryly, 'of four sweating pages' telling Lamb where he'd gone wrong. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Wordsworth was, as Brian R. Bates reveals in this fascinating and detailed study of Wordsworthian paratext and parody, a compulsive writer of prose introductions, glosses, footnotes, and subtitles.

More surprising is how little critical attention, relatively speaking, this aspect of Wordsworth's work has received – it is this deficiency Bates's study sets out to address, revealing

a poet intent on developing the prefatory, concluding and marginal spaces in his books to foster paths of connective reading through his volumes, relate individual poems to the whole of his poetic project and life, publicize and defend his poetry and establish an enduring place in an emerging contemporary canon of British poets. (12)

Using the curiously novel method of reading everything on the page, Bates reveals the hidden-in-plain-sight networks of footnotes, subtitles, and repetitions used by Wordsworth to tie his collections together.

As Bates explains, '[t]wo intertwined stories govern the chapters that follow. The first describes how Wordsworth used supplementary writings to shape and engage readers in his poetic collections' (1). Chapter 1 looks closely at the various editorial and textual decisions that led to Wordsworth's reorganisation and renovation of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* into the two-volume collection of 1800. Chapter 2 then takes up the 1800 volumes and describes the methods by which Wordsworth maps the reader's progress through the poems, and, concurrently, through their geographic referents, to present a kind of poetic walking tour of the English Lakes, and, by extension, the nation itself. Bates's paratextual study continues in Chapter 4 as he examines Wordsworth's "Gothic church" model for the projected *Recluse* (as outlined in the introduction to *The Excursion*) and the self-anthologising and organising on show in *Poems in Two Volumes* (1815). Chapter 5 follows the image of the Gothic church into Chapter 13 of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, surely the ultimate supplementary text of literary history. Finally, Chapter 7 presents Wordsworth's bravado reading of his own life and poetic trajectory in *The River Duddon* volume where, as Bates explains, Wordsworth 'offers a composed prospect and a historical continuum on which to centre Britain's past, present and future identity' (158). Wordsworth's poetry becomes, in a sense, paratext to Britain's history and nationhood.

Chapters 3 and 6 discuss the second story – 'how Wordsworth's critics and parodists responded to and were connected with the designs of those collections' (1). Beginning with Richard Mant's laboured but venomous burlesquing of Wordsworthian simplicity, *The Simpliciad*, and finishing with J.H. Reynolds's incisive and gleeful 'Peter Bell', Bates shows how parodists, even as they set themselves against Wordsworth's systematising of 'simplicity', revealed and often empowered such systems as embodied in the architecture and referentiality of Wordsworth's poems and poetic collections. Even grossly exaggerated or

twisted out of context, Bates shows, Wordsworth's 'system' offers some protection, and, curiously, still encourages readers to engage closely with the challenge his work presents.

While the comparison between parody and original is fruitful and usually well explained by Bates, it is here I found myself unsatisfied with his conclusions. Bates' underlying thesis seems to be that Wordsworth's paratexts, 'designs', and repetitions allow the reader to read more richly and imaginatively, opening up dialogues between poems, and encouraging backwards and forwards movements in his increasingly varied poetic collections:

While Wordsworth constructs a complex, organizing apparatus for these poems and alerts readers to the necessity of paying heed to this apparatus, he also leaves readers at liberty to discover the relationship between the poems that he has classified. (91)

This seems a fairly questionable liberty, and is one example of a number of sympathetic conclusions Bates comes to on Wordsworth's didactic impulses, some of which strike me as overly utopian in their characterisation of willing reader and guiding poet. The point, as Wordsworth's parodists often exclaim, is that Wordsworth only seems to enter into conversation with himself, or, at most, on his own terms – a point driven home forcefully by William Hazlitt in his review of *The Excursion*, registered by Charles Lamb in the correspondence quoted above, and experienced personally by John Keats when, in conversation with his older contemporary, he was shushed by Mary Wordsworth and told: 'Mr. Wordsworth is never interrupted.'

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