

Brandon C. Yen, *The Excursion and Wordsworth's Iconography*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018. Pp. 316. £95. ISBN 9781786941336.

Brandon C. Yen's study argues that through an exploration of the 'iconography of landscape images' in *The Excursion*, political and 'historical weight' can be found in 'Wordsworth's apparently marginal images' (36). Presenting a complex web of intratextual and intertextual examples, Yen analyzes how Wordsworth develops and expands iconographies and how their implementation in *The Excursion* reasserts the poem's place in Wordsworth's major poetic project. The critical framework underlying this study is a successful 'middle point' between the prevailing interpretive traditions which focus on either *The Excursion's* 'philosophical abstraction' or its 'touristic realism' (36). Iconography imbues what appear as merely descriptive images with philosophical, political, and historical significance, which Yen argues is lacking from the existing scholarship on the poem.

The first chapter establishes what Yen sees as the prevailing thematic foundation of Wordsworth's poetic project: the themes of 'paradise lost' and 'paradise regained'. Through biblical and Miltonic images, Yen presents Wordsworth's association of the Fall of Man with the French Revolution. The Solitary's despondency is a result of a feeling of 'paradise lost' in the post-revolutionary world and, as Yen argues, the rhetorical exchanges between the characters and our reading of them is an ongoing attempt to regain paradise, or at least find belonging in a post-lapsarian/post-revolutionary world.

The following chapters present five 'active' images in *The Excursion* that are often considered 'marginal', 'descriptive', or 'collateral', but which are revealed to have more complex, implicit meanings that are often overlooked. Chapter 2 focuses on the first of these images: envisioning. Yen tracks the image of the 'prospect view' and its many valences. Yen exhibits how the variable interpretive capacity of the 'prospect view' derives iconographical meanings for Wordsworth despite being closely related to a 'politics of abstraction' (73).

The breadth of Yen's study is highlighted in Chapters 3 and 4, 'Rooting' and 'Dwelling', respectively. These chapters feature the majority of Yen's readings of pictorial sources. The descriptiveness of his introductions to the images are accompanied by equally lucid interpretations of the images. Tracing the symbolic etymologies of trees like the 'oak', 'mountain ash', and the 'Liberty Tree' through James Gillray, Edmund Burke, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and others, Yen shows the intricate socio-economic and political meanings implicit in these seemingly 'collateral' images. Trees are associated with a place and the roots they put down are associated with dwelling or 'an instinct for home building' (191). Dwelling can transform a space into a 'place where one belongs' (211). The image of dwelling in Chapter 4 is explored through images of the 'ideal cottage', 'sanctuaries', and 'temples', which all factor in different ways to the sense of 'belonging' presented by the characters of *The Excursion*.

There is an unresolved tension between some of the images of dwelling Yen presents, but this tension leads into the final chapter which takes up images that are not grounded nor abstract like those of the preceding chapters. 'Flowing' and 'reflecting' are 'fluid images' which have 'iconographical indeterminacy' in *The Excursion* (256). This chapter contains some of the most adept of Yen's prosodic readings to demonstrate how the flow of the text contributes to the development of the image in the poem. The indeterminacy is a result of the characters' varied implementations of water images. Though reflections in water are fragile, 'brotherly resemblances' and other reflective images create a 'bond of brotherhood' between the natural and the human as well as the past and present. Yen argues this image holds a special place of 'redemptive potential for Wordsworth'. Yen recognises in his conclusion that despite the fact that *The Excursion* is 'fraught with tensions that resist final reconciliation', 'we should not be deterred from seeking to understand the complex ways in which they are composed' (285). It seems that the indeterminacy and complexity Yen foregrounds by examining water

images in the poem should be enough reason to study *The Excursion* with continued vigor.

An outstanding and persistent feature of the book is Yen's seamless integration of the poetry into his prose. This creates a hybrid voice, at once presenting the poetry for reconsideration and providing an enlightening interpretation of it. Ultimately, through this hybrid voice, Yen emerges as an advocate for renewed and increased scholarly attention to *The Excursion*. Yen asserts that *The Excursion* 'captures the spirit of the age [...] through its explorations of ways to regain a sense of home in the post-revolutionary world with all its conundrums, a world that we still recognise today. The post-revolutionary/post-lapsarian condition in *The Excursion* is the human condition itself' (51). He argues throughout that the Wordsworthian themes as they are portrayed in *The Excursion* exhibit a universality and timelessness which lead Yen to what seems to be a simple underlying motivation of the study. He plainly states, 'The poem deserves a wider readership' (51).

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