

Jeffrey N. Cox, *William Wordsworth, Second-Generation Romantic: Contesting Poetry after Waterloo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 260. £75. ISBN 9781108837613.

Jeffrey N. Cox's *William Wordsworth, Second-Generation Romantic: Contesting Poetry after Waterloo* contends that William Wordsworth, first-generation Romantic poet, was involved actively in the literary culture of Britain, past the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, until his death in 1850. This revisionist study builds on Stephen Gill's *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (1998), as Cox acknowledges, and explores Wordsworth's development as a poet beyond 1815. The book focuses on Wordsworth's poetic dialogues with younger contemporaries, including Leigh Hunt, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and Lord Byron, among others, and their literary responses to Wordsworth's work. Subsequently, Wordsworth's responses to these younger poets justify the case for responding to his later work as that of a second-generation Romantic. While Wordsworth is the book's primary focus, Cox also pays attention to the poetic output of Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Hunt throughout. Notable poetic works examined in addition to Wordsworth's own poetry include Byron's *Childe Harold III*; Shelley's 'Alastor', *Peter Bell the Third*, and 'Mont Blanc'; Keats's 'The Fall of Hyperion'; and various pieces from Hunt's oeuvre.

Cox reads post-1815 Wordsworth as responding to the ideology and market domination of the Cockney School poets and, simultaneously, reacting to contemporary events in his own writing. Cox argues, in Chapter 1, that Wordsworth's *The Excursion* prompted a series of literary responses from the younger poets. For example, Byron created the anti-thesis of Wordsworth's solutions to despondency through *Childe Harold III* and *Don Juan* while the other Cockney School poets equally responded to Wordsworth through their own smaller 'excursions'. In the writings of these younger poets, Wordsworth's advocacy of spirituality as a balm to political failure and despondency is substituted for an eroticised beauty, found at the core of reality, as a salve to political disappointment. Additionally, Wordsworth's contemporary relevance as a poet in this era is highlighted by the widespread dissemination and reception of his work in post-Waterloo literary circles.

Chapter 2 offers an examination of developments around Wordsworth's *Thanksgiving Ode*, published in 1816 as a response to the Battle of Waterloo. Wordsworth's ode, for its part, alludes to Hunt's *Descent of Liberty* which, in turn, evokes Robert Southey. Cox uses this network of allusions to establish the active inter-generational literary dialogue between these Romantic poets. An abiding awareness of Wordsworth and his writings is, as Cox suggests, a continual and underpinning presence in works by the Cockney School of Poetry. Cox argues that the Cockney School poets deliberately cultivated their ideology and style in contrast to the older Lake School poets, especially Wordsworth and Southey.

Cox investigates the responses that Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* drew from second-generation Romantic poets in Chapter 3, most notably Shelley's *Peter Bell the Third*. Cox suggests that the character of Peter Bell is an anti-Byronic hero and claims that Wordsworth defined his ideological position against Byron (who was outselling him). This suggestion is an intriguing one, because it presents an alternate perspective on Wordsworth's sudden publication of *Peter Bell* in 1819. Cox further explores the implications of the anti-Byronic Peter Bell for Wordsworth's profession of faith and how it shaped his own poetics.

Wordsworth's rejection of Shelley's atheism and scepticism is explored in Chapter 4. Wordsworth's inability to acknowledge the success of Cockney School writers, Cox claims, results from an ideological disagreement and not out of egotism. In Chapter 5, Cox reassesses Wordsworth's renewed confidence in Britain during his tour of Italy in 1837. There are also novel analyses of Wordsworth's retrospective style of composition in *Yarrow Revisited* (Chapter 4) and 'Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837' (Chapter 5). Cox's study here offers fresh

insight into Wordsworth's late style by accounting for its many religious and aesthetic concerns, as shaped by a responsiveness to the poetry of second-generation Romantic poets.

A few minor quibbles: Cox, perhaps, overplays the inter-generational rivalry and ideological wedge between the Lake and Cockney poets, especially as Cox admits that he cannot directly prove that Wordsworth read all the texts to which this study claims Wordsworth is responding. Nonetheless, Cox's study presents a much needed and valuable reassessment of Wordsworth's late poetic career. Cox does not shy away from acknowledging the ideological conservatism of the older Wordsworth and offers both original insights into the poet's later, and often critically neglected, poetic works to signal both fascinating avenues for future research and to rethink the parameters of new historical approaches to Romantic literary culture. By categorising Wordsworth as a second-generation romantic, Cox creates a new poetic identity for Wordsworth, who succeeds the 'first-generation' Romantic after Waterloo. Cox's study closely records Wordsworth as not only responsive to, but also directly engaged with, second-generation poets of the Romantic era and thereby offers new and important dimensions to the field of Wordsworth scholarship and Romanticism more widely.

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