

Cecilia Powell ed., *Canals, Castles and Catholics: Dora Wordsworth's Continental Journal of 1828*. Intro., Pamela Woof. Dove Cottage, Grasmere: The Wordsworth Trust, 2021. Pp. 227, 49 illustrations. £20. ISBN 9781905256525.

As the art historian Cecilia Powell notes in her preface, 'Like many talented women of her day, Dora Wordsworth has been remembered—if at all—in connection with an illustrious male relation' (xi). *Canals, Castles and Catholics* presents, for the first time in its entirety, Dora Wordsworth's 'rough notes' (166), the journal of her six-week tour to the Low Countries and the Rhineland with her father, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in summer 1828. Having only recently recovered from one of her recurring bouts of ill-health, it was the first time Dora crossed the channel. This exquisite volume is beautifully illustrated with almost 50 images that, in the absence of surviving sketches from the 1828 tour, illuminate Dora's journal. The two prefatory pieces, which are models of the genre, expertly unite word and image, as does the presentation of the journal itself. Charles Annesley's watercolour *The Devil's Bridge*, for instance, accompanies Pamela Woof's discussion of Dora's attempt to sketch the Welsh landmark in the rain, sheltered by her father's umbrella, and of the sonnet Wordsworth subsequently wrote, evoking a prior journey across the Alps. The journal itself is interspersed with illustrations, bringing to life the visuality of Dora's writing. The majority of these are near-contemporary images that give the reader some sense of Dora's own experiences. Each image is accompanied by concise explanatory material by Powell and by the corresponding section of Dora's journal, further contextualising Dora's immediate responses. At the heart of the volume is Dora, the artist and journal-writer. Examples of her sketches from other periods of her life help the reader glean a sense of her style and Powell's commentary shines a light on her artistic development.

Woof's elegant introduction offers a detailed overview of Dora's life, capturing the vivacious spirit of the 'wild and beautiful' (1) child of the Wordsworth family, whose poor health remained a lifelong worry. Often compared unfavourably with the more intellectually gifted Sara Coleridge, Dora emerges as a passionate, strong-willed woman, who would, much to her family's chagrin, eventually marry a Catholic widower and father of two, Edward Quillinan. Powell's introduction concentrates on the tour itself, providing forensic detail on its origin, the social circle of Charles and Eliza Aders, without whom the tour could not have taken place; and practical aspects, including finances. Powell's excellent commentary offers additional information on family members and acquaintances to whom Dora refers, contrasts Dora's experience with her companions' previous European tours, and generally contextualises entries and the party's itinerary.

The journal itself emphasises visual observations that would make 'fine studies for the painter', as Dora wrote in *Journal of a Few Months' Residence in Portugal, and Glimpses of the South of Spain* (1847). Her descriptions of landscapes are sketch-like:

These trees in most places join their foliage but openings are cut here & there making agreeable frames for Pictures of the river & opposite shore & the Vessels at anchor or gliding up & down—Our window is opposite one of these openings & last night the Moon dancing on the Water only disturbed by a passing sail, seen through this gloomy frame had a magical effect— (157)

We also learn of Dora's experiences as a traveller confronted with unfamiliar sights and people. She finds Rotterdam a 'most perplexing Town', where 'even [her] Organ of locality which is general is very good, here stands [her] in no stead' (158) and considers that '[t]he Dutch really

are Amphibious animals' (158). The journal was clearly written for her family and her personality shines through the page. Entries often conclude with a playful, irreverent note: 'The supper table was elegantly decorated with flowers—You [*sic*] Aunt Sarah would have taken several hints—' (115).

The journal is also noteworthy for its comments on Roman Catholicism as enshrined in unfamiliar buildings and religious practices. Dora gleans a 'peep' at a procession (102), grows puzzled by 'so many useless ceremonies' when she sees Catholic masses (82), and is disappointed by Michelangelo's *Madonna and Child* at the Church of Our Lady in Bruges, for 'they have given the Virgin a double chin' (82).

Wordsworth and Coleridge scholars will welcome Dora's comments on the two poets, their social circle, and poetic extracts. *Canals, Castles and Catholics* is testament to the Wordsworth Trust's commitment to bring art and literature alive to a wide audience, in an accessible and affordable fashion. The quality of this publication cannot be overstated. It is a worthy contribution to the fields of Romantic travel and life writing and art history, as well as women's writing and Romantic and nineteenth-century studies more generally.

Anne-Claire Michoux
University of Zurich