

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*. Edited and with an introduction and Notes by Fiona Stafford. Oxford: OUP, 2013. Pp. xlv + 371. £8.99. PB. ISBN 9780199601967.

Lucy Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: 'All in Each Other'*. Oxford: OUP, 2013. Pp. xiv + 386. £19.99. ISBN 9780199696390.

In terms of methodology, these books make a fine contrast. While Lucy Newlyn presents a kind of double biography, explaining William and Dorothy Wordsworth's writings as a collaborative creative effort emerging from a special symbiotic relationship, Fiona Stafford's new edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, which is the first to print the 1798 and 1802 versions together, enters its subject from the opposite direction. Stafford opts to approach the first collection of 1798 'with the original readers in mind, who were picking up a slim, anonymous volume of new poems' (xiii). These readers, as laid out by her very fine introduction, were in for a surprise. Whilst modern readers can hardly elude the famous Preface of 1802 as a guide to their understanding, the contemporary readers of the first edition would have been able to rely on the anonymous advertisement only, providing 'little guidance as to meaning' (xiii-xiv). Stepping back in focus in order to recapitulate how these readers would have immediately found themselves plunged into confusion in the face of the first baffling and terrifying poem 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', the editor delineates the undoing of the contemporary horizon of expectations achieved by the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. As the opening poem 'came laden with unpredictable possibility', presenting itself as 'at once traditional and experimental' (xvii), the recommendation 'to abandon "pre-established codes"' (xviii) persisted, as Stafford shows, following the sequential logic of the poems to conclude: 'This is a volume in which nothing is quite as it seems', and 'from the very first poem, readers were disconcerted and dislocated' (xix). With this introduction in mind, the reader is well prepared indeed for the juxtaposition of the 1798 and 1802 editions – realizing how much the sequential arrangement in a collection actually matters. What Stafford's introduction thus beautifully achieves is to let the modern reader share in the 1798 reading experience of having one's preconceptions unsettled, 'of seeing something that has been seen before' (xxiii) in a new light, and to read the poems as significantly positioned in a collection. The elegant transition to the inevitable biographical context – Wordsworth's and Coleridge's collaboration – comes only after the concluding 'Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey': with Wordsworth's turn from loco-description and eighteenth-century abstract personification to his sister's actual presence, 'a real women in a real place' (xxiii). It is in the context of the poets' real lives at the early stages of their careers that the history of the *Lyrical Ballads* is accounted for in informative detail. The text comes first (along with its literary and critical contexts explained in the annotations), and biography comes second.

The opposite construction is at work in Newlyn's biography, which offers not a tandem of texts, but of lives deeply entwined. (What both books share, however, is the importance they attach to the motif of 'thankfulness'.) Newlyn's *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: 'All in Each Other'* undertakes to deliver a comprehensive account of how Dorothy and William Wordsworth's lives and writings were inextricably and reciprocally linked. Her principle objective is to work out 'the quality and intrinsic value of their partnership in writing; to explore the therapeutic benefits, for both siblings, of their shared regional attachment; and to investigate their distinctly symbiotic contribution to Romantic environmentalism' (xiii). In other words, there is a twofold motive behind her narrative: firstly, to portray the siblings' relationship not as a lopsided relationship but as one of manifold 'interminglings in their work', of – quoting from the *Prelude* – 'ennobling

interchange' (xiii), and secondly, to highlight their regional identity, the bond to their local environment.

Punctuating her biography by allocating stages to places, Newlyn's narrative opens with a chapter entitled 'Homelessness'. The family's break-up after their mother's death is recaptured as the key to the Wordsworths' nostalgia for a 'home', for the Lake District, for a familiar regional topography. Both their cohabitation and collaboration spanning more than fifty years, and their attachment to the local topography spring from their childhood loss, causing 'an almost compulsive need to compensate for the past by laying up a store of memories for future years' (6). It all comes down, Newlyn claims, to acts of remembering and returning as part of coming to terms with the loss of their family home at Cockermouth – to a long process of repairing the 'trauma' (xii and *passim*) caused by their early separation through 'collaborative efforts to rebuild their scattered family's regional identity' (xii).

Thus 'Home at Grasmere' in particular, alongside the *Grasmere Journal*, the *Prelude* as well as *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, are attributed 'the great Homeric motifs of wandering and returning home intertwined with the georgic theme of dwelling in a place of work' (203). Citing Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia', Newlyn suggests that the repeated instances of revisiting – mental or physical – are part of the work of grieving, and of looking for a new place 'that would restore them to their lost origins and compensate them for the deaths of their parents' (5). In this sense, 're-familiarisation' (146), not defamiliarisation, is their poetic principle. This is, in brief, the overarching psychological angle organizing Newlyn's narrative. From this viewpoint, the delicate matter of possible incest that has kept previous biographers and critics speculating can be safely leaped across, while Dorothy's well known journal entry, 'in the style of a novel of sensibility', on William's wedding day is treated with explicit authorial approval, refraining from all further speculation: psychosomatic aches and pains are 'noted, but not dwelt on for longer than is necessary' (144). (At times, a slight note of all too easy authorial judgement seems to slip in, governed by sympathy with the protagonists, while their companions fare less well. Thus Thomas Monkhouse is briefly attested to have 'somewhat selfishly' (244) continued his Alpine trip without his bride, while William and Dorothy, leaving Mary behind with a young baby as they set out for Scotland, get away with more biographical understanding.) Indeed, Dorothy's 'unfailing sympathy' (230) with her brother seems to be echoed by the biographer's attitude to her subjects, resting, perhaps, on her own acknowledged concern with homesickness.

Next to the psychological explanation of the Wordsworths' focus on local places, supported by occasional reference to Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* – remembering places of their childhood, returning to them, experiencing them, their peripatetic experience as much as their poetic representation – Newlyn brings into play another 'big theory': the anthropologist Marcel Mauss's notion of 'gift exchange' as a means of establishing bonds between giver and receiver. What Newlyn sees at work throughout is a complex system of an exchange of gifts once the siblings had been reunited. Thus William gives his poetry as an expression of gratitude for Dorothy's existence and presence in his life, or rather: 'Gratitude itself becomes a gift when expressed in such eloquent and generous terms' (7). However, the emphasis is placed on the reciprocity of this arrangement, exculpating, one might add, William from any feminist indictment as to his exploitation of Dorothy's fine diurnal nature writing that found its way into his poetry, notoriously in the case of his Daffodils and her earlier account of them. Their relationship was, according to Newlyn's book, not one of asymmetrical poet and his sibling muse; rather, the writings of both reflect an intense 'shared creativity' (55).

In sum, Newlyn's very readable, beautifully illustrated book offers a wealth of details and insights into the extent and intensity of the Wordsworths' creative life together. Its material is expounded in a way that primarily aims at an audience beyond academia,

addressing the community of Wordsworth readers and lovers of the Lake district, who flock in thousands every year to visit its monuments. The almost inevitable price to pay for her wide intended readership is a certain tendency to an all too simplified evocation of theory. Conversely, this biography is at its best, I believe, when it relates the Wordsworths' permanent homesickness, biographically motivated, to the spiritual yearning of a larger Romantic *heimweh* – rendering the two Wordsworths true epitomes of European Romanticism. For students of the *Lyrical Ballads* as one of the key texts of Romanticism, Stafford's new edition, juxtaposing the two 1798 and 1802 versions, is highly recommendable as it finely lays out both the reader response dimension of its poetics and the contexts of its production.

Helga Schwalm
Humboldt-University, Berlin