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BOOK REVIEWS



Mark J. Bruhn, *Wordsworth before Coleridge: The Growth of the Poet's Philosophical Mind, 1785–1797* (London: Routledge, 2018), xvi + 179pp. ISBN 9-781-1384-8644-7; £115 (hb).

A NUMBER OF PROFOUND INTELLECTUAL CONTEXTS—Burkean politics, Lockean empiricism, Wartonian historicism and Hartleyan psychology, among them—have long proven indispensable to the study of Wordsworth's poetry. Many of these contexts seem to be incompatible with the others, but each circles back to the same set of questions. As Mark J. Bruhn puts it in his new study, '[w]here do the foundations of Wordsworth's dualism lie? Who prompted his political turns from radical republicanism and Godwinian theory? What are the sources of his "One Life" transcendentalism?' (p. 11) Such questions are crucial for understanding Wordsworth's development, from his earliest efforts in 1785 to the ambitious philosophical poetry that he first drafted in 1794. But, as Bruhn attests, critics tend to oversimplify matters by fixating on singular influences on Wordsworth or in attempting to explain away the poet's seemingly contradictory, or at least shifting, philosophical positions. More specifically, *Wordsworth before Coleridge* reconsiders the early history of Wordsworth's intellectual growth by challenging the critical consensus that the poet's most significant philosophical ideas only arose when he encountered Coleridge.

At the risk of teleology, perhaps, the book is arranged chronologically: the first and second chapters trace Wordsworth's schooling and university education, up to 1794. Chapters 3 and 4 ostensibly focus on 1794 alone, at turns addressing the break from Godwinian theory and the prominence of Dugald Stewart's poetics of interiority at that time. The fifth and final chapter, a short conclusion aside, extends the discussion to 1797. Really, the book is a revisionist study that is at its best when Bruhn fills in gaps, albeit speculatively, or overturns critical assumptions. He charts in unprecedented detail the process by which the aspiring writer came to appreciate the importance of passion within the mind-matter dualism that he was schooled in at Hawkshead and at Cambridge, for one thing. Wordsworth, moreover, was greatly affected by his reading of Stewart's recently published *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792) in 1793/94. This reading helped Wordsworth to reject the blunt rationality of Godwin's political philosophy and Pope's philosophical poetics. Between 1795 and 1797 Wordsworth was exposed to Cambridge Platonism and English Kantianism, which mingled with his ongoing investment in Stewart's teachings. Out of this body of work came Wordsworth's sentimental notion of the 'feeling intellect', as seen most emphatically in the early drafts of *The Pedlar*


and the 1798 *Prelude*, to limit ourselves to his early career (that is, his pursuits between the ages of fifteen and twenty-eight).

Understood as a revisionist study, the book's chief target is Ernest de Selincourt who, nearly a century ago, argued that a refracted, Coleridgean philosophy informed by Hartley's empirical theory of association shaped Wordsworth's thinking, virtually to the exclusion of other systems. Kenneth R. Johnston followed his lead in *Wordsworth and The Recluse* (1984): 'Wordsworth's imagination, more absorbent than egotistical in 1797–98, soaked up the flood of ideas, interest, projects, and speculations springing from the fountainhead of Coleridge's active mind and voracious reading'; 'their literary relationship in 1797–98 was a wedding of the Coleridgean ideal and the Wordsworthian real', he adds, whereby 'Wordsworth was to realize what Coleridge thought' (quoted on pp. 2–3). Suffice it to say, many critics tend to latch onto Coleridge's philosophical influence on the elder poet because in that period, 1797 to 1804 in most accounts, the documentation is fairly detailed. In truth, relatively little can be said with confidence about Wordsworth's access to specific books or tracts. Duncan Wu, the most pertinent expert on the poet's reading, dates Wordsworth's first exposure to Descartes to Coleridge's study of the philosopher in early 1801, and finds no evidence for Wordsworth's reading of Stewart at all. Bruhn instead takes a contextual approach. The absence of indisputable evidence for direct influence notwithstanding, *Wordsworth before Coleridge* documents how widely the ideas of Stewart, along with those of Cudworth and Nitsch, circulated in 1790s Britain. Wordsworth, quite simply, would have been exposed to their ideas in some fora or format, however derivative.

On occasion, Bruhn downplays his good work here, not least of all when second-guessing any claims that his study is conjectural at best. He also claims the book supplements rather than supplants alternative framings of Wordsworth's formative influences. One such study he might have in mind could be James Chandler's *Wordsworth's Second Nature* (1984), which famously made the case for the shaping role played by Burke's political writing in such works as *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Old Cumberland Beggar*. But Bruhn quietly complicates Chandler's claim that Wordsworth entirely fell in with Burkean conservatism in the 1790s. While Wordsworth recoiled from revolutionary violence, Bruhn avers, he clearly distanced himself from aristocratic governance.

Perhaps the most salient lesson offered in this new study is the importance of selecting the right manuscript—or, more accurately, signalling clearly to the reader what choice you have made. Otherwise, we risk affirming one iteration of Wordsworth's proclaimed poetics over others. Within the year or so that separates two distinct manuscript versions of *The Ruined Cottage*, MS B (from early 1798) and MS D (1799), for example, Wordsworth had lurched closer to a representation of nature more akin to what Coleridge called 'the numberless goings-on of life'. Reading that manuscript at the exclusion of the prior one would sidestep the non-biological sentiments glimpsed, however temporarily, in Wordsworth's 'one life': 'Most audible, then, when, the fleshly ear | O'er come

by grosser prelude of that strain | Forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed' (*Ruined Cottage*). (Chandler favours MS B, and David Fairer more recently, in *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790–1798* [2009], MS D.) In a quiet but clear key, then, *Wordsworth before Coleridge* offers a sustained challenge to a number of assumptions held about Wordsworth's intellectual history, not least of all the outsized impact of Coleridge's philosophical thinking.

Bruhn's study is compact and dense—but it is eminently readable throughout. (The endnotes bear much of the weight of the supporting evidence, meaning the chapters themselves can tell a tightly woven story about the poet's development.) The narrative is as compelling as it is commonsensical: for more than a decade before meeting Coleridge, Wordsworth profited from a deep engagement with a range of distinct philosophical systems. Far from explaining away the poet's leap from Hartley to Kant, and the like, we ought to expand the scope of Wordsworth's philosophical poetics beyond, but without excluding, Coleridge. 

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Siobhan Carroll, *An Empire of Air and Water: Uncolonizable Space in the British Imagination, 1750–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 304pp. ISBN 978-0-8122-4678-0, £46 (hb).

IT IS NOT OFTEN THAT A PIECE OF SCHOLARSHIP is able to achieve both delightful complexity and remarkable clarity, but Siobhan Carroll's *An Empire of Air and Water: Uncolonizable Space in the British Imagination, 1750–1850* helps set that standard.

The Introduction begins with a comparison of earlier cartographic practices to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century map-making; specifically, Carroll describes a shift from geographers loosely using rumours and assumptions to fill in uncharted areas to Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville's cartographic approach of leaving the 'uncharted' areas of Africa blank (p. 1). According to Carroll, this 'blank' on the map not only served as an imperial elimination of the settlements and cultures of those regions, but also marked them as colonisable in their emptiness. However, in that emptiness lay another level of significance for explorers: the empty spaces were not just 'free' for conquest, but the blankness also signified danger of the unknown (p. 5). From this illustration, Carroll's conception of the 'atopia' emerges. Carroll defines atopias as natural regions which, despite seemingly being within the reach of scientific or

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



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Michael Falk is Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of Kent, and an Adjunct Fellow in Digital Humanities at Western Sydney University. His key interests include digital methods, the global aspects of Romanticism and the Enlightenment, and the literary history of the self. He has published on Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Smith, John Clare and Charles Harpur; co-edits the Romantic Poetry section of *Year's Work in English Studies*; and has work forthcoming on the problem of Artificial Stupidity and on eighteenth-century Swiss book history. He is a keen digital humanities educator, and has run workshops on coding and other skills across the UK and Australia. He is currently at work on his monograph, *Frankenstein's Siblings*, a digital study of contingent selfhood in Romantic literature.

Peter Garside taught English Literature for more than thirty years at Cardiff University, where he became founding Director of the Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research. Subsequently, he was appointed Professor of Bibliography and Textual Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He served on the Boards of the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels and the Stirling/South Carolina Collected Edition of the Works of James Hogg, and has produced three volumes apiece for each of these scholarly editions. He was one of the general editors of the bibliographical survey *The English Novel, 1770–1829*, 2 vols (OUP, 2000), and directed the AHRC-funded *British Fiction, 1800–1829* database (2004). More recently, he has co-edited *English and British Fiction 1750–1820* (2015), Volume 2 of the Oxford History of the Novel in English; and forthcoming publications include an edition of Scott's *Shorter Poems*, along with Gillian Hughes, for the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's Poetry.

Michael John Goodman is a postdoctoral researcher based at Cardiff University's Centre of Editorial and Intertextual Research. He is the director of the *Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive*, an online open-access resource that contains over 3000 illustrations taken from Victorian editions of Shakespeare's plays. He is currently writing his first monograph, *Shakespeare in Bits and Bytes*, which explores how the digital can help students and the general public engage meaningfully with the humanities.

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