

JULIA S. CARLSON, *Romantic Marks and Measures: Wordsworth's Poetry in Fields of Print* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 368 pp. £50 hardback. ISBN 9780 812 247 879.

Studies of literature and science are most rewarding when they carefully attend to the media in which these discourses are mutually grounded. Thus it is with this impressive book, which explores the entanglement of Wordsworth's poetry with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cartography, on the one hand, and contemporaneous developments in English elocution and prosody, on the other. These separate branches of science, as Carlson avers, materially influenced the intellectual milieu of the Romantic period. They ushered in new modes of diagramming and delineating 'speech and space', and they transformed how the 'morphologies of language and landscape' were marked and measured on the printed page (9). In this way, Carlson contends, these sciences made fundamental contributions to the manner in which 'Britain's linguistic and geographical self-conception as a modern nation' was visualised and represented, and they consequently shaped the various print contexts in which 'Wordsworth's topographically and orally invested poetry' appeared and engaged (10).

Especially key here, for Carlson, are Wordsworth's experiments with blank verse, and more specifically 'the care he took with [the] punctuation, layout, and diction' of blank verse poems that were directly concerned with 'the representation of speech and landscape in print' (12). This 'sensitivity' to the appearance of blank verse on the page, as Carlson argues, was not only heightened by Wordsworth's awareness of current innovations in cartography, elocution and prosody, but also by the way his works circulated 'within [the] indexically intensive fields of print' these innovations helped to create (12). 'Under these complex conditions of writing and reception', Carlson concludes, Wordsworth's 'blank verse became', like contemporaneous maps and elocutionary models, 'a medium' that contributed to and consolidated the manner 'in which Englishness was expressed in print' (12).

Carlson develops this argument over the course of seven chapters, which are broadly divided into two parts. These two parts are joined by an 'interchapter', which serves as a bridge between Carlson's considerations of Wordsworth's relation to the 'burgeoning cartographic culture' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Chapters 1 to 3, and to the elaboration of new systems of English elocution and prosody, in Chapters 4 to 7 (12). This partitioned structure, though innovative, has the limitation of making the

two halves of Carlson's book seem less integral to one another than they are otherwise demonstrated to be, and one wonders if the addition of a dedicated conclusion might have helped to mitigate this effect. On the whole, however, the arrangement of the book allows Carlson to develop perceptive and tightly focussed case studies that situate Wordsworth's blank verse poetry alongside the 'representational grammars' of cartographic and elocutionary science (25).

Thus, in her first chapter Carlson attends to the way tourist literature about the English Lake District helped to 'naturalize [English] blank verse' by combining it with other forms of verbal and pictorial illustration, including maps, diagrams, itineraries, topographical plates and prose annotations (25). One of the distinctive features of the print culture of Lake District tourism, particularly from the 1780s onwards, was its liberal admixture of the printed word with other forms of visual media. Within this context, as Carlson reminds us, excerpts of blank verse were regularly employed to animate and augment descriptions of specific landmarks and locations. This was especially the case with poems such as Wordsworth's 'Yew-Trees' and *The Excursion*, passages from which were widely reprinted in nineteenth-century Lake District guidebooks, and not least in Wordsworth's own *Guide Through the District of the Lakes*. This process of selective quotation, explains Carlson, exerted a decided influence on the way many readers encountered Wordsworth's poetry. On the one hand, it uprooted his verses from the poems to which they belonged; on the other hand, it emphatically reinforced the indexical relationship between those verses and the places to which they pertained. Carlson puts this point across especially well, noting how the piecemeal quotation of Wordsworth's poetry in Lakeland guidebooks helped to 'focus [the] rhythmical patterns and variations' of his verses 'in relation to the physical contours' of an increasingly canonical English landscape (25).

From here, Carlson's second and third chapters turn to consider different aspects of the 'cartographic consciousness' of Wordsworth's poetry (112). Carlson's prevailing concern in this context is the commensurability between autobiography and cartography evident in various aspects of *The Prelude*. Comparing successive versions of *The Prelude*, Carlson reveals the subtle ways the 'print and engraving culture' of cartography 'edge[d] into' the diction and thematics of Wordsworth's great autobiographical poem (75). Thus, whereas Chapter 2 focuses principally on Wordsworth's use of specific notational terms (such as *point* and *mark*), Chapter 3 dwells on the analogical similarity between Wordsworth's figuration of the task of autobiographical inquiry and subsequent disputes

over the value of pictorial and numerical modes of cartographical representation. Carlson's primary interest here is in the public debate occasioned by the Ordnance Survey's early experiments with the use of contour lines instead of hachures to represent topographical relief. Drawing attention to the 'Wordsworthian aesthetics' that informed Matthew Arnold's contribution to this debate, Carlson suggests how 'Wordsworth's resistance to inscribing land and human life by "geometrical rules"' remained relevant to British conceptions of the nation's cartographical self-image in the decades after his death (126, 129).

Moving forward from this consideration of the relation of Wordsworthian ideals to 'the historical, literary, and ideological determinants of [the] Ordnance Survey', the second half of Carlson's book explores the relation of Wordsworth's blank verse poetry to 'the new accentual understandings and graphic displays of English' proffered in contemporary 'elocutionary and prosodic discourse' (129, 130). Central to this exploration is an insightful consideration of Wordsworth's vexed relationship with the medium of print, and specifically his concerns about the capacity of the printed page to convey faithfully the emotional value of the spoken word. Accordingly, in Chapter 4 Carlson examines how 'verbal additions and [the] cancelling of emphatic italics' in different manuscript versions of *The Prelude* evince Wordsworth's 'concerns about the typographic marking of feeling and meaning' (178). This inquiry is deepened and broadened in Chapters 5 and 6, where Carlson combines readings of 'There was a Boy', 'The Brothers', 'Michael' and *The Prelude* to elucidate Wordsworth's awareness of the power of typography to help his readers perceive 'the gravity' of his blank verse poetry (224). Particularly noteworthy in this context is Carlson's perceptive discussion of Wordsworth's use of the exclamation point as a marker of the 'forthright and affectionate' correspondence with Coleridge out of which *The Prelude* emerged (233). Such items of punctuation were, as Carlson claims, not merely indicators of 'typographical emphasis', but rather a way of signalling the 'affective traces' of the voice in blank verse (258).

Carlson's final chapter extends this consideration of the imprinted voice of Wordsworth's poetry by delving into the notational model of English prosody developed and applied by John Thelwall. Building on the elocutionary theory of Joshua Steele, as Carlson explains, Thelwall devised a prosodic system based not on the rhythms of abstract metrical sets, but rather on the 'natural rhythmus' of the human voice (276). This system, with its rejection of disembodied metrical feet in favour of the 'physical pulsations and remissions' of the embodied voice, was, as Carlson indicates, the basis of a therapeutic

elocutionary pedagogy that aimed to empower the British people by cultivating their collective powers of speech (279). As such, Carlson affirms, Thelwall's conception of English prosody stood – in both form and spirit – at variance with the prosodic models that informed Wordsworth's poetry. This difference is apparent in Wordsworth's correspondence with Thelwall in 1804, but, as Carlson stresses, it is even more emphatically evident in Thelwall's response to *The Excursion* in the following decade. Thelwall, as Carlson shows, not only repudiated the politics of *The Excursion*, but also applied his own prosodic system in order to subvert the 'Tory conservatism' the poem promoted and 'to recover' within its blank verse a 'democratic and organic poetics' more in keeping with his own ideological and aesthetic agendas (303).

One of the great strengths and interests of this book is the adroitness with which Carlson links evidence and examples from different periods and cultural domains. Very occasionally, the nimbleness of these readings leads Carlson to present analogical connections as though they were historical ones. On the whole, however, Carlson's interpretations are historically valid and critically valuable. Her engagements with individual poems frequently offer insightful corrections and nuancings of the readings proposed by highly influential scholars, including Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Geoffrey Hartman. This is especially true of the attention Carlson devotes to explaining the critical limitation imposed by the 'silent omission' of Wordsworth's exclamation points from the text of the 1805 *Prelude* presented in the classic 1979 Norton edition of the poem (334). In short, Carlson's book makes for exceptionally rich and rewarding reading. One expects that it will be of great interest not just to scholars of Wordsworth's poetry but to all students of Romantic literature, history and culture.

CHRISTOPHER DONALDSON

*Lancaster University*