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A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg
(review)

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testimonial heart-religion. She stands there quietly, yet sturdily, with no rigidity.' (p. 174). This is indeed a form of influence 'Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart'. A different approach again is adopted in Elizabeth Fay's 'Wordsworth, Bostonian Chivalry and the Uses of Art', which argues that *Lyrical Ballads* was 'one of the most influential publications supporting the medieval aesthetic and its implicit ethical system' (p. 177). Fay persuasively sets up Wordsworth's courtly advances on and development of the reader's social conscience and 'honour', a readerly contract compelling the reader 'to uphold and preserve, carrying everywhere relationship and love' (p. 188). This high social purpose is then carried forward to Edwin Austin Abbey's murals for the Boston Public Library, an associative move which raises more questions than it answers about the diffusion of Wordsworthian contracts in the course of nineteenth-century America. That Wordsworth's individually and socially curative role was consolidated by the end of the century is confirmed by James A. Butler's 'Home (at Grasmere and 'On the Range'): Wordsworth and Owen Wister's *The Virginian*', which finds 'Romantic values' at the heart of modern American myth. Wister's move west was a cure for neurasthenia, a modern 'American' disorder which Butler links to Wordsworth's experiences. Wordsworth is again a therapist in the final essay, Matthew Scott's 'An Ethics of Wonder and the Cure of Poetry: Wordsworth, William James and the American Reader'. Scott uses Don McCullin's photographs of killings in Beirut in 1976 and Susan Sontag's 2003 *Regarding the Pain of Others* to set up reflections on wonder, distance, and the limits of sympathy. Scott's essay can be read as an indirect response to Susan Manning's. It raises the problem of intellectual and affective remoteness, in which Wordsworth's poems are both close to 'us' and marked by a 'feeling of immovability' (p. 221).

Despite this implicit responsiveness, however, *Wordsworth in American Literary Culture* stands more in need of a Postscript than a Preface. Several contributors emphasize the importance of received ideas about Wordsworth's life rather than, or in conjunction with, readings of his poetry, an element of misprision alien to the Bloomian model of the text, though constantly invited in to that model by Bloom's emphasis on 'strong poets' rather than 'strong poems'. To what extent does America's 'Wordsworth' challenge Bloom? Or is that challenge already incorporated in Bloom's work; or, indeed, in American literary history as an independent subject, always

wary of influence as an intellectual model? Reading this collection straight through, one notices that certain poems seem to have been especially important in the construction and consumption of America's Wordsworth – 'We Are Seven', 'The world is too much with us', 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'. The same lines from 'Tintern Abbey' direct Susan Manning's and Richard Gravid's investigations. Some closing comments might have made more of these special resonances: did American readers construct a significantly different Wordsworthian canon? Or is modern criticism particularly attuned to these Wordsworthianisms in American writing? On a more practical note, there are signs of editorial haste – contradictory citations of the same works in different essays, missed words, and an intermittent suppression of the definite article which at least made me reflect on how expressive it is in Wordsworth's own writing. Despite these minor flaws, this is an interesting, varied, forward-looking collection which will fulfil the editors' hope that it should 'offer points of contact, contestation, intersection and departure' for subsequent studies.

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GERAINT H. JENKINS (ed.), *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg (Iolo Morganwg and the Romantic Tradition in Wales)* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. xviii + 516. £45 hardback. 0 7083 1971 8.

A Rattleskull Genius is not merely an immensely long and carefully articulated collection of essays on Iolo Morganwg but announces itself as the precursor of an entire series devoted to that remarkable stonemason, agricultural consultant, self-proclaimed heir to Wales's bardic tradition, autodidact, artisan poet and scholarly forger of both the poems and the consciousness of his nation. The collection is made somewhat more wieldy and reviewable than a set of twenty-two disparate essays might otherwise be, by its helpful division into four sections.

After a thorough introduction, which previews the volume's territory in a helpfully discursive fashion, Part 1, 'Contexts', contains two essays situating the hero vis-à-vis Wales and Central European forgery. Branwen Jarvis describes Iolo as playing the parts of 'both Macpherson and Dr Johnson' in his own version of the Ossian scandal, and relates Iolo's work both to

the scholarly circles of Evan Evans and Lewis Morris and to Wales's political heavyweights, Richard Price and David Williams. R.J.W. Evans gives a spirited account of the cultural politics of literary forgery throughout central Europe, and in particular the long history of the so-called RKZ affair, which rumbled on from the 'discovery' of the 'Dvur Králové' manuscript in 1817, until the 1990s, when a report begun in the heady days of the Prague Spring was finally published, only to have its sceptical conclusion denounced as a Communist slur on Czech nationhood. The parallels with Iolo's history and its nationalist implications are well drawn.

Part 2, 'The Bard', relates Iolo's to Welsh poetic practice and to the English poets of the day. Two chapters on Iolo's forgery of syllabic 'strict metre' and accentual 'free-metre' poetry commend his work in both modes and his command of the tradition. Both chapters rather assume that the reader knows what the 'twenty-four canonical metres' of strict metre poetry might be. That on Iolo's strict metre poetry works mainly through paraphrase. Huw M. Edwards, however, makes a deft attempt to exemplify the intricacy of Iolo's work in Welsh. To cite one example of his analysis (in this case of a poem Iolo composed, but attributed to Dafydd y Nant):

There is *cynghanedd* in the middle of each line (e.g. *Ebrill / ebrwydd*) and between the end of each line and the beginning of the next (e.g. *codais / coedydd*). The pattern is sustained over three eight-line stanzas, with the added complication that the end of each stanza rhymes with the beginning of the next, thereby ensuring that the metre may be retained unaltered.

This commentary is both succinct and self-explanatory, but it may be a stumbling block to English readers. 'Metre', here, signifies verse forms, or specified combination of rhyme, alliteration and assonance, in combination with what passes for metre in English or Greek usage, that is, combinations of one to eight metrical feet in duple or triple time. At some point in the fifty pages of this book devoted to 'strict' and 'free' metre it might have been useful to outline just what is involved in at least two or three of those 'twenty-four canonical metres'. There is, clearly, a problem of audience. While almost every Welsh title or quotation is helpfully translated, with English readers in mind, some cultural assumptions – such as what is meant by metre – go untranslated.

Romanticists will be most immediately interested

in the chapter by Mary-Ann Constantine on the subscription-list approach to the publication of Iolo's fascinating *Poems Lyric and Pastoral*, Joseph Johnson's role in its publication, and Iolo's compulsive revisions in the interest of literary conventionality. Damian Walford Davies's argument that Godwin's condescension to Iolo was instrumental in reinforcing Coleridge's hostility to Godwin, has already appeared elsewhere (in his *Presences that Disturb*, reviewed in *Romanticism* issue 11.2). The evidence that the way 'Poor Williams', as Coleridge called him, felt about his mother, and the way Godwin scorned him for this, fed into Coleridge's own thinking about filial and paternal affections is well handled, though other essays in this book might make one wonder whether the true affinity between Iolo and Coleridge is their shared talent for calumny of competitors, and particularly non-believers. Jon Mee's chapter accumulates considerable 'circumstantial evidence' associating Iolo Morganwg and William Blake, and it does so without glossing over their very considerable differences.

Part 3, 'Iolo's Preoccupations', widens one's sense of what Iolo was about, in terms of building, agriculture and landscape, expertise in the study of Welsh dialects and the collection of traditional music. Unevenness is to be expected in so long a book, and the range of subjects in this section particularly is perhaps too great to interest any single reader continuously. A somewhat circumstantial chapter half-heartedly accuses Iolo of profiting from his family's West Indian interests while fulminating against the traffic in human gore. Much the most engaging contribution in this section is the editor's own. Geraint H. Jenkins shows how Iolo succeeded in hijacking both the Cambrian Society and the Carmarthen Eisteddfod tradition, and in making Unitarianism a small but significant force in Welsh experience. Numerous scholarly clerics who thought they could harness Iolo's energies to more sober ends found themselves outmanoeuvred as he yoked their prestige to his subversive purposes.

Part 4, 'Iolo's Friends and Enemies', turns out to be an episodic study of how Iolo fairly predictably turned friends into enemies, or as the editor puts it, felt 'a compulsive need to fall out with just about everyone he met'. Chapters on Iolo and women, in the lump, and on the naval surgeon David Samwell (a chapter which barely refers to Iolo, and left me with no sense of what it was doing in this book) are perhaps chapters too far. Three chapters tackle the indispensable story

of Iolo's relations to his patron Owain Myfyr and his collaborators Edward Davies and William Owen Pughe. Unfortunately, these three relationships do constitute essentially one story and telling that story from three angles leads to much repetition. Glenda Carr's chapter on William Owen Pughe, coming in at chapter 20, suffers from having had a dozen of its main points anticipated many times. Fortunately it is an excellent piece of work. It tells the story of Iolo's differences with Owain Myfyr, and with William Owen Pughe, and his use of the Hengwrst library, and of Evan Evans's manuscripts, much more roundly than has been done hitherto. The effect of this considerable success is to make one wonder whether the separate chapters on Owain Myfyr and on Edward Davies might have been better passed over in favour of a joint one by this author, or a collaborative effort. One feels that Glenda Carr would be capable of an excellent biography of her subject.

After a useful chapter on Iolo's son and heir, Taliesin ab Iolo, and his editorial work on his father's legacy, the final chapter by Huw Walters tackles the much-heralded questions of what Damian Walford Davies calls the 'mummeries of the Gorsedd ceremonies on Primrose Hill' in 1792 and Iolo's masterly hijacking of the Carmarthen Eisteddfod of 1819, bringing the book to a scintillating climax. When Iolo died in 1827 his functions were continued by his son and by Gwilym Morganwg, a printer and publican, and druidic apostle. In turn, the mystic egg was assumed in 1852 by Ieuan Myfyr, another visionary artisan who restored the rocking-stone of Pontypridd and surrounded it with two stone circles and an avenue of standing stones in the style of Avebury. Myfyr styled himself Archdruid of the Isle of Britain, took the dynastic name Myfyr Morganwg, and conducted quarterly druidic rituals at the rocking stone until the 1870s. Throughout the Victorian period, Huw Walters concludes, the druidic myth that was essentially Iolo's creation, found a succession of true believers. Druid worship continued at Pontypridd under an unbroken, if sometimes disputed succession

of Archdruids, until the death of Myfyr's successor Morien, in 1921. One is left wondering. Just what was it about the stonemason bard of liberty – or, of course, about a pervasive culture of credulity manifested similarly but less durably in the Church of Joanna Southcote – that inspired over one hundred and twenty years of ritual observance, entwined such observances into the national eisteddfodau, and enrolled in the druidic order successive clerics from Bishop Thomas Burgess in 1819 to Dr Rowan Williams?

If intended as an appetizer for the series of monographs that is to follow, this scholarly feast may in some respects be too rich and circumstantial. It is undoubtedly a book of great value (and at only £45 something of a bargain) but it must run some risk of satiating the appetite it is designed to whet. There may be an optimum number of essays for a collaborative book if repetitiveness is to be avoided. Anyone reading this one from cover to cover will wonder too often whether a topic already alluded to in passing by half a dozen contributors will at some point be treated in depth (on the whole, they are, but far too many topics and quotations exemplify the Zarathustran quality of eternal recurrence). It is a little surprising, also, that for a foundational work – likely to constitute most libraries' entire stock of information on the subject – this one lacks one highly desirable feature, namely a bibliography of antiquarian titles and modern treatments.

This volume ought to stimulate a demand, however, for more work on Morganwg's poetry in Welsh and in English, on his political and Unitarian involvements, on the reasons for the durability of his single-handed expansion of the Welsh bardic canon, and on some of his associates and antagonists. And few readers will engage with this handsome prefatory volume without having their sense of Iolo Morganwg and his culture challenged and extended.

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