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reads
Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802
(Oxford University Press, 2013)
edited by Fiona Stafford

LYRICAL BALLADS CONTINUES TO HOLD AN UNRIVALLED FASCINATION for readers and literary scholars interested in the period and this new edition, edited by Fiona Stafford and which includes for the first time both the 1798 and the 1802 editions in their entirety, is yet further evidence of this. It is the latest in a very long line of editions of the book published as a separate title. Four editions were of course published in Wordsworth's lifetime between 1798 and 1805. About twenty scholarly editions have been published since 1890, not including the numerous school editions published on either side of the Atlantic and not counting Bruce Graver and Ron Tetreault's scholarly electronic edition on Romantic Circles. Has any other single, non-collective and non-selective volume of poems received such devoted attention from publishers? One thinks only of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and Blake's *Songs* as other possible contenders.

It is worth reflecting for a moment on the reasons for the attraction this title has for publishers and readers. One reason must lie in the rise of English Literature as a subject. Every emerging academic discipline needs to plot its outline map and in the late nineteenth century the year 1798, with its suggestion of 1789, the date of the French Revolution, provided a convenient starting point for modern poetry. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* to be published after the death of Coleridge and Wordsworth was edited by a Professor of Literature, Edward Dowden, who taught at Trinity College Dublin. He chose the 1798 edition, and it appeared in 1890. A further attraction of the title lies in its bibliographical complexity, of interest to Victorian bibliophiles in that great age of collectors, and of continuing interest in a modern golden age of Romanticist textual studies. Nevertheless, surely a vital element in the special place this title has in the affections of many generations of readers and scholars is because in reading *Lyrical Ballads* as a discrete text rather than as a series of individual poems scattered throughout collected and selected editions of Wordsworth or Coleridge we feel somehow that we are encountering the verse as did their contemporaries. The title shares with such volumes as Browning's *Men and Women*, Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*, or Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* a sense of perennial excitement and freshness. Hazlitt first heard these poems read aloud from manuscript in the summer of 1798 on the lawn in front of Alfoxden House and later likened the experience to 'the turning up of the fresh soil'. This, we tell ourselves, is what we too can feel if we return to the earliest editions.

For many, the first edition of 1798 remains the urtext, the real thing, in its anonymity, its extraordinary mixture of registers and genres, and in its uncompromising strangeness. As Michael Mason pointed out in the

introduction to his 1992 Longman edition, there are really two, and only two, different versions of *Lyrical Ballads*: 1798 and the rest. The early modern editions generally favoured 1798. Edward Dowden in 1890, Thomas Hutchinson in 1897 and Harold Littledale in 1911 as well as Noel Douglas in his 1926 facsimile all chose the 1798 version with only George Sampson's 1903 edition providing the 1805 version as an alternative.

The 1960's saw the expansion of Higher Education and three new student editions. RL Brett and AR Jones's 1963 Routledge edition aimed to provide a 'practical' rather than a variorum edition for use in university teaching. For the first time they presented both the 1798 edition along with the second volume only of the 1800 edition, with variant readings from 1802 and 1805. Thus, with a bit of ingenuity and effort, all the texts from all versions could be comprehended within a single volume. This was something new and this edition held its own for nearly fifty years. WJB Owen's superb 1967 Oxford edition of the 1798 version replaced Littledale's lightly edited 1911 Oxford edition. Its combination of scrupulous scholarship and unobtrusive omniscience is unrivalled and it remains in many ways the best edition of the 1798 version. (OUP has, unaccountably, allowed it to go out of print.) 1969 saw Derek Roper's edition of the 1805 version published by Collins. Thus by the end of the decade *Lyrical Ballads* had been presented anew in each of its various guises with the single exception of the 1802 revision.

The pace slowed somewhat until 1992. Then two major publishing projects, the Cornell Wordsworth and Longman's Annotated English Texts, both gave birth to a *Lyrical Ballads* in the same year. The former is of course unchallenged in its treatment of the text of the poems by Wordsworth, and the editorial matter is comprehensive and authoritative. However, it is a reference work rather than a reading text and, naturally, for a series devoted to Wordsworth, publishes the poems by Coleridge only in an appendix. The thrust of modern Romantic period scholarship and of the Cornell Wordsworth project in particular was towards the earliest versions of texts. Thus Michael Mason was flying in the face of current thinking in choosing the 1805 version for his 1992 Longman edition, but was reflecting Wordsworth's own clearly expressed and uncompromising views about the importance of a text based on the author's final corrections. Whatever one's views on this issue of texts, no one could challenge the intelligence, scholarship and integrity of Mason's edition, which has possibly the best introduction and the most detailed, full and helpful notes of any currently available.

The rise of New Historicism led to at least two very interesting new American editions, which emphasise extensive contextual material rather than commentary on the poems. The New Riverside edition of 2002 edited by William Richey and Daniel Robinson is entitled *Lyrical Ballads and Related Writings* and of its nearly 500 pages less than a 100 are devoted to the text of the 1798 edition, the reminder consisting of a very generous selection of contextual material, taking the student deep into the period. A distinctive feature is the amount of contemporary verse published, including a section

consisting of poems written in direct response to the book.

Michael Gamer's and Dahlia Porter's 2008 Broadview edition for the first time makes available both the entire 1798 volume alongside both volumes of the 1800 edition, which allows one to compare with ease these fundamentally different editions. The aim is 'transparency' so that the reader and student can more easily understand the process whereby the first edition was expanded into the 1800 edition. There is a wonderful sense of spaciousness about this edition with its textual completeness unhampered by concerns about duplication, its generous margins and its profuse and imaginative selection of contextual material, including maps. Its distinctive strength is its emphasis on the process of publication and the ways in which the business of publishing impacted on both the poetry and its authors. In the numerous appendices nearly every letter, source or related writing one has ever patiently had to look up oneself is published, along with numerous others one had never thought of, all with helpful annotation. Production standards are high and I imagine that this edition is now very widely used in North America.

So, finally we come to the volume under review. What does it have to offer in such a crowded marketplace? Fiona Stafford in her note on the text lays out her stall: 'This edition is designed to allow readers to compare the first and third editions, and so any additions and revisions by the poets after 1802 have not been incorporated….' Thus it prints both the 1798 and the 1802 *Lyrical Ballads* complete, preserving the integrity of the original volumes by printing the original notes and prefaces in the same positions as that in which they first appeared. If one wishes, therefore, one can read through both versions continuously and in their entirety, from the 1798 'Advertisement' to Wordsworth's endnotes on *The Brothers* and *Michael*, without any editorial interference or intervention whatsoever. In this it differs from the Broadview edition. In fact the World's Classics volume encourages an emphasis on the reading of the actual poems rather than of accompanying contextual and editorial material. The excellent explanatory notes are printed at the back of the book rather than at the foot of the page, leaving the page as a reading text rather than as a study text. Notes on individual poems are generally fuller than in the Broadview, partly because Fiona Stafford includes the relevant Fenwick notes rather than printing them separately as a continuous prose work in an appendix, as in the Broadview. Contextual material is sparing, consisting only of a list of Coleridge's 1817 glosses to *The Ancient Mariner*, the 1801 correspondence between Wordsworth and Charles James Fox and the 1802 exchange of letters with John Wilson. These letters are included in order to underline Fiona Stafford's emphasis on what she contends is the distinctive organising principle of the 1802 edition. Her case for the 1802 edition, never before republished, rests on the contention that it marks a clarification, expansion and culmination of the 1800 edition. This, she argues, is indicated clearly by the insertion of the new word 'Pastoral' into the subtitle of the 1802 edition: *Lyrical Ballads with Pastoral and Other Poems in Two Volumes* together with an additional Latin epigraph quoted from Quintilian on the title

page about the true source of eloquence. This lies in emotion rather than in command of a special language or poetic diction, thereby enabling 'the uneducated' to express themselves forcefully when moved. Both these changes to the title page aimed to draw attention to pastoral poems such as *The Brothers* and *Michael*, both mentioned in Wordsworth's letter of 14 January 1801 to Fox accompanying a complimentary copy of the book, and both changes convey Wordsworth's maturing views on the proper role of the Poet. This is a theme on which he further elaborated in his significant additions to the 1800 'Preface' and in his new 'Appendix On Poetic Diction', both written for the 1802 edition. Although Fiona Stafford does not say so, it is also true that the not insignificant re-ordering of the poems in the 1802 version, the deletion of two poems and the revisions to some of the texts provide further evidence of Wordsworth's thinking after the appearance of the 1800 version. Having made these changes, he never really shifted his position, and the final 1805 edition, the fourth and last, is virtually identical to that of its 1802 predecessor; no further substantive changes were deemed necessary.

Fiona Stafford's detailed and very readable introduction develops her case for the distinctive quality of the 1802 edition. She also narrates very clearly and sensitively the process by which the 1798 and later editions came to be written and published, rooting this process in Wordsworth's life experience and relationships and in his developing understanding of his role as a poet rather than in the literary marketplace. 'By 1802, Wordsworth had come to understand that being a 'poet' was not a question of getting published and receiving favourable reviews, but of possessing a certain cast of mind and a heart open to the astonishing revelations of the everyday.'

In comparing the Broadview edition with this new one from Oxford one sees perhaps the different traditions of British and American literary scholarship and academic publishing. In brief, the first is more readerly, while the second is more encyclopedic. Both these editions are excellent of their kind. Fiona Stafford's seemingly slighter edition is marked by taste, tact, economy and scrupulous scholarship. It is smaller, lighter, 200 pages shorter, and easier to handle and read; better for the pocket, handbag or backpack certainly, and more affordable and more easily available in the UK. It is an excellent all-purpose edition for any reader or student, and includes all of the poems and prose ever published under the title *Lyrical Ballads* while retaining the integrity of two of the original editions. The Broadview edition is focused around a clear critical position and is generous to the point of luxuriousness; its appendices are virtually a library in themselves. This edition is ideal for reference or for the postgraduate seminar room, if somewhat too bulky for the pocket. But why choose? This new Oxford World's Classics edition, by publishing the 1802 text in its entirety for the first time in a modern edited version, plugs a last remaining gap. This makes it a mandatory purchase for the completist, who now has access to good modern versions of each of the four original editions of *Lyrical Ballads* to set beside a variety of editions of the plural texts of *The Prelude*. Textual instability, it seems, is alive and well.