Bruce Graver[1]

reads

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude Newly Edited from the Manuscripts and Fully Illustrated in Color*

(David R. Godine and Oxford University Press, 2016)

edited by James Engell and Michael D. Raymond

JAMES ENGELL AND MICHAEL D. RAYMOND have produced a new edition of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, aimed at what we used to call the common reader, and claiming to be "the first fully illustrated edition of" Wordsworth's autobiographical masterpiece. It is a beautiful book, an oblong quarto (in size, if not in foliation) with over 130 full-color illustrations, most of them from the watercolor collections of the Yale Center for British Art, the Tate Gallery, and the Wordsworth Trust. The colors of the reproductions are usually good, and the book design, the work of Howard L. Gralla, is splendid. The book is also surprisingly affordable, retailing for £20 in the UK (and considerably less on Amazon) and equivalently priced in the US, although currently out of stock at the publisher and selling for absurd prices from third-party dealers (don't be snookered).

The editors begin with an introduction that is both clearly written and clearly aimed at a non-professional audience. There they stress the importance of place for Wordsworth (implicitly justifying an illustrated edition of his works), as well as the ways in which early memories help to build and form character. In the text itself, there is a sparing use of footnotes, usually glosses on words that Wordsworth uses in an unusual way, again with an eye to the general reader: for instance, words like "awful" and phrases like "charnel houses" are glossed, as well as potentially ambiguous pronoun references. In addition to footnotes, there is a running interpretive gloss in the left margins which at its best is helpful in providing context for ideas expressed obliquely in the poem. But it does occasionally, and inevitably, remind one of the glosses in Coleridge's "Rime," including some of the ones that are less than necessary (the Platonic Constantinopolitan Michael Psellus, anyone?). Engell may be smiling about these, as Coleridge did himself, but sometimes the glosses seem to verge on parody. In any case, I don't believe the poem needs this kind of intervention, however much fun writing them may have been.

For their texts, the editors have chosen the 1805 *Prelude* rather than the text the Wordsworth family published after the poet's death in 1850. In the acknowledgements, previous editors of the 1805 poem, alive and dead, are thanked generously, although it may be worth noting that M. H. Abrams did not technically edit the poem (as he himself would admit, were he here to do so)—he supplied the selected essays in the now old and seriously outdated Norton Critical Edition. In explaining their editorial practice, the editors state that "this is not a definitive scholarly edition, but one for common pleasure

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and student use." Consequently, they have made adjustments in spelling (for consistency) and punctuation, including the elimination of 'd in preterit forms of verbs: "exclaimed" rather than "exclaim'd" (the manuscript reading). I compared a few hundred lines of their edition with those of de Selincourt and Reed, and found that, in general, Engell and Raymond follow de Selincourt's punctuation more closely than Reed's, the latter of which is more directly reflective of the manuscripts.

The book ends with more information directed at the nonprofessional or undergraduate reader unfamiliar with Wordsworth, his times, and scholarship about the poem. There is a useful chronology, beginning with the birth of Wordsworth's father, and ending with 2016 when "*The Prelude* (1805) is fully illustrated for the first time." The gap in the chronology between 1926, when de Selincourt first published the early version, and 2016 is rather glaring: I believe some rather hard work on the poem was done by a number of Cornell editors, and their omission here is a bit awkward. There is also a very short list of scholarly works on *The Prelude*, a list (not comprehensive) of illustrated editions of Wordsworth's poetry, including early photo-illustrated collections, and a list of scholarly editions of *The Prelude*, including the new digital Wordsworth project, undertaken as a joint enterprise by Sally Bushell, Jeff Cowton, and Richard Light.

So this is a book we all should own. It looks as good on the shelf as on the coffee table, it's affordable (and will be even more affordable when the paperback edition appears), and it's a pleasure to read. I think the question all of us will ask is whether to adopt it for the classroom. For those of us in North America, that will depend in part on David Godine's ability to print copies in sufficient numbers, which seems a challenge at the moment. The decision will also depend on whether we want to present the poem as a stable, fixed thing, complete with pictures, or whether the textual destabilization that began with de Selincourt and was brought into full flower by Stephen Parrish and the Cornell editors is essential to our understanding of Wordsworth and this his greatest work.