

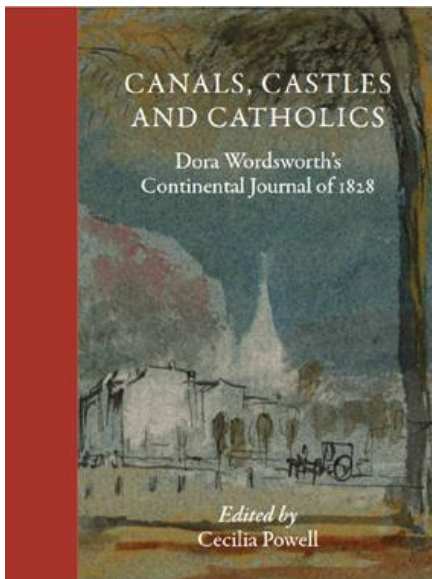
Hannah Britton

reads

*Canals, Castles and Catholics:
Dora Wordsworth's Continental Journal of 1828*

edited by Cecilia Powell¹

AT A QUARTER TO FIVE IN THE MORNING, on 21 June 1828, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Dora Wordsworth (the poet's twenty-three-year-old daughter) left London in the pouring rain on route to Ostend and a six week's tour of the Low Countries and the Rhine Valley. At Margate, Dora wrote, 'the sun broke out a fresh breeze sprung and on we went at a brisk rate', before the motion of the boat compelled her to 'shut [her] eyes to the glorious waves' (81) until they arrived at port in Belgium. Unusually for the Wordsworths, the idea of the trip was concocted and plans executed in a matter of days. '[O]ur Vagabonds', as Mary Wordsworth describes them to Edward Quillinan on 23 June, 'have played us all a pretty trick by flying off in this way' (37). An exultant sense of being in motion



threads its way throughout Dora's journal of this tour. The original plan that she should be left behind in England, to remain in London or follow her mother to Leicestershire, swiftly abandoned, her delight at being abroad for the first time is self-evident. The reader is plunged into the matter of the tour from the journal's opening page and carried along by carriage, steam-boat, barge, and pony as Dora records in detail where they went and how they got there. Dora was a committed chronicler of the tour, including entries in the journal for each day, which expand and contract depending on how much the party crammed into their itinerary and how far along the route they travelled. It is notable

that the entries for two periods of rest taken in Godesburg, at the palatial summer residence of Charles and Eliza Aders, friends to both poets, are spartan in comparison to the rest of the journal, many composed of a mere handful of lines, except when they walk or ride out to explore the surrounding countryside. Dora was grateful for the opportunity to rest on what was, at times, an exhausting tour for someone of her fragile health. Yet there is a compulsion in the journal to not stay still, the exuberant vivacity of a young woman determined to grasp each opportunity to do and see more.

¹ Cecilia Powell, ed., *Canals, Castles and Catholics: Dora Wordsworth's Continental Journal of 1828* (Grasmere: The Wordsworth Trust, 2021).

The journal has distinct rhythms to the writing, which correspond to Dora's physical experience of being in different states of motion. When travelling by carriage or boat, the landscape is captured in flashes and moments, connected by dashes that seem to thread their way through the text like the rivers and roads on which Dora finds herself: 'Town beautiful vanishing from our sight—whilst in front exquisite views open upon us Walls of rock on each side assuming grotesque forms—Now a Tower, now a Pillar—now round, now square, sometimes crowned with trees but often bare and jagged—' (98). This edition, to the credit of its editor, Cecelia Powell, is a faithful transcription of the journal—the next best thing to having the manuscript before one's own eyes—retaining Dora's spelling and punctuation, her corrections and other markers of her handwriting. As Powell notes, there are few full stops in the journal, Dora preferring a dash or nothing at all, which recreates in the text a sense of immediacy or speed.² Dora occasionally drops into the present tense, unconsciously drawing the reader within the scene of composition—'Again the river is gliding' (96)—or with a conscious sense of the act of writing: 'To the Hôtel de Ville by moonlight [—] as I know I could not give the faintest idea of the grandeur of this Square . . . I will hasten on to our Inn' (92).

Dora writes her journal for, and to, a known audience: her family. And to her mother, aunts, and brother Willy, in particular, who are each addressed in the journal's pages. Mary and Dorothy are most often at the forefront of Dora's mind, in part because this tour, like so many undertaken by the Wordsworths, is an act of revisiting. It shares ground with sections of the long continental tour taken by William, Mary, and Dorothy in 1820, during which both women kept notebooks that were written up into 'fair copy' journals on the travellers' return.³ Dorothy's 'neatly penned Memorial' is dedicated to Dora, while Mary's journal was 'commenced at D[orothy]'s request' and 'continued at W^m's desire; & from the feeling that my Daughter, & perhaps her Brothers might one day find pleasure especially if should they ever have the good fortune to trace our steps, in recognizing objects their Mother had seen' (47). Walking and writing in the footsteps and pen strokes of her mother and aunt, Dora does find pleasure in this shared ground, as in this moment from 2 August: 'Father desired me to look back . . . & there Mother I saw the Cathedral at the end of the Vista as you did—& can well imagine your delight at this your first introduction to it: & my farewell' (164). Yet she also takes pleasure in knowing and writing of these places for herself—her purpose in the journal is, as Pamela Woof describes it in the opening essay, 'to put into words things as she saw them' (17). We see through the eyes of a lively, curious, thoughtful young women.

² See Powell's 'Editorial Note' to the text of the journal (78–79).

³ The 1820 tour was itself a retracing of the route taken by William Wordsworth on his 1790 walking tour with Robert Jones, although this time in reverse. The 1828 tour also revisits parts of the tour taken by William and Mary Wordsworth through the Low Countries in 1823—during which Mary again kept a journal.

Like her father, Dora is at her finest when writing lyrically about landscape or in recording encounters with individuals in the course of their travels. Yet she is also a remarkably playful writer, not only recording amusing anecdotes (usually with Wordsworth as the subject) for the pleasure of her family, but also finding room for fun in her descriptions of what she sees. During one boat ride, for example, she writes of how ‘the rocks & the fields play at battledore & shuttlecock with each other’ (98), imaginatively illustrating the way in which the features of the landscape alternate on either side of the riverbank. As so often in the journal, it conjures the sense of her own movement—her head turning left and right as if she is a spectator to this match. She enters in with gusto to the full experience of being a tourist, recording the inns and hotels, the weather, the strange streets and customs of foreign cities and people, and collecting memories and souvenirs, place names and famous views like many other English sightseers following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.⁴ Dora can be poetic, at times prosaic, but her playfulness is always bubbling up through the journal’s pages.

Dora renders their party of three: ‘Travellers in search of the picturesque’ (101). It is a knowing glance at the style and route of their tour, but it also foregrounds an important aspect of her experience. Dora was not only making a detailed record of their travels in words; having studied drawing from the age of eleven, she was also a talented artist, making numerous sketches of scenes that captivated her. We see this figure of the artist in the journal’s pages as Dora delights in the chance framing of the landscape by natural or architectural features, as she describes scenes that make ‘a pretty Picture’ (119) or laments a missed opportunity to capture a scene in a sketch. The act of sketching and the object of the sketch animate the journal—they retain a sense of rapidity or fleetingness: ‘I ran down to the river’s edge & took this little sketch’ (96). And yet these moments of sketching—both in the sense of capturing scenes with her pencil and conjuring a view through words on the page—are also where Dora lingers. References to ‘this sketch’ recur throughout the journal, Dora evidently intending for the object of her description to be seen alongside her writing, yet sadly, none of these sketches are extant. The journal manuscript is an intriguing textual object in this respect. As Powell observes, it both is and is not a fair copy, existing somewhere between the ‘on the spot’ notes Dora kept during the course of the tour and a finished account. Like the missing sketches, aside from a few pages of financial calculations made after the trip, none of Dora’s other writings from the tour—either the notes she made or the letters she sent home while travelling—are known to survive. It is an unfinished text—with gaps left for the names of paintings or places that Dora did not

⁴ Like many tourists of the day, the party stopped at Waterloo to visit the battle field. Dora observes the commercialisation of this site, where there are ‘Men & boys hanging around the door offering for-sale bullets, Eagles & other relics found on the field’ (92)—souvenirs which the Wordsworths do not buy due to William’s frugality rather than lack of interest. Yet this image of the souvenir trade is set alongside Dora’s collection of a different kind of ‘memento’; she records having ‘picked some exquisite wild Flowers which were “mocking the Corse beneath”’, adapting a line from Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Adonais* to describe this strange meeting of life and death. That she picks the flowers suggests a sense of both the natural erasure of, and the instinct to preserve, that which is buried here.

record in the moment and which do not get filled.⁵ Blank sheets of paper sit within the pages of the journal, where the two poems Wordsworth wrote during the tour were to be inscribed. And there is a rather wonderful pencil addition to one entry, written in another hand—identified by Powell as Mary Wordsworth—which reads, ‘fill this up if you please’ (96).

‘Filling up’ the gaps and blank spaces of the journal is part of what this edition seeks to do. The text of the journal sits at the centre of what is a rich scholarly resource, as well as a beautiful object. The journal itself takes up around fifty pages of a book which numbers more than two hundred. These pages are given over to two contextualising essays, helpful commentary on each daily entry of the journal, and additional material that relates to the tour. This includes the poems that Wordsworth and Coleridge wrote as a result of it (limited though they were) and extracts from two other tour narratives, the writers of whom each spent multiple days during the tour as part of the company.⁶ Woof’s opening essay gives a biographical account of Dora, illuminating her character and experiences for those both familiar and unfamiliar with them. Like Dora the artist, capturing scenes in words and pencil, Woof creates distinct portraits of Dora at different times in her life, each of which are drawn together in the later text of the journal itself. In Woof’s sketches, Dora appears as a spirited, wayward child—known by the family aged six as ‘the Panther of the Wilderness’ (1)—a devoted companion, reader, and scribe to her father, an adventurous horsewoman and one who must ride in pursuit of health, a fragile semi-invalid and a devoted nurse of others, determined explorer and home-loving Lakeland girl. She is a captivating mix of opposites—as a child, her Aunt Dorothy describes her as having ‘so much elegance combined with so much wildness’, and it is a description that suits the writer of the journal, too. If Woof’s essay situates the journal within the context of Dora’s life, Powell’s situates the tour within social, historical, and personal contexts, exploring its genesis, destination and aftermath, its principal characters, and the role Dora plays within it. Powell’s interests as an art historian are manifest in the almost fifty illustrations included in this edition, most of which reproduce paintings and engravings made by contemporaries of the Wordsworths and Coleridge during their own tours of the continent. In vivid colour, brush stroke and line, these illustrations are the counterpart to Dora’s lyric descriptions of the principal sights of the tour and go some way to filling up the spaces left empty by her own missing sketches.

When Mary Wordsworth concluded her 1820 tour journal, she described it as ‘these my imperfect notices’. It is an apt phrase for Dora’s journal, too—

⁵ During their passage by boat along the Rhine, these gaps become infrequent—perhaps as Dora gains in confidence as the tour progresses, or perhaps simply because she was afforded a greater luxury of time and space to write or to consult the guidebook. Scenes do not fly past with such speed or jolting as when in a stagecoach or carriage.

⁶ The writers are Thomas Colley Grattan and Julian Charles Young. Powell includes a brief discussion of their tour narratives in her introductory essay to the journal (50–51), noting Dora’s marginal place in their accounts (particularly Young’s), which, unlike Dora’s own record, focus intently on the two poets. Their studied renderings of the experience of travel with Wordsworth and Coleridge are useful here as a foil to the fresh immediacy of Dora’s own writing.

unfinished as it is, though glittering with thought and observation. The continental journal of 1828 is a distinctive record of what Dora saw, felt, and shared on her first trip to foreign shores. It is not occupied with the thoughts and sensibilities of 'the Poets', as she terms Wordsworth and Coleridge when she wants to distinguish between their amusingly lofty response to the landscape and her own more down to earth experience, nor with her 'Tutors', whose aims are to educate in art and the art of travel. There is evident love and respect for her father as both companion and poet—though she alludes to many writers in the course of the tour, none appear so frequently as Wordsworth, nor are so often allowed the privilege of the last word in her journal entries. Yet the great Romantics hover, for the most part, at the edges of her text, figures of interest in her own picturesque composition. Like Mary, Dora expected the journal's readership to consist only of her family and close friends, although unlike her more famous journal-writing aunt and namesake, she would see another journal published in her lifetime.⁷ One of the single greatest contributions of this edition is that it brings Dora's own words to wider readership. It matters not just what is preserved, but what is accessible. In publishing the journal, the Wordsworth Trust has added once more to our sense of the singular women in William Wordsworth's orbit. This is a playful, lyric, laughing voice that deserves to be enjoyed on its own terms.

⁷ Dora Wordsworth, *Journal of a Few Months' Residence in Portugal, and Glimpses of the South of Spain*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1847).