Pfau, Thomas, *Edwin Stein's*

Edwin Stein. *Wordsworth's Art of Allusion*. University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988. Pp. xi+262. $23.50.

The allusive quality of Wordsworth's poetry has frequently been remarked by critics of all schools, yet much of this discussion has been consigned to the incidental, if significant, realm of footnotes (e.g., the Norton edition of *The Prelude*) or to a few parenthetical notations. With his comprehensive study of Wordsworth's allusive poetic practice, Edwin Stein not only wishes to save literary allusion in Wordsworth from being treated as a more or less sublime textual exception, but his project is simultaneously aimed at redefining Wordsworth's place in English literary history. According to Stein, there exists, in between the "trivial echoes" and the "preemptive allusions of a power approaching the Miltonic," a vast number of allusive moments "that fall between these extremes [and] have not always been appreciated" (39). Stein claims to have amassed some 1300 allusive moments, of which 550 refer us to Milton, some hundred to Shakespeare, while other popular intertexts are those of the Bible (40), Gray (50), Spenser (40), Thomson and Coleridge (35). Close scrutiny of these allusive or echoing moments, Stein argues in an oblique ("comparative") allusion to Bloom's theory of poetic influence, may allow us "to shift the focus from Wordsworth's struggle with certain great precursors to the Wordsworthian text as a kind of linguistic system built up out of previous systems, or subsystems, through the variable process of echoing" (2).

In fact, the question of Wordsworth's place in English literary history informs the first half of Stein's book which discusses a variety of "Motives for Borrowing." However, it is precisely with this expansive, potentially all-inclusive approach that Stein's initial project of reading Wordsworth as "a kind of linguistic system" progressively fades out of sight. Beginning with his discussion of Wordsworth's "Remembrance of Collins" and its intertexts in Thomson, Collins and, more distant, Milton and Pope, Stein restricts his interpretations exclusively to the level of thematics. Such a position allows him to read the perennial Wordsworthian issue of continuity and discontinuity strictly as an established literary *topos* which, in turn, is itself taken as evidence for an overarching continuity in English literary history. The restriction of intertextual relations to thematics, which is prepared for early on in Stein's book—"the same principle of resonance is at work . . . whether the poem responds to nature or the poetic tradition" (9)—causes Stein to approach Wordsworth's allusions and echoes exclusively as relations between the respective *referent* of text and intertext. According to Stein, such referents break down into two distinct categories: those presumably

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intended by the poet *for the reader* (i.e., ideas) and those intended (consciously or unconsciously) by the poet *for himself,* what Stein calls the "thickening of a mood" or of an "atmosphere." According to Stein, this second aspect of allusion is designed to effect the "full internalization of speech" (116).

Wishing to expand our understanding of the extent to which Wordsworth was immersed in the poetic idiom of Miltonic and post-Augustan poetry, Stein distinguishes between "comparative" and "assimilative" allusion. Such a distinction is partially analogous to the one between an intentional and an unconscious allusion. Although justly hesistant about our ability to discriminate between levels of awareness in the process of poetic production, Stein generally speaks of *allusion* where the operation appears to be conscious while referring to unconscious resonances as *echoes* (115 f.). Deriving from the Renaissance notion of heuristic imitation, Wordsworth's comparative allusions often serve his wish "to shape and resolve a discontinuity" (122). Such allusion is often explicit, and it frequently surfaces in the context of an experience of the sublime.

The assimilative mode of allusion, or rather echoing, which according to Stein derives from the Renaissance mode of *contaminatio* or eclectic imitation, proves a much more elusive species. In examining the "Principles of Wordsworthian Allusiveness," Stein continues to remove the phenomenon of assimilative allusion from its inherently textual foundation. Rather than developing a somewhat verifiable linguistic, textual paradigm for such allusion, Stein insists that assimilative allusion seeks "to internalize poetic speech" (118): "When the assimilative mode dominates, we can only perceive the containing form by responding to the voice buried in it, for it is a feeling structure, and feeling is the informing principle of tone, mood, atmosphere, utterance-in-process" (119). While dispensing of the traditionally noted, comparative mode of allusion in some twenty pages, Stein devotes almost three times as much space to his discussion of assimilative allusion, in its moralizing, anthropologizing, naturalizing, and poeticizing moods.

It is often hard to follow Stein's argumentation here, such as when he establishes allusive links between Wordsworth and Drayton, Sir John Davies, Jeremy Taylor, Bartram and others. Frequently Stein himself circumvents the absence of any clear verbal link between text and intertext by stating that "the links are all atmospheric" (148), that we are presented with a "loose rewriting" (149), that "the echo . . . is slight" (148), that "the echo simply thickens the atmosphere" (155), or that "these parallels might be explained as coincidences" (188). Specifically in the case of rather obscure writers, Stein's notations of allusive or echoing interplay seem irrelevant, even if a verbal proximity could be

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established. For already the romantic intellectuals and hermeneuticians (e.g., Coleridge, Schleiermacher) and, of course, Wordsworth himself—professedly occupied with reshaping his contemporary culture of literary sensibility—recognized that meaning (understood as the linguistic self-definition of an individuality) can only be conceived as a relation between an individual utterance and a presupposed *communal* discursive "sphere." In short, a properly *linguistic* paradigm for allusion, which Stein never develops, would make it readily apparent that the incorporation of inherited poetic signs (understood as the unity of S_r and S_d) into Wordsworth's own structure of signifiers (Wordsworth's poems) can produce meaning (i.e., become a *new* signified) only if the reader recognizes this combination as such.

Yet given the frequent absence of any direct verbal continuity between Wordsworthian text and its purported "source," such recognition remains highly improbable. And even where such continuity can be established at a verbal level, the source remains frequently so obscure as to remain both unrecognizable and thus irrelevant for Wordsworth's audience. Stein himself is forced to admit that assimilative echoes—if read in a strictly thematic vain—remain uncomfortably devoid of interpretive significance, and indeed he wonders "whether this resonance [i.e., assimilative] has any special value, and what that value is?" (115). Discussing an echo of Sir John Davies in Wordsworth's "The Power of Music," he readily confines the function of the echo to "fill[ing] out the gestalt of a mood, not to imply a confrontation of meanings" (150).

One of his answers to this nagging question concerning the relevance of assimilative allusion involves the transference of his loosely psychological description onto Wordsworth, such as when he claims that features of Augustan poetry "return upon [Wordsworth] as emblems in the act of composition" (181). On the same page, such a visitation of the Wordsworth composing "There was a Boy" is traced to Michael Bruce's *Lochleven*. Yet no attempt is made to elucidate the significance of the intertext for the production and/or reception of Wordsworth's poetry while elsewhere, after tracing Wordsworth's "corresponding mild creative breeze" to Thomson's "Autumn," Stein is forced to admit that such an allusion amounts to little more than "a commonplace" (201). Indeed, his tenuous notation that the various "minor talents" of the post-Augustan literary scene may have offered to Wordsworth "a free field for casual, mood-inspired plunder" (189) which often resulted in little more than "merely 'poeticizing' decorations" (205), brings to light a related, though more serious, problem with his study. It concerns the striking absence of a genuine interpretive effort that would seek to highlight the significance of a given allusion or echo within the poem's

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own performance. Wherever he makes such an effort, Stein often takes recourse to highly unified and traditional interpretations of a given poem, rather than trying to reassess the validity of these interpretations on the basis of his own discovery of a more complex textual profile in Wordsworth's poetry.

One such instance involves his reading of "Resolution and Independence." After admitting once again to the "tenuous" quality of the link between Wordsworth's poem and Burns' "The Cotter's Saturday Night," Stein merely observes that "Burns' celebration of rustic life . . . emphasizes the kind of simplicity and ability to make do that impress Wordsworth in the old man." To speak of the old man's "humble-sublime capacity of endurance" (187) not only ignores the self-deprecating closing lines ("I could have laughed to scorn myself . . . ") but also the fact that the legend of Burns—whose experiment with the rustic ended with his starving to death—is already assessed critically earlier on in the poem as resulting "in despondency and madness." Significantly enough, some of the stronger interpretive instances are found in Stein's section on "The Role of Echo in Wordsworth's Revisionary Poetics," a section that is less concerned with the discussion of concrete allusive moments. Philologically sound and endowed with a wealth of valuable poetic sources and traditions—often overlooked in contemporary romantic studies—Stein's book adds especially to our understanding of romanticism's and especially Wordsworth's place in English literary history. Now that the highly intricate field of those poetic articulations which find some resonance in the text of Wordsworth has been mapped out, it becomes an imperative to properly *read* Wordsworth's allusive practice as an integral moment in his poetic—that is, intrinsically *textual*—self-creation.

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Colin Campbell. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987. Pp. 301. $24.95

The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism, though "not a detailed scholarly work," is "a broad-ranging and fundamentally speculative attempt," i.e., an essay (13), and, though no book-length essay should be excused from scholarly industry and though Colin Campbell is no Montaigne (he is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University

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