

Desperately Seeking Coleridge

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“You appear to me not to have understood the nature of my body & mind—. Partly from ill-health, & partly from an unhealthy & reverie-like vividness of Thoughts, & (pardon the pedantry of the phrase) a diminished Impressibility from Things, my ideas, wishes, & feelings are to a diseased degree disconnected from motion & action. In plain & natural English, I am a dreaming & therefore an indolent man. I am a Starling self-incaged, & always in the Moulting, & my whole Note is Tomorrow, & tomorrow, & tomorrow. The same causes, that have robbed me to so great a degree of the self-impelling self-directing Principle, have deprived me too of the due powers of Resistances to Impulses from without. If I might so say, I am, as an acting man, a creature of mere Impact. ‘I will’ & ‘I will not’ are phrases, both of them equally, of rare occurrence in my dictionary. — This is the Truth — I regret it, & in the consciousness of this Truth I lose a larger portion of Self-estimation than those, who know me imperfectly, would easily believe — /I evade the sentence of my own Conscience by no quibbles of self-adulation; I ask for Mercy indeed on the score of my ill-health; but I confess, that this very ill-health is as much an effect as a cause of this want of steadiness & self-command; and it is for mercy that I ask, not for justice. — To apply all this to the present case [. . .] there are those, who have believed that Vanity is my ruling Passion. They do not know me. — As an Author, at all events, I have neither Vanity nor ambition — I think meanly of all, that I have done; and if ever I hope proudly of my future Self, this Hot Fit is uniformly followed & punished by Languor, & Despondency—or rather, by lazy & unhoping Indifference.”

—Coleridge to William Godwin, as an attempted apology for not attending a little party, 22 January 1802 (Griggs 2:781-83)

“ . . . a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” No, this is not someone summing up Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s personality. But it could be. [1] More intriguingly, it could be Coleridge describing himself. Coleridge could often see his better and worse self, and he often seemed to specialize in the latter. He found himself an ever-intriguing topic, turning self-analysis into

metaphysics. Just in the letter to Godwin, above, he covers all the bases of incapacity: weak emotional disposition, hypersensitivity, unhealthy thoughts, a too-vivid imagination, and lack of self-control; feelings of disconnection, indolence, inconsistency, aimlessness, impulsivity, insecurity, unsteadiness, laziness, indifference, guilt, and despondency. All of this under the category of “ill-health,” though Coleridge is uncertain if his behaviour and character is a cause or an effect. Poor Coleridge.

Someone all too aware of his creative and intellectual gifts, who also often expressed a good measure of self-directed despair and frustration as side-effect of those gifts; a man who spent much of his life trying, quite literally, to gather his ever-digressive thoughts and channel his diffusive imagination, while fighting loneliness and insecurity that often crept into his unbalanced and sometimes debilitating sensibilities and habits—habits that included not just the bad stuff like opium and alcohol, but also, for him, the equally addictive habits of reading, writing, talking, observing, and thinking. Coleridge could press neither the OFF nor RESET button. At times, the hypocrite; at times, self-deprecating yet aggrandizing; at times, generous then defensive; innocently mirthful for a moment, mysteriously moody a minute later; often manic and hyper-focussed in his work, yet equally listless and slothful, with guilt, his own albatross, somehow always hanging around his neck. A man at times afraid of even falling asleep (Griggs 2:999). Little wonder that Coleridge coined a term—“psycho-somatic”—to describe himself.

Despite these complexities and contradictions, we come back to the obvious: Coleridge was smart—very smart. Too smart, perhaps. That profound, overhanging forehead covered a too-teeming mind, and drooping eyelids and thick lips oddly countered a cluttered, quick, delinquent brilliance. In his 1818 *Lectures on the English Poets*, William Hazlitt—who knew just about everyone important of the age, and was critical of many, including Coleridge—stated that Coleridge was the only person he met “who answered to the idea of a man of genius” (Hazlitt 329).

Coleridge’s friends recognized and often treasured that brilliance and those considerable gifts. On occasion, they even liked to show him off, like some strange, exotic creature. Indeed, he had the ability to be, at times, positively and strangely fascinating. And Coleridge did indeed perform—hearing him preach, lecture, or just in conversation was usually something to behold. Again, Hazlitt in his *Lectures*: “He talked on forever; you wished him to talk on forever” (330). But at too many moments friends also found him thoughtless, demanding, hypersensitive, undisciplined, and unpredictable. As for his unfortunate wife, Sara Fricker, whom he clearly

should not have married (he did so 4 October 1795)—well, she found him mostly absent. Coleridge loved her, though almost exclusively as the caring mother of his children. As one of Coleridge's close (and once closest) friends, Robert Southey, put it in a letter of 9 January 1802, "the fact is no wife could suit Coleridge—he is of all beings the most undomesticated" (Pratt 17). Coleridge had his own take on the particular situation: writing to William Godwin a few weeks after Southey's hyperbolized slam, Coleridge, unable to resist a touch of rhetorical panache, describes his "domestic Discord": "I could not be happy without my children, & could not but be miserable with the mother of them" (Griggs 2:784).

This seems as simple as it is sad. Coleridge calls it "heart-withering." He's stuck, and he knows it. But here's the complication: a few years earlier, in late 1799, another Sara—Sara Hutchinson—shows up as Coleridge's love obsession. But this love for "Asra" (as he called her—"Sara" spelled backwards) was, alas, a love that could not be.

Meanwhile, as we move into 1800, Coleridge begins to jealously witness the emerging happiness of his close friend and quasi-collaborator, William Wordsworth, who is almost certainly looking toward marriage with Asra's sister, Mary Hutchinson. That jealousy perhaps peaks in October 1803, a year after Wordsworth marries Mary: it impossible not to hear Coleridge's envy slide toward mockery driven by resentment when, in a letter, he describes Wordsworth "living wholly among Devotees – having every [sic] the minutest Thing, almost his very Eating & Drinking, done for him by his Sister, or Wife." Coleridge's diagnosis: Wordsworth suffers from "hypochondriacal Fancies" and "Self-involution" (Griggs 2:1013).

But back to Wordsworth's marriage: on the day Mary and Wordsworth exchange vows, 4 October 1802, Coleridge publishes "Dejection. An Ode, Written April 4, 1802"—in a newspaper, no less. It is also the seventh anniversary of his own unfortunate marriage. The Ode movingly and with remarkable control addresses loss and sorrow on both a philosophical and humanizing scale, but the description of being unable to respond to Nature's graces has its roots in a self-pitying yet painful verse letter to Asra, written half a year earlier on the evening of 4 April. But there's a vaguely coded yet purposeful finger-pointing in the publically-declared date that accompanies the Ode's title, as well as something of a compositional lie: the Ode, as it appears on 4 October, is 139 lines long; the earlier verse letter of 4 April is 340 lines. That is, the Ode and the verse letter are obviously related poems, yet seeing what Coleridge does to massage one into the other is both sneaky and artistically exceptional: the shifting addressees in multiple versions of the poem—first

“Sara,” then “William,” then “Edmund,” finally “Lady”—point to Coleridge’s unsettled attempts to control the message, not to mention the complex intertextual response that the verse letter makes to the first four stanzas of what a few years later becomes Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode.” [2] A petty paraphrase of the first version of the verse poem might be, *You, Asra, are my only comforter. You are happy. So are William, Mary, and Dorothy. I’m not. Nature once lifted me with soul-sustaining joy. All seems empty and cold, but the idea of an active imagination throws me for a loop. What am I supposed to do? . . .* But more about these converging circumstances later.

Despite Coleridge’s personal struggles, we have a resume for him that would have done him well on LinkedIn: poet, playwright, pamphleteer, political pundit, publisher, preacher, journalist, philosopher, theologian, lecturer, literary critic, literary historian, translator, reviewer—and a psychologist of sorts, with interests spinning off in all directions, ranging from how plants grow to how clouds form. Myriad-minded; a true polymath; a nonfictional Pangloss.

A terrific example of Coleridge’s rambling range of knowledge—and one that also provides insights into his shaky self-image—takes place in a chance encounter with John Keats, the morning of 11 April 1819. Keats is twenty-three and Coleridge twice his age. At this exact moment, Keats’s poetic talents are bursting—he’s about to write some of the greatest poetry in the English canon, the so-called spring odes, and Keats’s masterfully allusive “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” may be brewing. A few of Keats’s friends know Coleridge quite well, but Keats has not met him, though he is familiar with Coleridge’s poetry and poetic theory. [3] In fact, when crafting his now famous theory of “Negative Capability” in late 1817—“when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason”—Keats does so in light of exemplifying Coleridge as a thinker “incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.” Keats is not completely right (Coleridge’s conceptualizing sometimes thrives on “half knowledge”), but capturing Coleridge’s thought with such assurance fairly points to a sophisticated understanding of the older poet’s work, much of which appears during Keats’s intense years of reading, 1816-1817.

The Keats-Coleridge encounter happens something like this: Keats, walking alone in a lane around Highgate (where Coleridge lives), runs into Coleridge, out walking with a mutual acquaintance, Joseph Henry Green (Keats knows Green through his medical training over 1815-1816; now, in 1819, Green is Coleridge’s amanuensis). Keats senses that it is “agreeable” to join

the two. Keats records the walk in the middle of an extraordinarily journal letter to his brother (George) and sister-in-law in America:

In those two miles he [Coleridge] broached a thousand things—let me see if I can give you a list—Nightingales, Poetry—on Poetical sensation—Metaphysics—Different genera and species of Dreams—Nightmare—a dream accompanied by a sense of touch—single and double touch—A dream related—First and second consciousness—the difference explained between will and Volition—so many metaphysicians from a want of smoking the second consciousness—Monsters—the Kraken—Mermaids—southey believes in them—southeys belief too much diluted—A Ghost story—Good morning—I heard his voice as he came towards me—I heard it as he moved away—I had heard it all the interval—if it may be called so. (Rollins 2:88-89)

Keats is clearly delighted about running into the legendary figure. His account of Coleridge broaching “a thousand things” in the half-hour or so thoroughly, and with some humor, captures both Coleridge’s personality as well as his associative and random spread of thoughts.

Ornithology, poetry, philosophy, psychology, physiology, folklore, the supernatural, mythology, criticism of a friend’s beliefs . . . it’s all there, unplugged and uncensored.

A decade or so after Keats’s death in early 1821, Coleridge twice talks about the encounter. His accounts are a little inconsistent. In one, recorded in Table-Talk for 14 August 1832, Keats is a “loose, slack, and not well-dressed youth” (Coleridge 48); in the other, taken down in December 1830 by John Frere in conversation with Coleridge, Keats is “a young man of a very striking countenance,” and Coleridge says he is “struck by the energy of his manner” (Frere 405-6). Then there’s the matter of duration: walking two miles would take about thirty minutes, while Coleridge records the meeting as lasting “a minute or so” (Coleridge 48). The specificity of what Keats records in his letter suggests that Coleridge’s memory is either flawed or that he prefers not to put on record his two-mile meandering monologue—he was perhaps self-conscious about his famed prolixity. But little matter. What Coleridge claims to remember clearly is Keats departing and then panting back to say, “Let me carry away the memory, Coleridge, of having pressed your hand!” (Coleridge 48). In his other account, he recalls Keats saying something similar: “Mr. Coleridge, allow me the honour of shaking your hand” (Frere 405-6). But there’s more: in both accounts, Coleridge claims that after Keats departs, he tells Green that the handshake forecasts Keats’s death. “There is death in that hand [. . .] yet this was,

I believe, before the consumption showed itself distinctly” (Coleridge 48), he writes. In the other account, he piles it on a little more: “Heavens! When I shook him by the hand there was death!” Asked how he knew, Coleridge answers, “I cannot describe it,” though he did notice some “heat and a dampness in the hand” (Frere 405-6).

Coleridge’s two accounts carry other confusions. But here’s the thing: by the early 1830s, when Coleridge registers the event for posterity and posthumous Keats has a rapidly growing reputation, something is gained by providing the sketch of a struggling young poet fawning before an older, famous literary figure. The cultural imagination of the era nursed the view that Keats’s demise was in part the result of cruel, crippling reviews. (Keats’s supporters started it; Shelley poeticized it; Byron mocked it; many Victorians ate it up.) Coleridge’s psychology: affectively connecting with and celebrating a victim is an artful way to celebrate himself and (in this case) either his empathic or paranormal powers. Thus we could say that the story evolves via Coleridge’s insecure image of himself, in the need to aggrandize his image; that is, Coleridge puts himself, rather than Keats, at the centre of the story—his status, his powers of prognostication, Keats as his fan.

This smallish incident points to why Coleridge’s actions and personality gives us so much to ponder. Figuring Coleridge the private man and Coleridge the public writer is like trying to parse “Kubla Khan”—the road to Xanadu is long, winding, and uneven. But if its reduction we need, we can try angling with a little pathos: behind many of Coleridge’s actions is his desire to be wanted and appreciated. After all, from the beginning, Coleridge is aware that much is expected from him. The effect of this is, of course, vulnerability, with its darker sides of disappointment, failure, and, on occasion, passive-aggressive behavior.

Coleridge did at moments openly wave the flag of his desire for admiration and recognition quite openly, conflating the private man and the public writer. The most important and definable period of flag-waving and backhanded aggrandizement is thoroughly contextualized and probed in Heidi Thomson’s *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper: The ‘Morning Post’ and the Road to Dejection.* Thomson focusses almost exclusively on the period between August 1799 and October 1802, when Coleridge is employed by the *Morning Post*. In fact, Thomson’s study convincingly sets out a distinct period for literary scholars and Coleridgeans—set up by those “converging circumstances” alluded to above. Again, the narrative is fairly simple: during this period, Coleridge’s passions for Asra and his admiration of Wordsworth are without reciprocity,

and, somewhat remarkably, and over a number of poems, he uses the *Morning Post* as a venue to poetically express his thoughts and feelings about the situation, with moments when admiration spills over into envy, and envy into resentment. Yes, on the surface, public displays of jealousy of Wordsworth's domestic situation and his disappointed longings for Asra are petty at worst and questionable at best, but in profitably scrutinizing Coleridge's newspaper poetry in the *Morning Post*, Thomson points to a curious situation: "Ironically, that public position gave him at the same time the confidence to broadcast his private woes" (33). But there's more than just jealousy of Wordsworth's circumstances. Thomson's goal is to "fill a considerable gap in understandings of Coleridge's private torment and how this related to his perception of Wordsworth's poetic genius" (15), and she fills this considerably.

Behind all this, Thomson carries a non-consensus opinion, that from almost the beginning, Wordsworth and Coleridge are hardly compatible, even if we view their collaborative relationship, celebrated with the publication of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* collection, as a genuinely significant moment in English literary history. Neither of their names appear in that first edition, which gestures toward some kind of equity. And so, it would be nice to romanticize their early relationship as cozy and mutually supportive—a Romantic bromance. But as an outward indicator of inner differences, we have to remind ourselves that only Wordsworth's name ("W. Wordsworth") appears in subsequent editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, 1802, 1805). Coleridge's name never appears, and his contributions to and placement in the collection fizzles. Wordsworth's poetic stock goes up; Coleridge's goes down, with his best days as a poet passed by 1802. If we could talk to Coleridge, we could tell him that he need not worry about dropping poetry; we could tell him that his premier poetic accomplishment, equally ground-breaking in poetic history, is his loosish gathering of what we call his "conversations poems." [4] To balance Wordsworth's growing poetic dominance, we could tell him that his early poetry definitively propels Wordsworth's poetic progress. Well, maybe we wouldn't need to tell him anything, since he was aware of his early poetry's influential powers: into his copy of his 1817 collection *Sibylline Leaves* and by his poem "The Eolian Harp," he scribbles, "I have some claim to the thanks of no small number of the readers of poetry in having first introduced this species of short blank verse poems," and he names Wordsworth as one who used his "species" to produce their own "exquisite specimens" (Mays 232).

While making a thoroughly cogent case that we should look upon Coleridge's *Morning Post* poetry as a distinct grouping, Thomson fleshes out new readings of poems from the short period, many of which have been overlooked—or under-interpreted. This, and the context for writing them, makes up the bulk of her book. Especially intriguing is Thomson's discussion of the first "Asra" poem, "Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladie," published 21 December 1799 in the *Morning Post*. The original version, as Thomson shows, proclaims his "doomed love" for Asra as well as his "desperate need for a sympathetic and appreciated audience" (55), and with its introductory letter, Thomson points to embedded responses to Wordsworth's criticism of Coleridge's language in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which initially was the first poem in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. Bottom line: the two poets do not see eye-to-eye in their poetics.

Thomson also provides an intriguing take on Coleridge's relationship with Mary Robinson. She's fourteen years older than Coleridge and also working for the *Morning Post* in charge of its "Poetical Department." Over two terrific chapters, Thomson explores "the friendship between Robinson and Coleridge in the context of Coleridge's exclusion from the Wordsworth circle" (135). Coleridge and Robinson share thoughts about poetry, but the juicy stuff takes place as Coleridge vents his bankrupt marriage with Sara and his longings—"obsession" would not be stretching it—for Asra. Given Robinson's notoriously racy personal history and experience with her own longstanding, unsettled marriage, she's not a bad audience, despite her waning health.

According to Thomson, Robinson writes some poetry that digs at Wordsworth's affair in France with Annette Vallon, a liaison that results in an illegitimate daughter, Caroline, born 1792 and baptized "Anne-Caroline Wordswodsth [sic]." Coleridge, Thomson suggests, is likely behind these digs (139). For a very small circle, this will soon be in the air, since Wordsworth will meet with Annette and Caroline in Calais, in August 1802, to settle up before Wordsworth marries Mary Hutchinson. (The affair is kept from the public until the early twentieth century, when a couple of Annette's passionate letters to Wordsworth show up in a French archive.) In sum, as Thomson notes, mutual admiration between Coleridge and Robinson may have been based on their work for the *Morning Post*, but their "intimacy is also fueled by Coleridge's despair about his marriage" and not being part of Wordsworth's domestic coterie (163). Thomson's conclusion: Robinson was "sensitively attuned" to and had "subtle affinity for Coleridge's poetry" (172), and she sympathetically bolstered his "self-esteem" (179)—unlike Wordsworth. When Robinson dies in late

December 1800, Coleridge feels even more isolated and underappreciated. After all, with Wordsworth's suggestion, he's also just faced the exclusion of his "Christabel" from next edition of *Lyrical Ballads*—the one that will now bear Wordsworth's name only.

The implicit competition with and jealousy of Wordsworth complicates, even compromises, Coleridge's poetic aspirations. While he nags Wordsworth to quit fussing with little poems and to get on with writing more or less the greatest poem of all time—the challenging *Recluse* project—over 1800 and into 1802 Coleridge's desire to be a poet dampens, or so he says: noting how Wordsworth's poetic superiority shows him up, to Godwin, 25 March 1801, he writes, "The Poet in me is dead," repeating a similar self-pitying earlier statement to John Thelwall, 17 December 1800, that he has "altogether abandoned" poetry, convinced he "never had the essential poetic Genius" (Griggs 2:714, 1:656). One truth: he simply cannot compete with Wordsworth. Early on his journalistic interests mixed with his poetry, but prose—meaning for Coleridge the metaphysically shifting intersections of literary criticism, literary theory, political theory, theology, philosophy, and psychology—begins to take over much of his hyper-active frontal lobes after the *Morning Post* period, and this continues for much of his writing life.

Spread through the *Biographia Literaria*, *Table Talk*, *The Friend*, *Lay Sermons*, *Aids to Reflection*, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, not to mention Coleridge's marginalia, notebooks, letters, and the *Opus Maximum* gathering, that turn to prose is impressive, eccentric, brilliant, derivative, and, at moments, impenetrable. But putting together *The Whole Picture* is usually impossible without the simplicity of fanaticism, and Coleridge was never attracted to simplicity, and fanaticism for him would have been a form of civilizing (or civilization), rather than culturing, and therefore potentially corruptive. As Coleridge writes in *The Friend* (and repeated in *Church and State*), "a nation can never be too cultivated, but may easily become an over-civilized race" (Coleridge, *The Friend* 216). And so, unlike Thomson's study, Andrea Timár in *A Modern Coleridge: Cultivation, Addiction, Habits* pulls together Coleridge's highly discursive forays into what today we might say crosses over from critical theory into cultural criticism, and she does so without any of Thomson's formative biographical contextualization. There's barely a flesh-and-blood peep from Wordsworth and his circle—real-world relationships count for almost nothing—but we do hear from, among others, Kant, Walter Benjamin, and Derrida. That methodological cross-over carries its own notional discourse within which to capture Coleridge's, and the result

may, at moments, give pause to more casual readers. But Timár's topic is a good one, since one side-effect provides us with a version of Coleridge's thinking that negotiates aspects of contemporary theory.

Timár presents Coleridge as exploring that key modernist and postmodern nexus where the complex relationship between who we are—conscious agents of free will—and all that stuff we create to surround ourselves and to give us meaning—culture, civilization, politics, education, consumer goods, media, and so on—is shaped. This relationship becomes the intellectual grist for other grand thinkers to come, like Marx and Freud. But unlike Marx and Freud, who both write sustained and purpose-built tracts, Timár's considerable effort is to link up Coleridge's diverse, piecemeal, and greatly dispersed forays into the subject. Here's just one moment, in one of Coleridge's lectures, when he looks around at his culture, and it provides him with a list of fears: of mindless consumption, a "desire to be strongly stimulated," an undignified "appetite" and "rage" for "gossip," over-consumption of "Reviews, Magazines, Selections - these with Newspapers & Novels," "the enormous multiplication of Authors & books," and interest in "Luxury, Lotteries, &c" (qtd. in Timár 66). Coleridge gets it pretty well right, and he could be talking about our own era, given the diet of info-junk food we gobble up from the media and entertainment industries. It wouldn't have been a surprise if Coleridge added "fake news" to his fears.

Where does the idea of addiction fit into this? Well, addiction is not just about substances. It is about all that stuff that society creates and provides in excess, stuff that excessively stimulates as forms of diversionary addictions, with the effect of numbing us to our more real self, to our consciousness and volition. Now, if this construction of addiction to culture sounds like something we are going to hear about from modernist and postmodern thinkers like Benjamin, Timár's purpose is to show how Coleridge handles it. Coleridge does get the idea of commodification, of the mechanical/automaton relationship, of cultural delusion, of media sensationalism, and of what Coleridge, himself now sounding postmodern, calls "stimulatability." Behind all of this is something else: Coleridge's acute awareness of human nature's basic susceptibility to being negatively subverted by just about anything—by self, others, feelings, thoughts, ideas, substances, objects, behaviors, by all those things that slide into and between culture and civilization. For Coleridge, guilt is often the result of this vulnerability to these forms of subversion, with passivity a point of entry.

Coleridge addresses the subjects in Timár's subtitle—cultivation, addiction, habits—over a long period, and he does so over shifting venues and with varying purposes, with equally shifting audiences and varying critical registers. Timár's methodology flattens some of these in the name of fashioning an argument that attempts to converge subjects. While organizing all these free-floating Coleridgean discursive moments into an argument is more than admirable, perhaps not quite enough attention is given to the development of Coleridge's thinking and to those shifting writing venues, purposes, and audiences.

Finally, *A Modern Coleridge* has far too many typos, as well as numerous errors of punctuation, apparatus, and production. (Where are Sedgwick, Marx, and Lacan in the index? Why sixteen blank pages at the end of the book?) Palgrave Macmillan is to be blamed for much of this, which is too bad, since Timár's deft thinking deserves more.

While these two studies contrast significantly in methodology, approach, and critical vocabulary, they point to a joined inference: we are not done with Coleridge. That both books have final chapters on "Dejection" (Timár has an added "Conclusion") suggests neither are we done with that Gordian, evolving intertext. For Thomson, all versions of the poem "testify" to a consistent theme, "the inextricable connection of joy, always associated with domestic harmony, with creative genius" (219). This statement builds from an analysis of Coleridge's troubled relationship with Sara, Asra, and Wordsworth. For Timár, "Dejection" revolves around "the founding figure of the mother, as the repository of love, that had been retrospectively withdrawn, or else, that had never existed at all" (131). And this is built from Coleridge's idea that the mother is the "medium between God and the child," and that Coleridge's idea of "life as unity" is compromised by absence and "the desire of desire" (128). The differences between these two books, then, are considerable, but they remain profitable differences.

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Books under review:

Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper: The 'Morning Post' and the Road to 'Dejection', by Heidi Thomson, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, xii +274 pp.

A Modern Coleridge: Cultivation, Addiction, Habits, by Andrea Timár, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, xi + 180 pp.

Notes

1 Winston Churchill's words on a radio broadcast, 1 October 1939, attempting to assess Russia's motivations: "I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. But perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest."

2 Ruoff (1989) profitably explores the "genetic" connections between Wordsworth's first four stanzas of "Immortality Ode," Coleridge's verse letter, versions of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," and the final version of "Immortality Ode." For a discerning view of the creative, dialogical, and complementary exchange between the two poems, see Ulmer (2009).

3 For Keats's textual knowledge of and engagement with Coleridge's writing, see Beth Lau's *Keats's Reading of Romantic Poetry* (1991) and chapter three of Jack Stillinger's *Romantic Complexity: Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth* (2006).

4 The grouping of "conversation poems" is first sounded by George MacLean Harper in 1928 (Harper). A definitive list is somewhat unsettled, numbering from four to eight poems (see Stillinger 1994, n.1, 237). The candidates: "The Eolian Harp" (1795), "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement" (1796), "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797), "Frost at Midnight" (1798), "The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem" (1798), "Fears in Solitude" (1798), and "Dejection: An Ode" (1802). "To William Wordsworth" (1807) might be added, since the fairly informal (though reverential) lyrical tone invokes an addressee, as well as a domestic setting within a discourse of friendship. But not all eight poems are equally lyrical. Moments of politically-edged polemic emerge as features in "Fears" and "Reflections," and so they might be dropped from the list inasmuch as they are topical.

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