

From

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# Paul Magnuson

Marilyn Gaul

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“OUR SENSIBILITIES are shaped by the voices of others,” Paul wrote on his memorial to Geoffrey Summerfield, the great NYU Clare scholar who died in 1987. It explains so much about Paul, the way he focused, attended, connected, and his impact on those who knew him, certainly on me, and on those who didn’t. I have never written a line or given a lecture without worrying about his approval. He remains my editor.

Paul and I met in Philadelphia, in 1969, when he submitted an essay to *The Wordsworth Circle*, called “The Deep Calm in Coleridge’s Conversation Poems,” starting a conversation, often deep but seldom calm, lasting nearly forty years, a stunning, mature, elegant, insightful, and learned essay. Like everything else he did, the essay reflected the civility, discipline, and genius he brought to nearly everything we did together, *The Wordsworth Circle*, the Wordsworth and Coleridge summer conferences, and the Wordsworth-Coleridge Association, first in Philadelphia until 1974, and then at NYU starting in 1987. Throughout our friendship, I knew that Bonnie was the source of Paul’s strengths, his inspiration, together a golden pair, luminous, warm, intelligent, whose equally luminous daughters who grew up to be, he said, the smartest people he ever met.

As peer-reviewer for thirty-five years, he became the unacknowledged mentor to generations of scholars. Similarly, at the Wordsworth Summer Conferences in Grasmere, beyond his own papers, he was an attentive and supportive listener, shaping and being shaped by the voices around him, not only in the lectures but in the Herculean climbs up Helvellyn (the last time in 2000, in a driving rain, while younger scholars sat in the pub), Scafell, Great Gabel, name a mountain, he did it, talking and joking, identifying birds, plants, reciting poetry, as companionable to Jack Stillinger (who recalled him as “One of the good guys... honoring the literary, always scrupulous, learned, generous,”) to Geoffrey Hartman and Carl Woodring, in a photograph, all the great Romanticists from the UK and the US who shared these golden days in the Lake District. As to the students, one who climbed and went on to become a professor as well, recalling, “his energies were formidable, inspiring, and his intelligence boundless.”

He had so much authority at these conferences, not only in Grasmere but later at the Cannington Coleridge conference that one year, fresh from the British Library, instead of a paper, he offered a list of Romantic names about whom he could find no scholarly comment. Everyone applauded. Having spent at least six months on a thirty minute paper for this implacable group of Coleridgeans, and an equally implacable Paul, I was annoyed, more than annoyed because however polished, learned, amusing, even a standing ovation, that year, as always, he dismissed my paper as entertaining, and raised the bar. And that is what I miss most about him, having someone who always expects better. But Paul’s presentation, his list of obscure names fired their

imagination, and three years later, people were still replying. Indeed whole careers may have been made from his list of names.

It was this natural authority, his commitment to books and the people who wrote about them that made him such a successful book-review editor, a career-breaker if there was one, especially in 1972, when our profession was entering its still unfinished mid-life crisis. What does successful mean? Before e-mail, seven letters for each of maybe eighty books a year, for copies, for reviewers, for comments, literary, civil, informed, on time. In 1974, Paul brought the review issue to New York University, and for thirteen years, through phone calls and little typed letters, we trudged along, while Paul to ease the burden became a parodist, publishing four of them, as introductions to issues he edited, and joked that it was parodies that did him in, not the work, and led to his resignation. *The Ancient Mariner* was one of his favourites, because it set us in dialogue, and it was published in *The Wordsworth Circle* in 1978, and is printed at the end of these two tributes.

Though he resigned as the book editor that year, the annual parodies continued, not only imitating familiar verse but encoding the titles of the books being reviewed (a footnote game for some future graduate student). As he explained in the unremembered “Lines Composed a few floors above the Zum-Zum Restaurant, the author Having receiv’d a Demand for Corrected Proof, June 29, 1977”:

Five years have past; five summers  
With the length of five long issues! And again I see  
These numbers rolling from the press...

    These beauteous books  
Though newly published, have not been to me  
As is grammar to a student’s eye,  
And oft in crowded rooms and mid the dirt  
Of bankrupt cities, I have owed to these  
Reviews some hours of weariness from work  
Bestowed, the nameless, unremembered acts  
Of emendation and of love. [...]

    For Thou, dear Reader, we prevailed against  
Rash judgments and the sneers of selfish men.  
For Thou, our dear, dear Reader, must attend  
Next summer’s issue where we will review  
Books which we miss’d, by strange mischance, this year,  
On Wordsworth’s ballads and their origin,  
That after many wanderings, many months  
Of Absence, we return with deeper zeal,  
O far, far, deeper zealous articles,  
More dear, both for themselves and for Thy sake!

Those many months, he was teaching a lot, serving, as you will hear, as the legendary graduate chair, which he reminded me of even as I was shackled in

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my own administrative prison, writing his own books, attending to his amazing family, definitely, through sickness and through health. For thirteen years he avoided reviewer's cluster bombs while helping others find their voices.

After *TWC*, and *Lyrical Dialogues*, Paul became a more public scholar even as he explored public Romanticism, which is, by the way, the name of a special session in his honor to be conducted by Nick Halmi at the 2007 British Association of Romantic Studies conference in Bristol, an event he would have loved and will I know be there in spirit. He loved conferences, delighted us with papers and anecdotes, told curiously innocent and silly jokes, always attentive, focused, in brief, and Paul was always brief, understated, sometimes merely raising an eyebrow, a lecture in a glance, a companion whose place no one else will ever take.

Meanwhile, ominously, even secretly, he became a Coleridgean *Editor* for fourteen years, an activity Tom McFarland compared to floating in fetid, dark purgatorial swamps, calling aimlessly and irrationally for someone to turn on the lights. But if being a Coleridgean editor means taking on his twisted genius, far more challenging is being married to one, more patience, good will, generosity of spirit, intelligence, clarity than any of us can imagine, along with a monumental belief in the man as well as the work. So to Bonnie, for all Paul's works and deeds, his virtues and strengths, for our good memories and blessings, for keeping him going and making him happy, from all people at the conferences, the journal, and the Wordsworth-Coleridge Association, our deep and abiding gratitude.

Larry Lockridge

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I WAS PRIVILEGED to be Paul Magnuson's colleague and co-worker in the field of British Romanticism for twenty-eight years. When I arrived at NYU in 1978, Paul welcomed me warmly as a fellow Coleridgean and told me everything I'd need to know to stay afloat in this new academic environment, including, in those days, the dress code. Aileen Ward was also in the department, so it was a great place to be. Paul and I had both recently written books on Coleridge and found we had much to talk about. He was five years into a long tenure as book review editor for *The Wordsworth Circle* and, along with Marilyn Gaull, had already established himself as a central arbiter in the field. I'll say something first about Paul's large contribution to Romantic studies, and then something of the personal qualities that won our admiration and affection.

Paul's three major books and his edition of Coleridge show a remarkable flexibility over the years in scholarly method and critical focus. His first book

carried a title he didn't much like, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry*, but there are few books on the subject more read and cited, even thirty-two years after publication. We find here close readings of the major poems, but they are far from formalist readings, as Paul makes splendid use of Coleridge's notebooks and letters, mobilizing passages of Coleridgean arcana that were fresh to criticism in 1974. These opened up the poems in new and unpredictable ways. Speaking of this book years later, he was able to bring an historicist perspective on his own work: *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry* was consistent, he told me, with the so-called consciousness criticism of the Seventies, with its emphasis on the "self." But he had the textual evidence at hand for Coleridge's own explicit theorizing of the self—and I think that's one reason the book has escaped critical obsolescence.

One concern in Paul's first book leads us to his later work: the shifting meaning of a poem as it goes through various drafts on its way to publication, and then still further revisions down the line as one edition trumps another. Early on, though, he took to heart the premise of the huge tomes known as *The Cornell Wordsworth* in paying most attention to early versions of poems.

We find this close textual scrutiny put to a different use in his next major publication, *Coleridge & Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (1988). Here the theoretical ground is provided by Bakhtin who speaks of "double-voiced discourse" and how it is directed both to the object of speech and "toward someone else's speech." But, as you know, Bakhtin found in the novel alone the true site of modern heteroglossia, or diversity of tongues—poetry is single-voiced and not dialogic, he said. (I sometimes ask my students if they know that, in picking up a novel, they are about to consume what Bakhtin termed "dialogized heteroglossia.")

Paul's elegant challenge to Bakhtin is to show that a poetic dialogue, such as we find in the literary relationship of Wordsworth and Coleridge, bears all the marks of double-voiced discourse—each poet possessed of a "strenuous tongue," in Keats's phrase, that approaches the other in an immensely complex dialogic exchange. Paul's book is a remarkable exercise in poetic analysis, as he ushers us through the twists and turns of this exchange and draws out their implications. He makes use, again, of early versions of poems, and also, as he says, "minor poems, fragments, and discarded or unused drafts because they often reveal, in ways that published or public poems do not, a greater degree of meditation upon the process of writing itself... ." Coleridge wrote early on that, regarding Wordsworth, "I think an admirable Poet might be made by *amalgamating him & me.*" But Coleridge later felt that his friend and collaborator had come from heaven to tell him that he, Coleridge, was "no poet." Between these poles of amalgamation and negation is a complex exchange, sometimes debilitating but often empowering. Certainly there is anxiety, but, unlike our colleague Harold Bloom, Paul is speaking of two contemporary, collaborative poets, not poets and their predecessors. And he focuses not on the psychic dynamics that inform the literary relationship but

on poetic practice as it is discovered on a textual level.

It's been a standing joke among Romanticists that *The Ancient Mariner* is one of Wordsworth's best poems and that *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude* are among Coleridge's best poems. The usual take has been the dominance of Wordsworth but Paul finds a subtle reversal of this ratio, seeing Coleridge as the dominant voice.

The lyrical dialogue of Coleridge and Wordsworth is an intimate affair, carried on in the intense voicing of one poet aware of the other. But Paul becomes more and more interested in the cultural and political dimension of literature, in keeping with another tenet of Bakhtin, that language is ideologically saturated by its social and cultural contexts, as different discourses jostle up against one another, heteroglossia challenging official or monologic speech. A darker version of this insight into discourse is found in Foucault. Paul's next shift of inquiry is, in a sense, a passage from Bakhtin to Foucault, as he undertakes a new major work, *Reading Public Romanticism* (1998). As the title suggests, Habermas adds a dimension, as does Genette's concept of the paratext—a forbidding term for everything surrounding the work in itself, such as the preface, footnotes, letters, and, especially for Paul, the context of its first publication in a journal or by a book publisher known to subscribe to one or another politics or set of cultural values.

Rather than focus on blatantly political works, Paul excavates a politics in poems where we might least suspect it—Coleridge's "Lime-tree Bower," "Frost at Midnight," and *The Ancient Mariner*, and Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," among others. To make the case, which goes against notions of private Romantic lyricism, he narrates the politics and cultural debates of the time with the finesse of an insider, unusual in an American scholar of British culture.

His concern with print culture and the history of "the book" underlies the method of his recent Norton critical edition, *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, co-edited with Nicholas Halmi and Raimonda Modiano. He inscribed a copy to me, "For Larry Lockridge, who, years ago, told me to 'do something different.' I hope at least this is different." I didn't recall having told him to do something different, but this Norton critical edition certainly does it. Instead of the usual ordering of poems according to time of composition, this edition organizes them "according to the volume in which a poem first appeared," and gives the version of that first public appearance, not later revisions. So we get, as Paul says, "a view of Coleridge's literary career as it unfolded before the eyes of his immediate contemporaries." One result is that an instructor often finds a text quite different from the one usually taught. These Norton critical editions have much influence on both teaching and criticism—and Paul's legacy here as elsewhere will be considerable.

I hope I've suggested something of the development yet consistency of Paul's deep engagement with Romantic writing.

Paul had, as you know, an affability and ease of presentation as well as a gift of empathic observation. I remember his participation in an event similar

to this one—a memorial service for a graduate student in this department, Peter Snyder. Paul got up without a script, as many of us never would, and spoke informally about what it was like to have Snyder in the classroom—a student who seemed to be orchestrating his own instructor at the same time that he was heartily finding in the instructor’s words a depth of implication well beyond what the instructor had in mind. I had experienced Snyder in the classroom also—and Paul’s precise evocation was funny, loving, and uncanny.

Paul had a certain reticence about himself. He wasn’t given to personal lament or to bragging. He sometimes claimed his brother was the “smart one in the family.” He did speak obliquely about himself in his farewell as book editor for *The Wordsworth Circle*, and his parody of *The Ancient Mariner*, a brilliant example of a genre that in our lighter moments we all enjoy, does give us glimpses into the difficulties of a reviewer.

The Ancient Mariner was a suffering person, of course, and Paul, in the time following his stroke, was a suffering person. But I never heard him complain or ask why this calamity had been visited upon him. He resolved to get better and return to teaching, with lots of support, we know, from Bonnie, Elise, and Kate. And this he did. Though his speech was slowed, he taught effectively by all accounts and was as usual greatly admired by his students. Many of us, with such an impairment, would have folded up our tents. But Paul had a dedication to teaching and scholarship that didn’t let up. And when many of us would have been shuffling through old lecture notes, he was even planning a demanding new course, in *Transatlantic Romanticism*, at the time of his death. This return to teaching gives evidence of a quality we may have missed among his many other strengths: a very great personal courage.

*The Rime of the Ancient Edytor.*

It is an ancient editor  
And she stoppeth one of three  
“By thy long red pen and gleaming eye  
Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?”

“The scholars’ works are published wide  
You are my next of kin;  
The Board has met, the issue’s set  
Gramercies will you win.”

She holds him with her inky hand  
“There is a book,” quoth she.  
“It can’t be done; my freedom’s won.  
You can’t hang this on me.”  
[...]  
“I ordered books and cast my looks

O'er every single tome,  
 Selected some to be reviewed  
 And some to carry home.

“Higher and higher every day  
 The pile it was uprist  
 With texts, and books, and monographs,  
 Reviewers now I wist.

[...]  
 At length did cross an Albatross  
 The mail did bring it next  
 Six hundred pages for the notes,  
 And twice six for the text.

Research, research everywhere  
 ‘Twas sad as sad could be  
 Research, research everywhere,  
 Facts floating all at sea.

The first reviewer read it all  
 And fell down in a fit.  
 And all his students raised their eyes  
 And prayed where they did sit.

*(In their confusion, reviewers tend towards lunacy, which is their appointed rest,  
 their native country, and their own natural homes.)*

And then I passed it on to one  
 Who now did crazy go  
 Laughed loud and long.  
 His face turned white  
 His eyes rolled to and fro  
 “Ha, ha,” quoth he, “Full plain I see,  
 The Devil knows how to write.

The book went here, the book went there,  
 Reviewers all around,  
 They swore and growled  
 They roared and howled  
 And then they beat the ground.

Another Scholar-blest I found,  
 “Review this monstrous book  
 Oh save me, save me, learned man  
 And get me off the hook.”

The Scholar-blest, he did his best  
 To read it through and through



But when he got passed chapter one  
His eyes were wet with dew  
He looked upon the argument  
And had not got a clue

“Do not include it, ancient one,”  
The Scholar blest did say,  
“Sink it like lead into the sea  
To there remain alway.”

“Farewell, farewell, thou Scholar-blest  
And from my heart I call:  
Revieweth well and loveth well  
All books both great and small.”

He went like one who hath been stunned,  
And is of sense forlorn:  
A sadder but no wiser man,  
He rose the morrow morn.”