The Fate of Bibliography
Reviews Editorial

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"IT IS THE FATE OF THOSE WHO TOIL at the lower employments of life … to be exposed to censure, without hope of praise," wrote Samuel Johnson in his "Preface to the English Dictionary" (1755). Some have wondered if the same lament applies to the compilers of bibliographies.[1] In the age of Google searches and a seemingly limitless supply of information online, Johnson's remarks may well serve as an epitaph for the death of academic bibliography as we know it.

I've been thinking a lot about bibliographies recently. Not only have I been working on an annotated bibliography as part of a current project, but not long ago a very curious work of bibliography appeared on my desk for review: Bill Whelan's *A Catalogue of the Library of William Wales: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Mathematics Teacher* (2019).[2] Whelan provides a complete account of the catalogue of William Wales's library. Who was Wales? According to Whelan, none other than the unacknowledged basis of Coleridge's understanding of maritime travel and the high seas in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

William Wales (1734–1798), astronomer and mathematician, is best known for his observations of the transit of Venus from across the globe in 1769 and his subsequent work as astronomer aboard Captain Cook's Second Voyage between 1772 and 1775.[3] Wales came into Coleridge's orbit, however, through his work as Master of the Royal Mathematical School, adjacent to Christ's Hospital, a position he commenced in 1775. Already by the 1790s, Wales was emerging as a venerated figure in the memory of Old Blues, a member of the Royal Society, and author of some accounts of his travels and numerous articles for the *Monthly Review* (some 149 articles appeared between 1778 and 1796). Christ's Hospital was so great a part of Wales's life that he was buried in the south cloister after his death in December 1796.[4]

Whelan builds on Bernard Smith's proposal that Wales is the unacknowledged source of many of Coleridge's allusions to arctic travel in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."[5] While Livingstone Lowes had suggested countless sources for maritime voyages in *The Road to Xanadu* (1927), Whelan builds on Smith's case for William Wales: "Lowes was unaware that Coleridge's teacher had sailed into Arctic waters, spent a year at Hudson Bay, and was one

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[1] Johnson's quote is altered for the epigraph of *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Scholarship*, vol. 3, ed. Walter B. Crawford, with assistance of Ann M. Crawford (New York and London: G. K. Hall and Prentice Hall International, 1996), v.

[2] Bill Whelan, *A Catalogue of the Library of William Wales: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Mathematics Teacher* (Petone, New Zealand: Steele Roberts Aotearoa, 2019).

[3] The year of Wales's birth is mistakenly listed as 1834 in the otherwise helpful introduction (vii).

[4] Later reminiscences by Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb, and Coleridge confirm their respect for their teacher.

[5] Bernard Smith, "Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and Cook's Second Voyage," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 19 (1956): 117–54.

of the earliest to record certain arctic phenomena."[6]

Under the conviction that Coleridge had access not only to the books Wales formed into a library at Christ's Hospital but also to conversations with the man himself, Whelan provides a painstaking account of every book and item held in the rare *Catalogue* of sale of Wales's library in 1799.[7] Each entry includes the original catalogue data, a complete bibliographic record, and detailed annotation of the work. Consistent with his stated interest in Wales's influence on Coleridge, Whelan also incorporates references to representative primary and secondary literature connected with the poet.

For lovers of books and book history, the *Catalogue* is equal parts wonder and curiosity. Whelan surely must have devoted years of his life tracing hundreds of obscure works with an eye on Coleridge and his most celebrated poem. Not surprisingly many of Wales's books are indeed ones that Coleridge mentions in letters, notebooks, and sundry essays and books. Indeed, quite a few are commonplace works of literature on poetry or religion or natural philosophy. Entry no. 689, "King on the Origin of Evil" in two volumes (1732), to select one item almost at random, traces not only the origins of the work and its author but also its influence on the philosopher David Hartley before noting that "Coleridge told Charles Lamb that he was considering the origin of evil as a subject for a long poem and in 1796 Coleridge wrote a note to this effect."[8] Of course, this detail, true enough on its own, cannot prove that Coleridge had read or accessed Wales's copy in his consideration of the theme. Undeterred, Whelan contends that this obscure library collection much be considered as a (if not *the*) pivotal source of Coleridge's labors during the 1790s.

Another case shows the potential pitfalls of recovering such a library. Early in Whelan's *Catalogue* one finds entry no. 42: James Colnet's *Chart of the Galapagos*, a map in Wales's possession that provides "the first accurate navigation chart of the Galapagos islands" (8). It is true, as Whelan indicates, that Coleridge mentions Colnett's voyage in *CN* 1249; however, a closer look at his notebooks reveals that Coleridge's knowledge of the expedition came directly from the *Monthly Review*:

> Colnett's Voyage to the South Atlantic, 1798./a passage concerning two fireballs that appears to throw great Light on the shooting Stars. vide Monthly review, for May 1799. p. 28.—Probability that in violent storm, the electric fluid has some means of attracting iron particles from the objects it passes over.—

[6] Whelan, *Catalogue*, xi.

[7] *A Catalogue of the Valuable Mathematical Library of the Late Mr. William Wales, F.R.S.* (London, 1799). Although Whelan claims that the only known copy is held in the Rare Books Library of the University College London, I located a second copy in the holdings of the oldest bibliophile society in North America: The Grolier Club in New York City.

[8] Whelan, *Catalogue*, 250.

Perhaps the most that might be said about such a reference is not that Coleridge learned of Colnett from William Wales but that Coleridge may well have gleaned a deeper interest in travel from his erstwhile mathematics instructor. Still, with more than 1100 records fully described and annotated, Whelan has provided an unexpectedly rich account of a library that many Coleridgeans have never before considered in their research.

Whelan's *Catalogue* reminds me of two older annotated bibliographies associated with Coleridge studies. The first, not unlike Whelan's, is Ralph Coffman's *Coleridge's Library: A Bibliography of Books Owned or Read by Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1987).[9] While Whelan's work meticulously follows the sale catalogue of Wales's library and consequently takes us into the 1790s specifically, Coffman's study accounts for some 3,000 books known to have been read by Coleridge over the course of his entire life. Coffman's introduction accounts for sixteen provenances of book buying and borrowing in locales such as London, Bristol, and Germany as well as individuals such as Wordsworth, Southey, and James Gillman. While Whelan provides a background history for each book on record, Coffman offers a detailed provenance for each book, references to any extant marginalia, and scholarly notations as appropriate. In many ways, *Coleridge's Library* has been superseded by the six-volume *Marginalia*, but with its helpful introduction and slim size, *Coleridge's Library* continues to be useful.[10]

Bibliographies are contested spaces: prone to outright errors and careless misprints—small slips of the pen, not easily corrected in expensive print editions—bibliographies raise questions about limits. This supposition is made evident in one of the most scathing reviews of a work I've read in recent memory: K. A. Manley's assessment of *Coleridge's Library* for *Libraries & Culture* (1988).[11] Unexpectedly, Manley not only takes aim at Coffman in the review, but even at Coleridge as a fitting subject for such a comprehensive work. Of the former, Manley rightly highlights many minor errors and omissions in Coffman's study. For instance, Manly explains, Coleridge certainly knew and admired Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and yet none of her works appear in Coffman's bibliography, "nor anything by her brother, John Aikin, the famous dissenter."[12] The list of potential omissions could go on and on, leading Manley to conclude: "his industry is admirable, but this kind of 'reconstruction' has its limitations." Yet not even Coleridge escapes criticism in this review. Manley opens the piece with a blistering appraisal of Coleridge's worthiness of such attention:

> Samuel Taylor Coleridge has inspired a veritable industry, though its

[9] Coffman is a curious case of the bibliophile, to be sure. Ralph J. Coffman, *Coleridge's Library: A Bibliography of Books Owned or Read by Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Boston: G. K Hall, 1987).

[10] A link to the online supplement to Coleridge's *Marginalia* may be found on the Friends of Coleridge website or directly at:
http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/collections/special_collections/coleridge_marginalia.

[11] K. A. Manley, Review of *Coleridge's Library*, *Libraries & Culture* 23 (1988): 514–16.

[12] Manley, "Review of *Coleridge's Library*," 515.

> justification is a matter of debate. As a poet he only rarely surpassed his contemporaries … He was an insipid, vapid character, unfitted for continuous hard work, who lived for much of his life off the charity of others and did little to provide for his family. Nevertheless, his every utterance, printed or manuscript, is currently appearing in a collected edition. Words scribbled into the margins of books (and not only his own books) are being published as *Marginalia*, and his poetry has been accorded that climax of scholastic achievement, a concordance.[13]

Whatever one thinks of the usefulness of *Coleridge's Library*, there is little doubt where Manley stands on the subject of discussion. Even so, amidst Manley's biting critique is a rather frank assessment of the limits of all bibliography. How much is too much? Manley prickles: "If every minor author were treated so fully, library shelves would be groaning with intolerable duplication."[14]

One further example will suffice, for the fate of the bibliography and its gallant compilers might be illustrated best in the three-volume collection *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography* (1976–1996).[15] The first of three volumes appeared in 1976, shortly after the publication of the earliest volumes of the *CC*, establishing the first comprehensive bibliography from "the first known appearance of his name in print until the present day."[16] While the inaugural volume covered from 1793 to 1899 (a somewhat arbitrary division based on a belief that the turn of the century marked a shift in Coleridge's reputation), the second volume spans from 1900 to 1939.[17] The second and third volumes offered supplements and corrections to previous volumes, extending the scope of Haven's bibliography up to the time of publication. Each volume exceeded the length of the last. The third, double-columned book spans over 900 pages and, by my own calculations, weighs more than five pounds!

To be sure, there's something here to celebrate. I recall using Haven's treatment of the nineteenth century in graduate school, discovering quite a few articles of which I was previously unaware in those early days of university computer databases and online searches. Online resources are better today. Still, while online searches can draw up millions of hits on a screen in less than a second, these bibliographies do something more than display algorithmic results: they have annotated and indexed more than 6000 bibliographic entries and categorized over 3000 more works that merit further attention for their unique allusions to Coleridge's life and works.

Yet even in such an expansive project as *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated*

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[13] Manley, "Review of *Coleridge's Library*," 514.

[14] Manley, "Review of *Coleridge's Library*," 515.

[15] As noted below, further supplements appeared online in 2002/2003 at: http://www.csulb.edu/university-library/the-coleridge-collection-supplement-2003

[16] Richard Haven, Josephine Haven, and Maurianne Adams, "Preface," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Scholarship*, vol. 1 (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976), vii.

[17] Walter B. Crawford, Edward S. Lauterbach, and Ann M. Crawford, eds., *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Scholarship*, vol. 2 (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983).

Bibliography, true comprehensiveness could never be achieved. The bibliographers necessarily made choices, and this led to surprising and arguably idiosyncratic results in the third volume. Editions and anthologies with substantial editorial contributions or visual representations are obvious selections for inclusion. Translations of Coleridge's works appearing in non-English languages also make for a helpful contribution. Yet how does one even begin to sort out the subtlety of allusions in a myriad of verses, parodies, cartoons, and musical settings inspired by Coleridge's writings? It boggles the mind.

Consider the Crawfords' annotation to an article titled "Another Ladleful from the Devil's Punch Bowl," which first appeared in *Blackwood's* in 1822. The article's author dedicates a poem, "a metrical advertisement of all Lord Byron's works," to none other than "the reading public … to whom Mr. C has such an antipathy" before continuing,

> This pamphlet-feeding prosopopoeia the reading public aforesaid seems to squat like the night-mare on the chest of the author of the AM and KK; and I much wish that so powerful a somnoversifier would harrow up our souls with some of the dreams, (all probably ready tagged with rhyme for the press,) which that incubus has occasioned.[18]

I can locate the same text in *Blackwood's* online when I search for the quote, but then the Crawfords' attribution of authorship comes into question as I click through a series of connected links. All too quickly, I find myself caught in a muddle over a jumble of references of dubious worth.

Of course, while some records yield more heat than light, others bring genuinely unexpected insights into significant scholarly trends. Take an annotation to a little-known 1942 radio broadcast discussion of Coleridge by the theater actress Margaret Webster and American poet and literary critic Mark Van Doren, a conversation that was subsequently printed in an edited volume, *The New Invitation to Learning*:

> In [an] undated Invitation to Learning CBS radio broadcast, Margaret Webster says that the most fallacious theory of Hamlet as a person is "C's theory of the dreamer and the man incapable of action." Van Doren adds that C's was a critic's most elementary mistake: "not realizing that perhaps the finest hero you can have for a tragedy is a hero who, so to speak, could not do the thing you see him doing."[19]

Indeed, almost every page delivers one such unexpected gem. How many Coleridgeans have access, not to mention the linguistic facility, to a Russian language article in the journal *Nauchnye Doklady Vysshei Shkoly, Filologicheskie*

[18] *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Scholarship*, 3:7.
[19] *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Scholarship*, 3:105.

Nauki [*Higher Education Scientific Reports, Philological Studies* (1967)]? The annotation alone reveals the remarkable development of scholarship on Wordsworth and Coleridge in non-English contexts:

> The interweaving of various tendencies in the esthetic thinking of W and C reflects the contradictoriness of the Romantic Movement as a whole. This contradictoriness reflects the complexity of the social struggle when in wars and revolutions and boisterous economic transformations a new capitalistic society was being born. … W and C sense the alienation and hostility of the new structure to the living interests of mankind, but they can counter it only with dreams of an old patriarchal village life. Revolutionary methods of correcting the world are for them not acceptable, and therefore they employ idealistic and utopian ethical approaches in the hope to influence mores and to overcome social evil. … A sense of injustice and oppression remains in W and C from the revolutionary ideas of their youth. But before they enter a camp of reaction against these ideas, they create a philosophy of art which in its mystifying irrational form express their critical relation to bourgeois society and the desire to promote the spiritual perfection of mankind.[20]

The summary annotation, a marker of Marxist political interpretation at mid-century, continues for another paragraph alongside thousands more diverse records. Bibliography is a labor of love.[21]

Today, all three volumes of *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography* can only be found in a handful of libraries worldwide.[22] Unsurprisingly, the advent of online searches and library databases quenched the thirst for bibliographical works. So when the Crawfords produced a supplement to the third volume in 2003, they moved the project online. Recruiting new bibliographers, however, proved too difficult a task. My theory: the intrinsic rewards that drive many bibliographers fail to meet the standards of scholarship necessary for university hiring and institutional advancement. The request for additional help towards a projected fourth volume in the preface to the online supplement strikes an ominous tone:

> We have no more time—in more than one sense of the word—to take on the challenge of continuing to make the Coleridge Bibliography as comprehensive, and as stimulating, even as entertaining, as possible—a project we began in all innocence more than three decades ago. Unless a qualified someone or group comes forward to take up this challenge, this

[20] *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Scholarship*, 3:357–58.

[21] With many sections and multiple indexes (more than ten pages to entries related to the "Ancient Mariner" alone), much more could be said of both the strengths and weaknesses of this unique work of scholarship. Cf. Morton Paley's review in *Studies in Romanticism* 38 (1999): 315–22.

[22] My own preliminary searches in WorldCat indicate that the third volume may be found in only a few dozen libraries around the world (at most).

online Supplement may be the last "published" start on volume IV.

Moving the project online was the right move, but until the entirety of *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography* appears in electronically linked format—with subject, author, and title indexes to enhance organization—the project will only fall into further impracticality and neglect.

What is the fate of bibliography? Too prone to error and too quickly made obsolete, libraries are no longer willing or able to bear the weight of expensive tomes. Shelf space is limited, and budgets are constrained, but the work of capable and judicious bibliographers is needed more than ever.

Above all, institutional resources must be secured to bring annotated bibliographies online. Permission will need to be secured from publishers to convert existing resources to electronic formats where scholars and interested readers can access these tools easily from anywhere in the world. Electronic formatting will also allow for multi-layered indexing, links to the original sources, and more reliable information that can be corrected quickly and easily.

In the meantime, those who use such sources might begin to demonstrate the value of these works through more overt forms of scholarly acknowledgement. Bibliographies provide unexpected insights through the happenstance discovery that leads to new associations and interpretations. In a digital age, hailing the bibliographer may appear as foolish as praising the laptop on which one writes. Databases yield results unconsciously, but the labor behind bibliographies reflects considerable professional devotion, including travel to distant libraries, hours locating heretofore unknown sources in archives, and the costs that come with setting aside personal and familial interests. If we want these works to flourish into the future, and interest students in such projects, then greater recognition for bibliographers will be required.

When all is said and done, Samuel Johnson may be correct. Perhaps the bibliographer, as with all those who toil in such "lower employments," can hope for little more than censure. But the recent history of Coleridge studies indicates that there may be room for praise.

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The current set of reviews includes a discussion of books not only on S. T. Coleridge but also the literary, philosophical, and political contexts of his works. Three reviews focus on the concerns of the age. Frederick Burwick's *A History of Romantic Literature*, according to Mark Canuel, "is a book with big ambitions." Although not focused singly on Coleridge, Burwick's *History* demonstrates the ongoing significance of the relationship between the books we read and the historical contexts in which they were written. Similarly, Sean Barry's review of *Poetry and British Nationalisms in the Bardic Eighteenth Century* highlights the ways that Strabone's compelling study demonstrates how "the

medievalism of textual antiquarians shaped English, Welsh, and Scottish national identities and avant garde poetics" in the late eighteenth century. Finally, Aimee Barbeau looks at Timothy Michael's *British Romanticism and the Critique of Political Reason*, a work suggesting that the literature of the period offers an account of the political capacity of reason.

Other reviews cast new light on Coleridge's thought. Nicholas Reid provides a review of the first complete monograph study of Coleridge's *Opus Maximum*, explaining how Murray Evans's *Sublime Coleridge* provides a clearer account of the epistemology that underlies much of Coleridge's work. Moreover, as the literary origins of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" continue to be a source of interest and speculation, Robin Whittaker assesses Van Fox Lloyd's new look at two maritime voyages that may have shaped his poem.

The final group of reviews look at Coleridge's relationship to other writers and subsequent reception. Kim Wheatley places the late Coleridge in conversation with Keats and Shelley through a review of Karen Swann's *Lives of the Dead Poets*, while Linda Reesman's review of *Wordsworth Before Coleridge* clarifies Coleridge's relationship to Wordsworth's intellectual formation. Across the Atlantic, Jessica Oliver explains how Coleridge contributed to the reception of Jonathan Edwards in a review of Brad Bannon's *Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the Supernatural Will in American Literature*. In the next issue readers can look forward to reviews of Casie LeGete's *Remaking Romanticism* and Tim Fulford's *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1815–1845*.