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reads
Coleridge, Revision and Romanticism, After the Revolution, 1793-1818
(Continuum)
by Ve-Yin Tee

THE AIM OF THIS STUDY is to examine multiple texts in their various versions. Through an analysis of revisions and their implications, Tee explains that authorial intent at particular moments can be uncovered. Additionally, the intent of editors and their choices may be examined and questioned. To this end, four case studies are offered: two of Coleridge's major poems, as well as a prose article and a play. By treating each version as a separate work, with its own historical and social context, Tee seeks to open up new, different, and wider readings of Coleridge.

The first chapter considers *Frost at Midnight* and particularly its relation to Coleridge's conservative critics. Of the versions of the poem, four are examined. Naturally, Tee's historical examination focuses largely on the original version of the poem, then narrows to examine those individual sections that were the subject of revision. Of interest is the relationship between the poem and the accusation that reformist thinkers such as Coleridge embraced a morally and socially destructive philosophy. It was, in part, for this reason, according to Tee, that Coleridge found himself compelled to paint a picture of a God respecting household, through a familial fireside scene.

Parallels between this scene and that of Madonna and the infant Christ are explored in relation to Coleridge's sympathetic descriptions of German Catholic iconography in the Notebooks, and related to the issue of Catholic emancipation. Additionally, particular attention is given to Coleridge's oft-revised description of the floating soot observed above the fire. In *Frost at Midnight* Coleridge describes its motions as making it seem alive. Tee notes the potential connection that Coleridge's critics could have made between this idea and the atheistic theory that life resides in animation alone. Coleridge, perceiving this connection, re-wrote this passage on numerous occasions.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter is the second, which considers one of Coleridge's best known, and most heavily revised poems, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Three major versions are examined from the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 and 1800, and from the *Sibylline Leaves* of 1817. Tee establishes high expectations for this consideration when he claims to have "managed to provide the most historically specific reading of the poem that currently exists" (13). While this proves to be an overestimation, some very interesting perspectives are brought to the reader's understanding of the poem.

In considering the first version, Tee relates the *Ancient Mariner* to the social history of British seamanship. We learn of the relation between the penal system and seafaring, and how ships were, in essence, floating prison workhouses. Tee also considers the mutinies among sailors as they struggled

for better working conditions, and finally of the diseases from which they often suffered. These are related back to the Mariner, the crew and the diseased female spectre of the poem.

The 1800 version of the poem is taken up through the relationship of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Tee tells a story that does not see Wordsworth exclude Coleridge from the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Instead Coleridge's withdrawal is posited as a voluntary act, given that it was a time of relative financial security for him, attained through the Wedgewood annuity and a salary from the *Morning Post*. This is compared to Wordsworth's more difficult financial situation, one that made the second edition *Lyrical Ballads* an important potential source of income that Coleridge was content to pass on. Finally, the consideration of the 1817 version largely examines Coleridge's attempt to respond to the concerns of critics, and the challenge of making the parable of the poem more obvious to readers.

The third chapter is useful in showing the reasoning behind the continuities and discontinuities of Coleridge's evolving politics. The section takes up three examples of Coleridge's prose writing, examining his reversal of the Romantic pastoral to present a "post–apocalyptic" vision of a land dominated by a particular target for criticism. The first vision Tee selects is taken from the 1795 lectures 'on Revealed Religion its Corruptions and Political Views', in which the land is mastered by the established church. Here the piety of the reform minded dissenters is contrasted to the wealth, mystery, and superstition of Anglicanism. Tee juxtaposes this criticism of the established church with an article presenting the reverse vision, where revolutionaries and Catholic conspirators have overthrown the established religion and inaugurated despotism in the place of English freedom. Written in 1811 for a pro-government newspaper, the piece reflects Coleridge's revised position in the context of the war with France. Finally, Tee selects a third version of the vision taken from the 1817 *Lay Sermon…On the Existing Distresses and Discontents*, which offers something of a compromise between the two previous visions.

The fourth and final chapter turns to the multiple versions of Coleridge's play *Remorse*. The popularity of Shakespeare's plays, particularly *Macbeth*, during the period is taken up and linked to the interest Coleridge and the age had in imperious rulers and the poetic justice that can befall their fictional representations. We see this in Coleridge's own *Robespierre*. Initially, Drury Lane rejected Coleridge's first contribution to this trend, the tragedy *Osorio*. However, Coleridge re-wrote and re-submitted it when the theatre came under new management with the new title of *Remorse*. His alterations reflect not just political change, but also advances in stage production, and the increased popular demand for romance. *Remorse* was accepted and lasted twenty nights earning Coleridge four hundred pounds, which he calculated to be more than all his previous literary works put together. This final chapter provides interesting insights into the dramatic world of early nineteenth-century London, and the role public fashions, politics, critics, and even the needs of individual performers played in shaping Coleridge's most successful play.

Tee offers a concise insight into his approach when he writes in the conclusion: "I believe it is the overriding duty of the textual pluralist to multiply data in such a way so that comprehensive statements become impossible" (142). This interest in multiplicity informs some of the useful contextualisation we find in this study, but it can also lead the analysis of the works examined away from the wider intellectual context that is so helpful in considering poems such as *Frost at Midnight*. The secret ministry of frost, the animate soot, and the icon-image of mother and child, are all connected through the Spinozistic immanentism that was the driving force of German Romanticism, and which had such a revolutionary effect on Coleridge's own thought. Yet this wider intellectual trend is not considered as a common theme to unite each of these aspects. Furthermore, there are more complex dynamics in the authorship occurring than revision alone. If we examine the relationship between a work like *Aids to Reflection* and the *Opus Maximum*, we can see how some of Coleridge's more grand designs were often cannibalised by more attainable projects, as well as the more immediate financial gain they offered.

These are, however, more sins of omission than commission, and *Coleridge, Revision and Romanticism* offers a helpful contribution to understanding Coleridge's development as an author, allowing us to appreciate how and why he made the revisions he did, and to reconstruct the context of particular works. These revisions reveal to us how Coleridge struggled with his radical past, and the pressures of living in a country at war. Furthermore, they show the evolution of his political ideals in a direction that, in the end, was neither radical, nor particularly conservative. Finally, they exhibit the practical and market forces that shaped his production as an author. Each of the revised works taken up are shown to be expressions of the individual author and society in which he lived at the specific moment they were produced, making this examination helpful for those concerned with these works in particular, or with Coleridge's development in general.