Book Reviews

edited by

Jeffrey W. Barbeau

READERS TODAY FACE A SEEMINGLY INSUPERABLE CHALLENGE: information overload. Chad Wellmon's *Organizing Enlightenment* (2015) explains the problem as a matter of epistemic authority: "What legitimates one form of knowledge over another? Which sources of knowledge are to be trusted? Which not? What practices and scholarly habits, techniques, and institutions render knowledge authoritative or worthy? Questions about distilling knowledge rely on assumptions about its value."[1] From face-to-face dialogue about a recommended book to the algorithms that rank results on Google, we sort information through a complex network of communication.

Talk of information overload makes me all the more thankful for the labours of those who review books. Reviewing can be thankless work, yet a well-written review brings satisfaction to readers and writers alike. The ideal reviewer suspends judgment in sympathetic expectation, postponing certitude in a posture of criticism. In this way, the modern state of information overload is thwarted, or at least impeded for a time. Readers glean insights from books they may never read, and writers profit from responsible evaluation.

If it is true that a well-written review expands the boundaries of a book, extending the conversation, widening its audience, and prolonging its life, then readers of *The Coleridge Bulletin* have a great deal to cherish. Each of the reviewers in the current issue has brought thoughtful commentary on a book of interest to our readers. Whether in Paul Cheshire's careful retrieval of Coleridge's use of the theta ⊙, Seamus Perry's appraisal of Southey and Wordsworth as Coleridge's writing partners, weighing the *Annual Anthology* against the *Lyrical Ballads*, or Jacob Risinger's assessment of Coleridge's communication methods, these reviewers have not only captured key aspects of recent books, but also underscored potential areas of further investigation.

Beginning in this issue, I introduce a new feature to *The Coleridge Bulletin*: "Looking Back" and "Looking Forward." Each issue will feature a few selections from past reviews focused on a single theme, work, individual, or (as in these inaugural selections) a prior volume. Even in the field of Coleridge studies, the steady stream of books, articles, and reviews leads to its own variety of information overload. "Looking Back" will provide a reminder of books and reviews from the past, calling to mind particularly insightful resources that may enrich our understanding of the history of scholarship, contribute to the current conversation, or indicate areas of potential renewal and investigation. In "Looking Forward" I will also provide notice of a few of the upcoming reviews that readers can expect to see in future issues. In my short time as reviews editor, I am deeply impressed by the breadth and depth of current scholarship and feel grateful for the many reviewers, past and

---

[1] Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2015), 12.

present, who have contributed to the success of *The Coleridge Bulletin*.

Looking back

A selection of reviews from Autumn 1997

From Lynda Pratt's review of Mark Storey's *Robert Southey: A Life* (1997):

"It is a story that, written once from Southey's perspective, traces the gradual shift in *his* feelings, from the ecstatic praise found in his earliest surviving comments about his new friend ('He is of most uncommon merit—of the strongest genius, the clearest judgment, the best heart'), through frustration ('he does nothing which he ought to do, & everything which he ought not'), to his ambiguous response to the news of Coleridge's death ('It will not intrude much upon my waking thoughts, but I expect to feel it for some time to come in my dreams'). . . . Problematic and distorted as Wordsworth and Coleridge's interpretations of Southey are, even more disconcerting is the tendency of writers on the Romantic period to accept these judgments at face value. . . . The crucial point is, however, that unlike many of his contemporaries, Southey cannot just be dismissed as a mere influence. . . . Reconsidering Southey's reputation, and restoring him to a central position in the debates and practices of his time, sheds new light on the cultural achievements of a period which did not actually call itself a 'Romantic' one."

From Edoardo Zuccato's review of Morton D. Paley's *Coleridge's Later Poetry* (1996):

"Paley believes that the turning-point of Coleridge's career as a poet was not the 'Dejection' ode, as might be expected, but 'To William Wordsworth.' This often ambiguous text would represent, among other things, Coleridge's definitive farewell to his role of oracular poet, which he left to Wordsworth. From that time, Coleridge's public mask as a poet was a different one. The style he developed often drew on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century devices such as personification and allegory; the themes he explored revolve round the concept of loss. Paley points out that Coleridge's mask, unlike Yeats's, is a simplified exaggeration 'of the poet's subjectivity, through which he can present painful aspects of his existence in verbal constructions that remain under his control'."

From Alison Dodd's review of Raymond Hainton and Godfrey Hainton, *The Unknown Coleridge: The Life and Times of Derwent Coleridge, 1800–1883* (1996):

"His twenty-three years at St. Mark's [College in Chelsea] form the most substantial part of the book, and should be particularly interesting to Coleridgeans. Derwent's background and experience combined to make him a firm believer in his father's vision of a national clerisy, a body of truly educated

men who would cultivate the humanity and intellectual potential of every citizen; Derwent made that vision the essence of his teaching at St. Mark's. Many of the lower and middle-class youths whom he taught transcended class barriers and rose to success as grammar school teachers or in the Church, with a sound foundation of knowledge and the confidence borne of independent thought. But in 1861 the Whig government's Revised Code for education, a swingeing economy measure which was also designed to establish tight political control over what might be taught, abolished financial assistance to colleges and teachers, and made it possible to become a certified teacher without attending college at all. Despite his vigorous resistance, the committed labour of half of Derwent's life was destroyed . . ."

Looking forward

Some reviews planned for the next two issues

James Engell on *Coleridge's Ancient Mariner* (2016) by J. C. C. Mays.

Gregory Leadbetter on Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* (2016) edited by Richard Matlak.

Murray Evans on *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief* (2015) by Michael Tomko, and *Imagination and the Playfulness of God* (2011) by Robin Stockitt.

Talissa Ford on *Memorializing Animals during the Romantic Period* (2015) by Chase Pielak.

Ralf Haekel on *A Romantics Chronology* (2016) by Martin Garrett.