

Editorial

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ALMOST EVERY DAY SOME NEW HEADLINE unsettles my mind. Wars devastate communities around the world. Political strife divides allied nations—and sometimes families. Environmental concerns manifest themselves in the news as well: flooding and fires devastate property and disrupt ordinary activities, reminding us of the fragility of life and calling to mind the Ancient Mariner's discordant relationship to nature. Amidst such uncertainty, one might wonder if the study of Romantic literature and the life and thought of S. T. Coleridge is only time misspent.

As I have pondered these matters, a lesser-known work by the twentieth-century literary critic and public intellectual C. S. Lewis came to mind. Lewis's 'Learning in War Time', a sermon which he first delivered in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Autumn 1939, addressed students at Oxford when the war had only just begun. Many of Lewis's listeners were undoubtedly aware of friends and family who were already engaged in the struggle, and many soon would leave the university to join their ranks. Lewis rightly asked what many of his students were almost certainly wondering that day: how can we study poetics, philosophy, or art when calamity casts its long shadow over our work? How attend to the life of the mind when turmoil threatens our very existence?

Coleridge, of course, lived in times of trouble, too. He memorably quipped of politics that 'what begins in Fear usually ends in Folly' (TT 208). The Revolution, however promising it appeared, quickly descended into the Reign of Terror. Events in France sent ripples across the Channel. And with the rise of Napoleon, war soon followed. Famine, disease, and political turmoil abroad led to years of uncertainty and economic upheaval at home. While there is much we look back upon and celebrate—the end of the slave trade, political emancipation, new advances in education, and parliamentary reform—the marks of progress were accompanied by a persistent uncertainty that is all-too-easily overlooked.

Lewis reminded his listeners of something that I think remains relevant to our study of Romanticism. 'Human life', he explained, 'has always been lived on the edge of a precipice. Human culture has always had to exist under the shadow of something infinitely more important than itself. If men had postponed the search for knowledge and beauty until they were secure, the search would never have begun'.¹ So it was in Coleridge's day. So, too, in our own.

The current issue includes a range of articles on topics such as Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, conception of monarchy, and travels abroad. Other figures in the Coleridge circle come into view through a new article on De Quincey and Tim Fulford's public lecture on Tom Poole. Seven new reviews demonstrate Coleridge's continued relevance for the study of poetry, ecology, politics, and much more. Lastly, I thank Tom Mayberry for writing a fine remembrance of Maggie Roberts, an active committee member of the Friends of Coleridge and erstwhile custodian of Coleridge Cottage.

¹ C. S. Lewis, 'Learning in War Time', in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 44.