

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



COLERIDGE

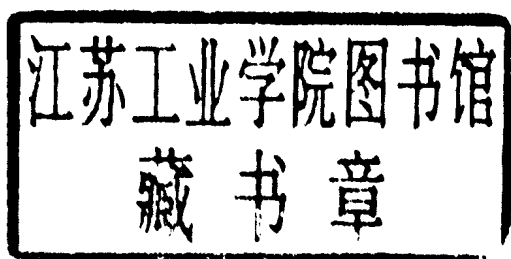
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*Edited by Lucy Newlyn*

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
COLERIDGE

EDITED BY  
LUCY NEWLYN

*St Edmund Hall, Oxford*



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## CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN BEER, Peterhouse, Cambridge

JULIE CARLSON, University of California, Santa Barbara

DEIRDRE COLEMAN, University of Sydney, Australia

JOSIE DIXON, Palgrave, Macmillan

JAMES ENGELL, Harvard University

ANGELA ESTERHAMMER, University of Western Ontario

KELVIN EVEREST, University of Liverpool

TIM FULFORD, Nottingham Trent University

PAUL HAMILTON, Queen Mary and Westfield College, London

PETER J. KITSON, University of Wales, Bangor

JAMES C. MCKUSICK, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

PAUL MAGNUSON, New York University

J. C. C. MAYS, University College, Dublin

LUCY NEWLYN, St Edmund Hall, Oxford

MARY ANNE PERKINS, Birkbeck College, University of London

SEAMUS PERRY, University of Glasgow

## ABBREVIATIONS

All quotations from Coleridge's prose refer to *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, general editor Kathleen Coburn, Bollingen Series (Princeton University Press, 1971- ). Individual volumes in the series have their own abbreviations, which are offered below. Unless it is otherwise stated, all quotations from Coleridge's poetry refer to *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

This volume was already in press when the latest additions to the *Collected Coleridge* were published; I was unable, therefore, to incorporate references to Jim Mays's fine edition of Coleridge's *Poems*, or to bring references to the Notebooks up-to-date.

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| AR                      | <i>Aids to Reflection</i> , ed. John Beer, Bollingen Series 75 (Princeton University Press, 1993).                                   |
| BL                      | <i>Biographia Literaria</i> , ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Bollingen Series 75, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1983). |
| <i>Church and State</i> | <i>On the Constitution of the Church and State</i> , ed. John Colmer, Bollingen Series 75 (Princeton University Press, 1976).        |
| CL                      | <i>The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge</i> , ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1956-71).        |
| C. Lects                | <i>Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature</i> , ed. R. A. Foakes, Bollingen Series 75, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1987).         |
| CM                      | <i>Marginalia</i> , 5 parts to date, ed. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson (Princeton University Press, 1980- ).                      |

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CN *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 4 vols. to date, each in two parts (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957- ).
- CPW *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
- CT *Coleridge the Talker: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and Comments*, ed. R. W. Armour and R. F. Howes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1940).
- EOT *Essays on his Times*, ed. David V. Erdman, 3 vols. (London and Princeton, NJ, 1978).
- EY *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, revised Chester Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).
- Friend* *The Friend*, ed. Barbara Rooke, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1969).
- Howe William Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930-4).
- IR S. T. Coleridge: *Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Seamus Perry (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000).
- KL *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1958).
- Lects. 1795* *Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, Bollingen Series 75 (Princeton University Press, 1971).
- Misc. C* *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (Cambridge, MA: Constable & Co., 1936).
- MY *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, 1806-11*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, revised Chester Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).
- Phil Lects* *The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Owen Barfield and Kathleen Coburn (Princeton University Press, 1949).
- Prelude* William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1995).
- Sh C* *Shakespearian Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1960).
- SM *The Statesman's Manual, Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, Bollingen Series 75 (Princeton University Press, 1993).

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- SWF *Shorter Works and Fragments*, 2 parts, ed. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson (Princeton University Press, 1995).
- TT *Table Talk Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*, ed. Carl C. Woodring, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1990)
- VCL mss. Victoria College Library mss.
- Watchman* *The Watchman*, ed. Lewis Patton, Bollingen Series 75 (Princeton University Press, 1970).
- Wordsworth Prose* *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1772 Born at Ottery St Mary, Devonshire (21 October)
- 1782 At Christ's Hospital School, London
- 1792 Jesus College, Cambridge
- 1793 Attends the trial for treason of William Frend (May); enlists in the army under assumed identity (December)
- 1794 Returns to Cambridge; collaboration with Robert Southey; publishes *The Fall of Robespierre*; begins 'Religious Musings'
- 1795 Political lectures at Bristol; marriage to Sara Fricker; publishes *Conciones ad Populum*
- 1796 Tours the Midlands to sell his political journal, the *Watchman*; Publishes *Poems on Various Subjects* and moves to Nether Stowey; first son, Hartley, born
- 1797 Finishes his play, *Osorio*; William and Dorothy Wordsworth become Coleridge's neighbours; publishes *Poems, to which are now Added, Poems by Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd*
- 1798 *Fears in Solitude* published; starts writing for the *Morning Post*; collaboration with Wordsworth and anonymous joint publication of *Lyrical Ballads*; second son, Berkeley, born in May; visit to Germany (September)
- 1799 Death of Berkeley (April); return to England in July; meets Sara Hutchinson (October); working for the *Morning Post*
- 1800 Moves to Greta Hall, Keswick, to be near the Wordsworths in Grasmere; second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* published
- 1802 Marriage starts to founder; publishes 'Dejection'; birth of daughter, Sara
- 1803 *Poems* (1803); Scottish tour with the Wordsworths
- 1804 Visits Sicily; becomes Acting Public Secretary in Malta
- 1806 Returns to Keswick; agrees to separate from his wife



## CHRONOLOGY

- 1807 Moves between London, Stowey and Bristol
- 1808 'Lectures on the Principles of Poetry' at the Royal Institution; moves to Allen Bank, Grasmere; begins to publish his weekly journal, the *Friend*
- 1809-10 Publishes 28 numbers of the *Friend*
- 1811 Contributions to the *Courier*
- 1811-12 Lectures on drama and Shakespeare in London
- 1813 Coleridge's play, *Remorse*, is performed at Drury Lane
- 1814 Lectures in Bristol
- 1815 Dictates *Biographia Literaria*
- 1816 Publishes *Christabel* (three editions), *The Statesman's Manual*
- 1817 Publishes *Zapolya*, *Biographia Literaria* and *Sibylline Leaves*; lectures on poetry and drama (January-March)
- 1818 Publishes *The Friend* (3-vol. edition); lectures on literature and philosophy
- 1819 Meets Keats; occasional contributions to *Blackwood's*
- 1822 Henry Nelson Coleridge begins recording *Table Talk*
- 1823 Begins *Youth and Age*
- 1825 *Aids to Reflection* published
- 1828 *Poetical Works* (3 vols.)
- 1829 *On the Constitution of Church and State*
- 1834 Death at Highgate

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Josie Dixon for inviting me to edit this book; and to the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press who made suggestions in the early stages. Thanks also to Linda Bree for her many helpful observations, to Leigh Mueller for her careful copy-editing, and to Neil de Cort for seeing the book through the Press.

I am very grateful to Phil Cardinale for giving up his own valuable time to check the typescript and the proofs. Any mistakes that remain are of course my own responsibility.

My thanks to the Principal and Fellows of St Edmund Hall for a term's sabbatical leave, during which the bulk of the work was completed.

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LUCY NEWLYN

## Introduction

Since the early 1980s, major developments have occurred in the way British Romanticism is approached and understood. We now read the literature of that period (1789–1832) with a greater consciousness of its political, economic and social contexts. The impact on British writers of the French Revolution and ensuing political movements has been more thoroughly investigated than ever before. New historicist criticism has taught us to understand how market-forces influenced the production and enjoyment of literature. Women's writing (as well as the work of various male authors previously judged to be 'minor') has come very rapidly to the fore, involving significant shifts in how we think about the canon.

As a consequence of all these changes, it would be unthinkable nowadays to design a course on British Romanticism based around the work of six male poets, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats and Shelley; or even around a list expanded to include the great prose-writers of the age: Scott, Hazlitt, Lamb, Peacock and De Quincey. 'What about Wollstonecraft, Austen, Mary Shelley?', our students might legitimately complain if such a course were offered. (And what about Barbauld, Edgeworth, Godwin, Burke, Paine and Thelwall, one might rejoin; for the list of writers available for study grows longer every year.) The 'Big Six' go on being of vital importance, of course. But we now want to understand and appreciate their achievements historically and comparatively, not just according to the standards of taste which have made them classics for two centuries. This evidently entails diversification, both in the range of writers we teach, and in the disciplines and methodologies we draw on in our teaching. But it also calls for a reconsideration of the central figures who at one time constituted the canon. For, if the meaning of the word 'Romanticism' has shifted to accommodate a broader spectrum of texts and approaches, then it follows that the contribution made by each individual Romantic writer asks also to be reappraised.

What does it mean to read 'The Ancient Mariner' as a contribution to political debate in the late 1790s? What happens to our understanding of 'Frost at Midnight' when we place it in its original context, as one of three poems published in a quarto volume (1798) entitled *Fears in Solitude*? How true is it to say that Coleridge began as a radical and ended as a conservative? Do those terms apply to his idiosyncratic engagement with the politics of his own day? If we think of Coleridge not just as a poet and a critic, but as a journalist, preacher and lecturer, how does this affect our view of his overall contribution? Such questions are being asked daily, at a specialist level – in critical essays, scholarly articles and monographs addressing specific issues, genres and texts. But the answers are slow to filter into the classroom; for these scholarly materials are scattered, sometimes even inaccessible. Moreover, the level of research expertise required to process them (let alone to amalgamate the separate areas of interest) is high. Hence the need for a volume such as this, addressing the full range of Coleridge's works, and making accessible to students both their contemporary contexts and current approaches to them.

This need is all the more pressing because of the interdisciplinary nature of Coleridge's thinking. If his 'myriad-mindedness' is legendary, it is also responsible for the difficulty his writings pose – and have always posed – for readers. His massive contribution spans most of the species of knowledge available to nineteenth-century enquiry. It bears witness to a historical moment at which interdisciplinary thought still seemed possible. The word 'science', for Coleridge, meant knowledge in general. Theology was not to be separated from philosophy. Philosophy – properly understood – was a species of poetry. But the interconnections between different discourses were already becoming less transparent, as knowledge became professionalised and therefore specialised. Even Coleridge's contemporary readers found the threads of his thinking mysterious, baffling, frustrating. These difficulties were compounded by the tenacity with which he opposed (or seemed to oppose) the secular reading practices of his day. His lifelong mission to retrieve a vanishing spiritual authority was the register of his resistance to modernity. He voiced that resistance in a language which has seemed to many obscurantist and impenetrable.

Readers in the twenty-first century, approaching Coleridge for the first time, are faced with the daunting task of re-building intellectual connections obscure in their origins, and now lost. They are aided in this project by the magnificent (though still incomplete) *Collected Coleridge*, by the *Letters*, *Notebooks* and *Marginalia*, and by a corpus of critical commentary whose exponential growth since the early 1980s has been both exhilarating and bewildering. Some of the difficulties they experience in reading Coleridge are

ones he foresaw. Secularisation has not only relegated the Bible to a thing of the past, but has rendered the idea of spiritual meaning opaque. Knowledge has become diversified in such a way as to make Coleridge's combination of eclecticism and erudition inaccessible, both in terms of its actual content and in the habit of mind it presupposes. The professionalisation of literary criticism (intensified, in recent years, by the advent of critical theory) has made academic discourse so specialised that it can produce volumes of disparate exegesis on a single Coleridgean text.

On top of all this, there is the difficulty posed for readers by the passage of time. Time has the confusing tendency of making the significance of public allusions seem irretrievable, by obscuring or removing the immediacy of political events. Simultaneously, it moves private allusions further under cover. This makes the task of accurately interpreting Coleridge's poetry almost as difficult as understanding his vastly and densely knowledgeable prose. Let us take as an example the mysterious first line of 'Frost at Midnight', one of his most anthologised poems:

The Frost performs its secret ministry

Coleridge is here describing a cold night in February 1798. He goes on to picture himself seated by the fireside in his cottage at Nether Stowey, Somerset, alongside his sleeping baby (Hartley), to whom the poem is addressed. There is nothing at first sight even remotely political either in the intimate domestic setting or in the quiet meditative register. But even so, the first line carries a freight of historical and biographical, as well as symbolic, associations, which help to illuminate Coleridge's political perspective at this time. The year 1798 was the one in which, offered an annuity by Thomas Wedgwood, this radical young dissenter gave up the idea of becoming a Unitarian minister in order to devote himself to poetry. So in a sense that year marked the beginning of his so-called apostasy, his retreat from the public political stage. But he was still a 'marked man' as far as the Tory government was concerned. It was while living at Nether Stowey that he and Wordsworth were allegedly followed and watched by a spy in Pitt's employment, who was under the impression that the two of them were plotting treason. The word 'ministry' is therefore inescapably loaded: it evokes a personal and spiritual vocation which has been abandoned (not without guilt) for poetic retreat. But it also connotes a public office which has peculiarly menacing implications, at a time when dissenters were persecuted and no one was beyond suspicion.

Are some of these haunting resonances perhaps also present in the description of the melting frost which concludes the poem?

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,  
 Whether the summer clothe the general earth  
 With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing  
 Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch  
 Of mossy apple-tree, while the night thatch  
 Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall  
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
 Or if the secret ministry of frost  
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
 Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

In this patient descriptive catalogue, Coleridge preserves the smooth flow of regular iambic pentameter, breaking it only once with the dactyls and spondees of

Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall

Notice how the rhythmic irregularity in this line causes one to halt at the word 'eave-drops', as though it marked a kind of dissonance. Notice, too, how close the word 'eave-drops' is to 'eavesdrop' – so much so that, when reading aloud, it is easy to make the slip. As well as the acoustic resemblance, there is a close etymological connection between the compound noun and the verb. It seems likely that Coleridge, fascinated as he was by the power of puns, was evoking the idea of a private rumination 'listened in on', a conversation overheard. The poem's mood has by this stage moved onto a plane of tranquil resolution; and yet, subliminally, there is a sense of privacy disturbed – perhaps by the reader, perhaps by a wary and watchful public world. Perhaps even by a spy.

In its preoccupation with the precious fragility of seclusion, 'Frost at Midnight' resembles Coleridge's 'Fears in Solitude', a poem which laments the destruction of Somerset's rural tranquillity by warfare. His more overtly political 'France: An Ode' deplores the invasion of Switzerland by France, and re-defines liberty in terms of the mind's harmonious interaction with the natural world. The volume in which all three of these poems first appeared in 1798 took *Fears in Solitude* as its title – indicating a strong thematic linkage between poems ostensibly different in their register and subject-matter. Private and public anxieties mingle and intersect in these poems. For a writer who felt so acutely his accountability as a citizen and political subject, it could hardly be otherwise. Critics differ, however, about whether the accent should fall on a change in Coleridge's political complexion, marked by his retreat from the public arena; or on the re-channelling of his radical energies at a time when dissent was forced underground, and political protest had to be camouflaged. Kelvin Everest, in his foundational



book *Coleridge's Secret Ministry*, noticed 'the urgency', the 'almost fugitive quality', in the epithet 'secret', seeing here a coded allusion to the poet's continuing radicalism. More recently, in *Minotaur*, Tom Paulin has shown how the poet's 'occult activism' is overlaid by the naturalising and spiritualising tendencies of his art – tendencies which increasingly characterised his conservatism.

Careful annotation and commentary can supply much of the specialist historical and philosophical information that is needed for students to piece together their own interpretations of Coleridge's richly allusive writing, helping them to reach their own conclusions about his politics and psychology. But without direction and cross-referencing between works, they are unlikely to see the full picture. It is intended that the chapters in this volume should bring together the astonishing range of Coleridge's intellectual concerns, restoring to his writings some of their more inaccessible meanings. The collective aim of contributors has been to place Coleridge's works in their original contexts, paying special attention to the readership they addressed and the reception they received. The chapters are designed to introduce students to important areas of debate in Coleridge scholarship today. They also contribute to a clearer understanding of Coleridge's relationship with contemporary writers, as well as his later influence on poetry, criticism, and literary theory. The volume is divided into three sections. Part 1 provides essential material for students: the topics chosen are deliberately canonical, representing the standard range of material covered in undergraduate courses; and the material is presented in a broadly chronological sequence. Readers can then progress to the more general chapters in Part 2 ('Discursive modes'), intended to reflect the full range of Coleridge's interests and achievements; and finally to Part 3 ('Themes and topics'), which focuses on areas of interest that engage scholars today in critical debate.

Coleridge would have approved wholeheartedly of a book intended as a 'companion' for his readers. The metaphor of companionship is deeply germane to his concerns. In a poem of 1796 addressed to Charles Lloyd 'on his proposing to domesticate with the author', Coleridge figures their future life together 'arm linked in friendly arm', either 'in social silence . . . seated at ease on some smooth mossy rock', or unlocking the 'treasured heart' in intimate exchange. This idealisation of friendship, anticipating his later collaboration with Wordsworth, was a crucial ingredient in Coleridge's figuration of poetry as a domain in which political ideals could be fulfilled. Domestic fraternity was seen as a more accessible and harmonious alternative to political fraternity, at a time when the French Revolution was anathematised by conservative ideology. Friendship also provided an ideal figure for the poet's