

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1775-1834)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a poet, philosopher, and literary critic whose writings have been enormously influential in the development of modern thought. In his own lifetime, Coleridge was renowned throughout Britain and Europe as one of the Lake Poets, a close-knit group of writers including William Wordsworth and Robert Southey, who resided in the English Lake District. Coleridge was also known to many English readers as a talented prose writer, especially as the author of the *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a literary autobiography; *The Friend* (1809-1810), a collection of essays; and *Aids to Reflection* (1825), a series of aphorisms on religious faith. Residents of Bristol might have remembered him as a young radical firebrand who delivered some controversial lectures on politics and religion in 1795, while residents of London would more likely have recalled his lectures on literature (delivered from 1808 to 1819), which first established his public image as a distinguished man of letters endowed with immense cultural authority in matters of aesthetic theory and practical criticism. However, very few of his contemporaries were aware of the wide range of his prose works, which included a large quantity of newspaper articles, occasional pamphlets on politics and religion, and a vast number of letters, notebooks, marginalia, and manuscript treatises on philosophy and theology. Coleridge's prose gradually became better known during the Victorian period, mainly due to the republication of his major works in England and America, which contributed to his growing reputation as a philosopher, theologian, and literary critic.

The sanctimonious and sentimentalizing attitudes of Coleridge's Victorian editors tended to repel readers in the early twentieth century, and his reputation went into temporary eclipse as the English Romantic poets came under attack by Irving Babbitt, T. S. Eliot, and T. E. Hulme. But a Coleridge revival got underway with the publication of John Livingston Lowes's *The Road*

to Xanadu (1927), one of the most widely read scholarly books of the twentieth century. This fascinating study of the narrative sources for Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was sparked by the rediscovery of the "Gutch Memorandum Book," a manuscript notebook that provided clues to Coleridge's early reading and intellectual development. Thrilled by the prospect of an undiscovered Coleridge lurking in dusty manuscripts, a new generation of scholars began to seek out and publish his widely scattered writings. In 1930 Kathleen Coburn discovered a trove of fifty-five unpublished Coleridge notebooks, which she painstakingly transcribed and annotated in a series of magnificent volumes. Coburn is also serving (with Bart Winer) as general editor of the Princeton University Press edition of Coleridge's *Collected Works*, a landmark of modern textual editing that is finally making available all of Coleridge's unpublished prose.

Readers of Coleridge have always been confronted with a daunting problem in the sheer volume and incredible variety of his writings. His career as an intellectual figure spans several decades and encompasses major works in several discrete fields, including poetry, criticism, philosophy, and theology. The great variety of Coleridge's achievement, and the incomplete or provisional state of most of his writings, poses an enormous obstacle for any reader. Yet the richness and subtlety of his prose style, his startling and often profound insights, and his active, inquiring quality of mind provide ample recompense. Coleridge is now generally regarded as the most profound and significant prose writer of the English Romantic period. No longer dismissed as a mere footnote to his poetry, his prose is coming to be understood as an important achievement in its own right, with continued relevance to the fundamental issues of our own times.

The youngest of ten children, Coleridge was born in the village of Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, on 21 October 1772. His father, the Reverend John Coleridge, was the local clergyman and master of the grammar school as well as the author of four

books, including a Latin grammar and a commentary on the Book of Judges. Coleridge later described his father as an absentminded dreamer, while his mother, Ann Bowdon Coleridge, was more practical and ambitious. He enjoyed an especially close, affectionate relation with his father, who regarded the young Samuel as a highly promising lad destined to follow in his own footsteps as a minister of the Church of England. In a 16 October 1797 letter to Thomas Poole, Coleridge recalled a winter evening when his father took him out stargazing: "he told me the names of the stars--and how Jupiter was a thousand times larger than our world--and that the other twinkling stars were Suns that had worlds rolling round them--& when I came home, he shewed me how they rolled round." This incident remained vividly imprinted in the boy's memory as a moment when he became "habituated to the Vast," intensely aware of his imaginative participation in a natural world that enormously overshadowed the self-oriented daily activities of normal human beings. From this childhood episode we can trace the origin of Coleridge's sensitivity to nature and natural objects, so essential to his growth as a poet; his intellectual engagement with the ultimate questions of being and knowledge that he struggled to answer throughout his prose works; and perhaps also his characteristic impatience with the duties and responsibilities of everyday life, which always seemed so petty on the vast scale of the universe.

Coleridge's father died of a sudden illness in 1781, leaving the nine-year-old Samuel and the rest of his siblings to fend for themselves in a bleak, lonely world. The family was soon scattered; Samuel was sent to London and enrolled in 1782 as a "charity boy" at Christ's Hospital, a preparatory school of some intellectual repute, but a cold and inhospitable place for the young and impressionable orphan. The rigors of boarding-school life were mitigated to some extent by the presence in London of his gregarious and alcoholic uncle John Bowdon, who introduced the young Samuel to the delights of

London's numerous public houses and encouraged him to drink and carouse like a man. Coleridge also found several close friends among his fellow students at Christ's Hospital, most notably Charles Lamb, who remained a loyal and trusted friend for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, the early years at Christ's Hospital were lonely and difficult ones for Coleridge, who became known to his classmates as an impractical visionary, an incorrigible bookworm, and a precocious classical scholar, deeply learned in the arcane lore of third century Neoplatonists such as Plotinus and Iamblichus. Coleridge later wrote in a 19 November 1797 letter to John Thelwall: "I am, & ever have been a great reader--& have read almost every thing--a library-cormorant--I am deep in all out of the way books, whether of the monkish times, or of the puritanical aera." On his leave days from school he would wander the streets of London, pondering deep metaphysical questions and accosting clergymen with whom he might discuss theology.

Coleridge's extraordinary talents were soon noticed by his teachers, who encouraged his reading of classical texts and promoted him to the elite class of "Grecians" destined for the university. James Boyer, the upper grammar master of Christ's Hospital, was remembered by his pupils as a strict disciplinarian, unsparing in his use of flogging and even (in extreme cases) fetters and dungeons, but under his stern tutelage Coleridge flourished in his studies of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Coleridge's mathematics teacher was William Wales, a professional astronomer on Capt. James Cook's second voyage, who told his students fascinating tales of his exploits in the Antarctic Ocean, where he encountered icebergs, albatrosses, and strange luminous phenomena. Bernard Smith has suggested that these tales first sparked Coleridge's interest in the history of British maritime exploration, leading him to read voraciously in old travel books, and eventually bearing fruit in his lecture on the slave trade (delivered on 16 June 1795) and his haunting

poem of South Sea adventure, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798).

In due course Coleridge was awarded the Christ's Hospital Exhibition and a Rustat Scholarship, which provided about £105 per year for his university education, and in October 1791 he enrolled at Jesus College, Cambridge. There he became an academic prodigy, winning the Browne Gold Medal for his Greek sapphic "Ode on the Slave-Trade" in 1792, while at the same time he indulged his newfound sense of intellectual freedom by engaging in radical politics. Coleridge avidly read the "master pamphlets of the day," memorizing entire paragraphs and entertaining eager listeners with his impromptu evening discussions of current events in France. He admired the splendid rhetoric of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), but he responded more sympathetically to Thomas Paine's reply, *The Rights of Man* (1791-1792), which castigated Burke's aristocratic tendencies and sought to vindicate the republican principles of the French Revolution. In May 1793 Coleridge attended the Cambridge trial of William Frend, a fellow of Jesus College whose strong Unitarian beliefs and radical democratic politics were regarded by the authorities as such a dangerous influence that he was dismissed from the college and prosecuted for sedition and defamation of the Church. Coleridge was an ardent defender of Frend, applauding conspicuously at his trial and rallying support for his doomed cause.

Despite his brilliant academic success, Coleridge harbored characteristic feelings of selfdoubt that were only confirmed in January 1793 when he failed to win the prestigious Craven Fellowship, an award that would have assured his future as a professional academic. Deeply disappointed, Coleridge neglected his studies and sought to drown his sorrows in a self-destructive cycle of drinking, gambling, and debauchery, running up ever higher debts that he dared not admit to his relatives in Ottery St. Mary. Finally, after fleeing to London, risking his last few shillings in the

Irish lottery, and briefly considering suicide, on 2 December 1793 Coleridge enlisted in the Fifteenth Light Dragoons under the assumed name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbache, hoping thereby to escape his debts, evade the reproaches of his family, and begin a new life. Coleridge would later describe this episode in a highly comical way, but such a desperate subterfuge could only have emerged from the depths of a hopeless despair.

Coleridge was physically and temperamentally unsuited to be a cavalryman, a fact which soon became painfully evident to his officers as he stumbled through basic training, always unkempt in personal appearance and repeatedly thrown from his horse. Eventually his brother George discovered his whereabouts and, after weeks of negotiation, obtained his discharge. With diligent effort and suitable contrition, Coleridge was reinstated at Jesus College in April 1794, although he was confined to the college precincts and, as a penance for his transgressions, required to translate the works of Demetrius Phalereus, an exceedingly dull and obscure Greek philosopher. Always eager to make a virtue of necessity, Coleridge was soon declaring his intention to translate a whole series of Latin and Greek poets into modern English verse. He planned to publish a two-volume anthology of choice lyrics, which would provide him with enough income to discharge all of his remaining debts and obligations. This was perhaps the first of Coleridge's many publishing schemes that were never to be realized, owing to his penchant for wishful thinking and his highly developed talent for procrastination.

By June 1794 Coleridge was feeling restless at Cambridge and hungry for new horizons. He set out on a walking tour, rambling from town to town until he reached Oxford, where he met a young radical and fellow poet, Robert Southey. Coleridge remained in Oxford for several weeks, fascinated by his new friend and mentor, finding in him a kindred spirit who shared his relentlessly questioning intellectual outlook and his disaffection with established social and political

values. Together they evolved a utopian scheme they called "Pantisocracy," a plan to create an ideal society in an isolated agrarian setting on the banks of the Susquehanna River, in the wilds of northern Pennsylvania. The key elements of Pantisocracy, as it emerged from intense late-night discussions, were the elimination of private property among a small group of emigrant couples and the development of egalitarian values through the sharing of agricultural work and intellectual inquiry. As Southey imagined their daily activities, "When Coleridge and I are sawing down a tree we shall discuss metaphysics; criticise poetry when hunting a buffalo, and write sonnets whilst following the plough" (letter to Horace Walpole Bedford, 22 August 1794).

Since only married couples were expected to embark on the Pantisocratic adventure, Coleridge began casting about for an eligible spouse; and he soon found himself proposing marriage to Sarah Fricker, the attractive and amiable sister of Southey's fiancée, Edith Fricker. Two years older than Coleridge, and the eldest of six children, Sarah was a strong, self-confident, and responsible woman who could offer Coleridge the emotional support and stability that had been lacking since his early childhood. Coleridge became engaged to her in September 1794, finding in "Sara" (as he always spelled her name) not only the ideal Pantisocratic spouse, but an answer to deep emotional needs. Molly Lefebure's biography of Sara Coleridge provides a compelling reassessment of her character, countering the traditional scholarly depiction of her as an insensitive shrew, as well as the claim (advanced by Coleridge himself, jaundiced by later years of marital discord) that he was dragged reluctantly to the altar. During the months following their marriage on 4 October 1795, the young couple found deep and abiding happiness together, as Coleridge proudly declared in a 13 November letter to Southey: "I love and I am beloved, and I am happy!"

Meanwhile, Coleridge's friendship with Southey was developing into a close literary collaboration.

Together they wrote a play, *The Fall of Robespierre*, in an attempt to earn money for their voyage to America. This "historic drama," published in Cambridge in September 1794, failed to make much impression in the quiet groves of academe. Restless and disaffected with the entrenched conservatism of the university, Coleridge departed from Cambridge in December 1794 and settled in Bristol, a hotbed of radical politics, where he shared lodgings with Southey and continued to collaborate with him on various projects, including a series of lectures on history, politics, and religion. Southey delivered the historical lectures, while Coleridge addressed the other topics. Coleridge's political lectures were immediately published as a series of four pamphlets, but his six "Lectures on Revealed Religion" remained unpublished until 1971, when they appeared in his *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*. Only after the publication of these volumes were scholars finally able to grasp the integrity of Coleridge's early views on civil rights, social justice, and religious dissent.

Coleridge's political lectures attack the British government and its war against France, yet also criticize the violence of the French Revolution, particularly the hideous work of the guillotine during the Terror of 1793-1794. He advocates the moral and political education of the poor and working classes in order to prepare them for full participation in the political process. He calls for parliamentary reform, freedom of speech, and honesty in political debate, criticizing the abuse of language perpetrated by his "aristocratic" opponents, who rely on slogans and catchwords to exercise "almost a mechanical power" over the minds of the common people. Coleridge deplored the plight of his friend and fellow radical, John Horne Tooke, who was imprisoned in the Tower of London and prosecuted for high treason in 1794 because of his writings and speeches in defense of liberty. Horne Tooke, a renowned linguist and etymologist, witnessed the tyranny exerted by the political establishment in its power to alter and misconstrue the meaning of words. The ringleader of this abuse of language,

according to Coleridge, was the prime minister, William Pitt, whose false eloquence served to mask the utter vacuity of his public speeches. The windy rhetoric of Pitt's political discourse, Coleridge charged, threatened the English language with a collapse of meaning, a descent into darkness.

Coleridge further developed his critique of established power in his "Lectures on Revealed Religion, Its Corruptions and Its Political Views," attacking the Established Church for its abuse of power, its obscurantist theology, and its betrayal of true primitive Christian values. At the same time, however, he deplored the atheism of many contemporary English radicals, criticizing the mechanistic reasoning of William Godwin, a leading political theorist whose *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) outlines a gradual, inevitable evolutionary process toward an ideal society. Although he admired Godwin's utopian vision, Coleridge could not abide his dismissal of Christian fellowship as an agency of social change. As an antidote to Godwin's atheism, Coleridge advocated the ideas of David Hartley, whose philosophical treatise, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duties, and His Expectations* (1749), defends the historical truth of Christian revelation, while also explaining all mental activity, including moral judgment, as a product of the "association of ideas." Coleridge's early enthusiasm for Hartley is the result of his synthesis of Christian belief with advanced empirical thought, thus enabling Coleridge to propound his own radical theology, which envisions the elimination of private property, the demise of mercantile capitalism and its endless colonial wars, and the return to a peaceful, agrarian way of life where Christian and democratic values could finally be reconciled.

Coleridge's 1795 lectures show some evidence of hasty and slapdash composition, as well as the vehemence and one-sidedness of his youthful radicalism. They are avowedly polemical and patently unfair to opposing viewpoints. Nevertheless, they are treasured by readers of

Coleridge for their forthright adherence to democratic principles, their courageous defense of free speech in the face of censorship, and their refusal to compromise with mere political expedience. The fiery heart of the young Coleridge is fully revealed in these lectures. Moreover, Coleridge's relentless search for absolute principles that would serve as a basis for political action and religious belief, and his rejection of merely utilitarian concerns, would abide throughout his intellectual career, providing a coherent intellectual foundation that endures beneath the often bewildering shifts in his overt ideological allegiances. Unsatisfied with easy answers, Coleridge sometimes seems inconsistent in the development of essential terms and concepts; but his repeated avowal of "the necessity of *bottoming* on fixed Principles" lends rigor and relevance to all of his prose writings, far beyond their immediate context. In "Coleridge" (1840) John Stuart Mill argued that Coleridge's essential contribution to political discourse is precisely this commitment to absolute principle, as opposed to Jeremy Bentham's narrowly utilitarian views. Coleridge's 1795 lectures elucidate the early development of his quest for absolute principles in politics, philosophy, and religion.

Southey's collaboration with Coleridge on the Bristol lectures had disillusioned the future poet laureate about his new friend's capacity for sustained effort; Coleridge had proven unreliable at keeping his speaking engagements and erratic in producing copy for their various publishing schemes. Working closely with Coleridge, Southey had also realized the extent of his opium habit. (Coleridge had started taking opium in adolescence as an antidote for various medical ailments and continued its occasional use during his college years as a recreational drug; by early adulthood he was becoming dependent on regular doses.) Meanwhile, Coleridge found himself disheartened by Southey's dwindling enthusiasm for the Pantisocracy scheme, as well as his seemingly self-interested development of plans for European travel funded by a wealthy

uncle. These frictions resulted in an open quarrel in August 1795, which led to the abandonment of Pantisocracy and the end of their collaboration on other literary projects. Southey abruptly departed for Portugal, leaving Coleridge feeling once again alone in the world, abandoned by his closest friend and mentor.

Coleridge responded to this crisis with surprising resilience, discovering new literary interests and developing his contacts with the radical intellectual circles of Bristol. He became a close friend of Dr. Thomas Beddoes, a prominent physician who was an eager advocate of the latest philosophical and scientific thought emanating from Germany. One of the first English proponents of Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy, Beddoes stimulated Coleridge's interest in the German language and literature and encouraged his involvement in radical politics. Coleridge was fortunate to find another friend and admirer in the Bristol bookseller Joseph Cottle, who published his political lectures as a series of pamphlets in 1795. With Cottle's almost daily encouragement, advice, and financial assistance, Coleridge published his first volume of poems in April 1796 with a prose preface explaining and justifying his aesthetic principles. This volume received favorable reviews and contributed to his growing reputation as a poet and literary theorist. The preface defends his poetry against charges of egotism and self-indulgence, arguing that "the communicativeness of our nature leads us to describe our own sorrows; ... and by a benevolent law of our nature from intellectual activity a pleasure results which is gradually associated and mingles as a corrective with the painful subject of the description." Coleridge's terminology here is largely derived from Hartley's theory of association, but his subtle psychological analysis of aesthetic response foreshadows the method of his mature literary criticism.

Coleridge's main energies, however, were focused on a new publishing venture. His 1795 lectures had established him as a leading voice of radical

dissent among the people of Bristol. Wishing to capitalize on his newfound popularity, and seeking to reach a larger audience, Coleridge planned a new periodical, *The Watchman*, to appear in regular installments every eight days (thus avoiding the stamp tax on weekly journals). In late 1795, Coleridge published a prospectus outlining his ambitious program of news and political commentary, declaring his intention "to proclaim the State of the Political Atmosphere, and preserve Freedom and her Friends from the attacks of Robbers and Assassins!!" In January 1796 he toured the industrial cities of the Midlands with copies of this prospectus, enrolling almost a thousand subscribers and gauging the tastes and interests of his potential readers.

The Watchman began publication in March 1796, and for its brief lifetime it served as a forum for Coleridge's rapidly evolving opinions on politics and religion. Coleridge contributed essays on a wide variety of topics: he defended his own political principles, denounced the fasts ordained by the Anglican church, insisted on the need for belief in God and immortality by modern progressive thinkers, and praised the self-sufficient culture of the ancient Germans. He also contributed reviews of current books and political pamphlets, including a stern critique of Edmund Burke's *Letter to a Noble Lord* and a warm commendation of Thomas Beddoes's *Essay on the Public Merits of Mr. Pitt*. Coleridge reported parliamentary debates and news from the war with France (mostly excerpted from the London journals), taking a critical attitude toward the Pitt ministry but patriotically recounting British naval victories. *The Watchman* printed a few pieces by Beddoes, Charles Lamb, Thomas Poole, William Friend, and John Edwards, but it remained largely a one-man operation. It ceased publication after only ten issues, as Coleridge found himself unable to continue production at such a sustained rate. He was also disheartened by the loss of subscribers who seemed frustrated by the uneven tone and quality of the journal.

Modern readers of Coleridge have also expressed frustration with *The Watchman*, especially with its patchwork texture and its evident slapdash method of composition. Coleridge was never at his best in writing articles against fixed deadlines. But *The Watchman* has lasting value as a record of Coleridge's personal struggle to come to terms with the changing political landscape of Europe after France had lost its allure as a center of advanced social and political experiment and had become just another tyrannical oppressor of its people and a dangerous aggressor against its neighbors. Coleridge's struggle to revise his response to the French Revolution in accord with his own fundamental values can be traced through the pages of *The Watchman*, especially in his "Remonstrance to the French Legislators" (27 April 1796), which censures their arrogant rejection of British peace overtures and their legal restrictions on the right of assembly and the freedom of the press. Coleridge prophetically warns that the curtailment of civil liberties in France could result in the betrayal of revolutionary ideology, the rise of a military dictatorship, and "the slavery of all Europe!" Coleridge's increasing disaffection with the French Revolution would find its climactic statement in "France, an Ode" (1798), which marks his final renunciation of faith in the revolutionary process.

In December 1796 Coleridge and Sara moved into a small cottage at Nether Stowey, a rural village fifty miles southwest of Bristol, where they led a self-sufficient agrarian life, sharing the labor involved in growing vegetables and raising their infant son David Hartley (born 19 September 1796), who was named after Coleridge's favorite philosopher. Their back-door neighbor, Thomas Poole, was a prosperous tanner with a strong commitment to radical democratic principles. A wonderfully warm and accommodating bachelor, Poole temporarily satisfied Coleridge's recurrent need for fatherly advice and support. Coleridge's residence at Nether Stowey was one of his happiest and most productive periods, as he prepared copy for the second edition of his *Poems*

(published by Cottle in October 1797), completed his tragedy *Osorio* for submission to Drury Lane Theatre (where it was coolly received), published several articles in the *Morning Post* (a leading London newspaper), and invited John Thelwall (a prominent radical orator) for a brief visit in defiance of a government spy sent to report on their activities.

Coleridge's residence in Nether Stowey also marked the beginning of his collaboration with William Wordsworth. Coleridge had briefly met Wordsworth in Bristol in August 1795, and had been in correspondence with him since then, but their first extended contact came in March 1797, when Wordsworth visited Nether Stowey. The two young poets soon struck up an intimate friendship, finding common ground in their shared experience of radical politics, especially their disillusion with the violence of the French Revolution and their turn to a more inward and domestic way of life. At the time of this visit Coleridge was certainly the more-accomplished author, having already published *The Watchman*, four political pamphlets, and an elegant, well-received volume of poetry. Wordsworth was glad of the advice and assistance of the better-known Coleridge, who already admired Wordsworth's poetry and who eventually came to revere him as the most talented poet of his generation. Two years older than Coleridge, Wordsworth was also educated at Cambridge, and his untroubled self-reliance, his ardent commitment to political justice, and his quiet competence in the craft of poetry must have appealed at a deep level to Coleridge's need for stable companionship with an older, wiser man.

In July 1797 Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, moved into Alfoxden House, just three miles away from Coleridge's residence in Nether Stowey. Coleridge soon found himself spending most of his time in their company, often walking out in stormy weather to discuss their ambitious literary projects. Among these was a trip to Germany, where they would study the exciting new developments in literature and philosophy.

To finance this venture they arranged to publish a volume of poems together, anonymously, through Joseph Cottle. This volume, *Lyrical Ballads*, appeared in September 1798. Not an instant success, it did receive generally favorable reviews and sold enough copies that a new edition was called for by 1800. From a modern perspective, the *Lyrical Ballads* mark a bold new departure in English verse, signaling the demise of the enervated tradition of Sensibility and the advent of a robust, full-blooded Romanticism.

Immediately following the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge departed for Germany with William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Coleridge had recently received an annuity of £150 from the Wedgwood family, along with a publisher's advance of £100 from Joseph Cottle, freeing him from financial worries and enabling him to broaden his intellectual development through European travel. After arriving in Germany, the Wordsworths settled in Goslar, a remote provincial town where Wordsworth found the solitude he needed to write the long autobiographical poem that eventually became *The Prelude*. Meanwhile, Coleridge went on to Ratzeburg, a small village where he began intensive study of the German language, living in a German household and compiling long lists of German vocabulary in his notebooks. After a few months in Ratzeburg, Coleridge proceeded to the University of Göttingen, which was recognized throughout Europe as a leading center of Germanic philology and biblical exegesis. Many of his later ideas in literature, philosophy, and linguistics grow out of his brief sojourn in the German academy.

Coleridge arrived in Göttingen in January 1799. His declared objective was to prepare a biography of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, a well-known historian, philologist, and aesthete whom Coleridge regarded as a kindred spirit in the vast scope of his intellectual activity. It was only as a minor and collateral interest that Coleridge began to study the older Germanic languages; but these soon became a consuming interest to him, no

doubt as a result of the inspiring example of the great philologists then at work in Göttingen. Foremost among these was Christian Gottlieb Heyne, an innovative classical scholar who was largely responsible for the "philological explosion" in the German academy. Through Heyne, Coleridge was exposed to the thought of Johann Gottfried von Herder in all of its deep, even mystical historicism and its concern for the remote origins of the Greek and Germanic cultures. Another crucial influence on Coleridge was Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, a controversial figure who was the leading exponent of the Higher Criticism, a new historically oriented textual analysis of the Bible. Coleridge's professors at the University of Göttingen also included Georg Friedrich Benecke, who instructed him in the history of the German language and literature of the Middle Ages, and Thomas Christian Tychsen, a philosophical linguist specializing in the early Germanic dialects.

By the time of his departure from the University of Göttingen in April 1799 Coleridge had gained a keen appreciation for the German language and literature, a basic familiarity with the exciting new discoveries in historical linguistics, and a sense of the boundless enthusiasm that accompanied the early development of Germanic philology. His knowledge of contemporary German literature was broadened by his acquaintance with the poetry of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock and Gottfried August Bürger and the plays of Friedrich von Schiller. His wide reading in German would eventually introduce him to the literary criticism of August Wilhelm von Schlegel, who was the first to develop the concept of organic form in Shakespearean drama. He would also encounter the philosophy of Kant and his disciple Friedrich von Schelling, who gave Kant's epistemology an aesthetic turn by elevating the faculty of imagination to a primary generative role within consciousness. These concepts of imagination and organic form would later prove essential to his literary criticism.

Coleridge made a leisurely journey back to England, climbing the Brocken (the highest peak of the Harz Mountains) and wandering through central Germany before finally returning to his family in July 1799. While Coleridge was in Germany, his infant son Berkeley (born 14 May 1798) had died of a long, wasting illness (apparently resulting from complications of smallpox inoculation), and Coleridge seemed reluctant to return home and face the reality of his son's death and his wife's terrible grief and despair. Their little cottage in Nether Stowey, formerly an idyllic abode, now seemed lonely, inhospitable, tainted by the tragic memory of their lost infant son. Unable to provide strength or support for his wife, Coleridge departed on another series of ramblings across the West Country, walking through Devon with his old friend Robert Southey, who had become an accomplished poet, and continuing to Bristol where he met the brilliant young chemist Humphrey Davy. In October and November 1799 he toured the Lake District with Wordsworth, who was planning to purchase a cottage in Grasmere and hoped to entice Coleridge to settle nearby. During this tour Coleridge first met Sara Hutchinson, a short, dark, rather plain, but sprightly and energetic woman who would soon become the object of his hopeless infatuation. Sara was the sister of Mary Hutchinson, Wordsworth's future fiancée, and her presence would become a source of frustrated longing and heartache for Coleridge during his many visits to the Wordsworth household over the next ten years.

During this period of restless wandering, Coleridge received a letter from Daniel Stuart offering him a permanent salaried position as a writer for the *Morning Post*. Coleridge had been contributing poems and articles to this journal since late 1797, and he eagerly accepted the offer of a prominent and lucrative position that would provide him with a headquarters in London and a forum for his views on current affairs. Coleridge hastened to London to accept Stuart's offer, arriving in late November 1799 and getting right to work on a series of articles on the new French

constitution. Over the next few months Coleridge was enormously productive; he contributed more than seventy articles to the *Morning Post*, attended sessions of Parliament, and translated Schiller's play *Wallenstein* for the publisher T. N. Longman. Stuart was so pleased with Coleridge's performance that in March 1800 he offered him a proprietary share in the *Morning Post*, an offer that would have assured Coleridge a substantial income and a secure job for the rest of his life. To Stuart's surprise Coleridge declined the offer, citing his reluctance to dedicate his intellect to the ephemeral medium of journalism. Deeper psychological factors may also have influenced his decision, especially his chronic restlessness, his inability to commit himself to a single career or profession, and his recurrent struggles with self-doubt and opium-induced depression. By 1800 Coleridge was fully habituated to heavy doses of opium, normally consumed in the form of laudanum (an alcoholic tincture of opium that was readily available throughout Britain). For the rest of his life he would struggle to control his use of opium, lapsing into extremely heavy usage in times of stress.

Despite his rejection of Stuart's lucrative offer, Coleridge continued to contribute occasional articles to the *Morning Post* over the next few years, amounting to quite a substantial body of journalism that has been republished as *Essays on His Times* (1978). Coleridge's contributions include an obituary of George Washington (1800), a lively satirical "Ode to Addington" (1801), an exposé of the dastardly impostor James Hatfield and his innocent victim, Mary of Buttermere (1802), and an insightful discussion of "The Men and the Times" (1803). In 1804 he began publishing articles on parliamentary politics in the *Courier*, a new London journal edited by Stuart. These newspaper articles reflect Coleridge's engagement in the rough-and-tumble of current affairs in a way that belies the common depiction of him as an indolent dreamer, basking in an opium-clouded haze and wallowing in vain philosophical abstractions. Coleridge is revealed as a much more agile, witty, and topical prose

writer than might have been expected by readers of his more formal publications. These articles no doubt convey something of the tone of Coleridge's conversation as he entertained friends and colleagues over drinks at the Salutation and Cat, his favorite London pub.

Following his rejection of permanent employment at the *Morning Post*, Coleridge departed for the Lake District. He visited the Wordsworths at their new home, Dove Cottage, in Grasmere, then (in July 1800) he installed his own family in Greta Hall, Keswick, just thirteen miles away from the Wordsworths, thus seeking to replicate the proximity they had enjoyed two years before in Nether Stowey. Coleridge's domestic life seemed fairly tranquil; on 14 September 1800 Sara gave birth to a son, Derwent. Coleridge and Wordsworth started working on a new edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, although it gradually became apparent that the terms of their creative partnership had subtly altered. Instead of being a truly collaborative venture, the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* was emerging as a showcase for Wordsworth's poetry, published under Wordsworth's name as sole author. Coleridge's main contribution, the narrative poem "Christabel," was rejected by Wordsworth as unsuitable for the volume, leading Coleridge to abandon it in fragmentary form. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which enjoyed pride of place as the first poem in the 1798 edition, was relegated to the back of the second edition, accompanied by a derogatory note. Despite these overt gestures of rejection, Coleridge labored diligently during the late months of 1800 to see the *Lyrical Ballads* through the press; the volume finally appeared in January 1801 (with the title-page date 1800).

Despite the critical success of the new edition, Coleridge remained deeply uncertain of his own abilities as a poet and tortured by feelings of self-doubt that he sought to allay with ever-increasing doses of opium, which led to prolonged illnesses and a general inability to carry out any sustained efforts at composition. The next few years of his life were passed in restless wandering, through

which he sought to rediscover the stability that he had briefly known in the early years of his marriage and in his best moments of collaboration with Southey and Wordsworth. Leaving his family at Greta Hall under the paternal care of Southey, Coleridge returned to London in January 1801. By December of that year he was visiting Thomas Poole at Nether Stowey, returning obsessively to the scenes of his former happiness; and in March 1802 he returned to the Lake District for a stay of several months, marked by frequent visits to Dove Cottage, growing disaffection with his wife, and helpless infatuation with Sara Hutchinson, who seemed increasingly unresponsive to his desire for a close, yet platonic, friendship.

Coleridge's tormented feelings reached a climax in April 1802, when he composed the long, rambling verse-letter to Sara Hutchinson that was first published, in severely edited form, in the *Morning Post* on 4 October 1802 as "Dejection: An Ode." This poem marks a crucial turning point in Coleridge's career as a writer. Lamenting the loss of his poetic talent, his lack of sympathy for natural objects, and his rejection by those closest to him, Coleridge declared his emancipation from "Reality's dark dream" and his reliance on the "shaping spirit of Imagination" as it issues forth from within the self. Henceforth his writing would celebrate the power of the imagination as it seeks to counter the tyranny of objects. This inward turn is also a linguistic turn, since it invokes the power of language to determine our conception of what we perceive. The "Dejection Ode" is the last of Coleridge's great poems, and the end of his long love affair with the beautiful objects of the natural world; yet it also marks a new beginning in his career as a prose writer, as he struggled to discover words adequate to convey the essential meaning of human experience, the ultimate questions of being and knowledge.

As a first step, Coleridge sought to emancipate himself from his uncritical devotion to Wordsworth's poetic career. Responding to the

1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, which contained a revised version of Wordsworth's preface defending his own poetic practice, Coleridge told Southey in a 29 July letter that "there is a radical Difference in our theoretical opinions respecting Poetry--this I shall endeavor to go to the Bottom of." Coleridge's urge to define his own critical distance from Wordsworth, finally achieved in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), finds its origin here. Coleridge published a new edition of his poems in June 1803, perhaps recognizing that his period of mutually rewarding poetic collaboration with Wordsworth was finished. In September or October of that year he declared in a notebook his intention "to write my metaphysical works, as *my Life, & in my Life*," clearly foreshadowing the plan of the *Biographia Literaria* as well as indicating his increasingly philosophical outlook. Meanwhile his wandering way of life continued, marked by such episodes as his solo climb of Scafell Pike (the highest point in England) in August 1802, his journey to South Wales in November 1802, and his tour of Scotland with the Wordsworths in August 1803. Despite the birth of his daughter, Sara, on 23 December 1802, Coleridge still found it impossible to achieve a stable relationship with his wife. Unable to find a resting place at home, and longing for a warmer climate to ease his many illnesses, Coleridge departed for Malta in April 1804. On that remote Mediterranean island he hoped to find the inner peace that seemed unattainable in England.

Coleridge's residence in Malta was formative of his intellect in ways that he could hardly have foreseen; he later called it "the most memorable and instructive period of my life." Shortly after arriving there in July 1804, he found employment as an unofficial private secretary for Alexander Ball, the British high commissioner. In this capacity Coleridge was privy to substantial amounts of fresh information, including some secret documents, on the war in Europe, which was heating up as Napoleon's armies swept across the Continent and the British Navy preyed on enemy shipping. On the basis of this information, Coleridge drafted essential state

papers for Ball, while also using his unique knowledge of current events as the basis for articles sent back to the *Courier* in London. In January 1805 Coleridge was appointed acting public secretary in Malta, in recognition of his fine performance as an assistant to Ball, whom Coleridge came to admire as "really the abstract Idea of a wise & good Governor." (Coleridge's "Sketches of the Life of Sir Alexander Ball," depicting his courage and resourcefulness in the Battle of the Nile and the growth of his "practical imagination" in government service, were later published in *The Friend*). Once again Coleridge found himself in a stable situation, providing assistance to an older, wiser man who could fulfill the role of a trusted friend and mentor.

Nevertheless, Coleridge became desperately unhappy in Malta, isolated from his friends and family and often cut off from all outside communication due to the ongoing warfare in the Mediterranean. Many letters to and from Coleridge were lost at sea or delayed for months as a result of naval hostilities. His health continued to deteriorate as a result of the hot weather, unsanitary food and water, and a steady supply of opium. Finally he determined to resign his position and return home. He departed from Malta in September 1805 and arrived in England in August 1806 after an extended journey overland through Sicily, Rome, Florence, and Pisa, and a perilous sea voyage from Leghorn to Portsmouth. To his old friends he appeared to have aged considerably; Dorothy Wordsworth described him as "utterly changed," the shattered hulk of the man she once had known.

Coleridge delayed returning home to his family, remaining in London for several weeks (visiting old friends and looking for employment) and finally reaching Keswick in November 1806. Upon his arrival there, he informed his wife of his determination to separate from her, citing their many episodes of domestic discord and what he regarded as their fundamental incompatibility. Distressed by this prospect, yet unable to alter her husband's fixed determination, Sara Coleridge

found herself compelled to remain, with her children, as a permanent houseguest at Keswick, where Southey had established himself with his wife and children. This extended household proved to be a warm and nurturing environment; Southey worked hard to become a professional poet while his numerous children and nephews and nieces roamed playfully in the open air or attended a makeshift schoolroom indoors. In this setting Coleridge's children thrived, particularly his daughter Sara, who later revealed some of her father's precocious talents as a linguist and essayist and who ultimately served, with her husband (and first cousin), Henry Nelson Coleridge, as the editor of her father's posthumously published prose works.

In the years following his return from Malta, Coleridge, unable to lead a settled existence, kept moving between London, where he worked as a reporter for the *Courier*, and Grasmere, where he stayed for long periods with the Wordsworths; he would also occasionally visit his wife in Keswick despite their ostensible separation. Although he found it congenial to work as a roving reporter for the *Courier*, he felt it a waste of his talents to publish his writing in the semianonymous form of newspaper articles, and so he evolved a scheme to publish a new periodical as an outlet for his more speculative prose. In November 1808 he published the first prospectus for *The Friend*, a weekly journal dedicated "to uphold those Truths and those Merits, which are founded in the nobler and permanent Parts of our Nature." Ambitiously conceived as a connected series of essays on ethics, aesthetics, linguistics, and politics, with anecdotes and illustrations drawn from the events of the day, *The Friend* aspired to a loftier and more systematic philosophical perspective than Coleridge had ever achieved in his previous periodical writings.

The Friend began publication in June 1809, printed at Penrith (a village in the Lake District northeast of Grasmere) and distributed to a list of 632 subscribers. The periodical faced enormous logistical problems: Coleridge sometimes had to

walk thirty miles across the fells to deliver copy to the printer, braving winter storms and fording icy streams. There were chronic delays in obtaining suitable types and paper from London, and one issue was partially devoured by rats. Despite these obstacles, *The Friend* appeared on a fairly regular weekly basis, running through twenty-eight issues before it finally folded in March 1810. Coleridge's friends were amazed at his ability to accomplish such a consistent schedule of publication; an essential ingredient in his success was the constant presence of Sara Hutchinson, to whom he dictated each number of *The Friend* during his residence with the Wordsworths. It ceased publication only when she left Grasmere and returned to her brother in Wales, unable to endure the relentless, conflicting demands of Coleridge's unrequited passion for her.

Like *The Watchman* a decade earlier, *The Friend* was almost entirely a one-man publication, with only a few items contributed by Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey. Unlike *The Watchman*, however, it avoided merely topical reporting of current events, seeking to address more fundamental issues of lasting intellectual significance. In the first few essays Coleridge investigated the medium of periodical publication, defending the freedom of the press and denouncing the gossip, libel, and sensationalism typical of ordinary journals. In a series of historical parallels intended to illustrate recurrent tendencies of human nature, Coleridge compared Voltaire with Desiderius Erasmus, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau with Martin Luther, taking Luther's vision of the devil as an occasion for reflection on the psychological basis of supernatural phenomena. Subsequent numbers of *The Friend* addressed issues of more immediate political concern. In a series of "meta-political" essays, Coleridge discussed the causes of the French Revolution and the eventual betrayal of its republican ideology, reexamining his own past political activities and seeking to discover a plausible explanation for the failed hopes and dreams of an entire generation. Coleridge further enlarged the scope of his periodical in later issues,

contributing essays on the foundations of international law, morality, and religious faith; "Satyrane's Letters" (written by Coleridge during his travels in Germany); and sketches of the life of Alexander Ball. *The Friend* thus broadened and deepened Coleridge's quest for fixed principles of action and belief in all realms of human endeavor. It contains some of his most lively and characteristic prose, moving easily among diverse fields of thought with a lucidity and accessibility that must be ascribed at least in part to Sara Hutchinson's presence as a sympathetic listener and amanuensis.

Despite its occasional incoherence and obscurity, *The Friend* remains one of Coleridge's most widely read works. Although it failed to reach a large audience as a periodical, *The Friend* was republished as a single volume in 1812, and republished in three volumes, extensively revised and enlarged, in 1818. This 1818 edition eventually reached a wide readership and remains the text normally consulted by Coleridge scholars. It imposes a somewhat more coherent structure upon its enormous variety of materials, organizing the major philosophical essays into three distinct series: an introductory section "on the communication of truth," a middle section "on the principles of political knowledge," and a final section "on the grounds of morals and religion, and the discipline of the mind requisite for a true understanding of the same." Each of these sections is complemented by a "landing-place" comprising a selection of more informal essays on historical, biographical, and literary topics. Founded on the analogy of a "magnificent stair-case, relieved at well proportioned intervals by spacious landing-places," this structure is uniquely Coleridgean in its unsystematic inclusiveness and its exuberant digressiveness, spiraling gradually upward through all realms of human experience to reach an ultimate vantage point. This culminating perspective is provided by the "Essays on the Principles of Method," an essential addition to the 1818 edition of *The Friend*. In these essays Coleridge undertook a comprehensive survey of human knowledge, seeking to discover and

exemplify a general principle of "self-organizing purpose" in language, literature, philosophy, and natural science.

The Friend is a work of enormous interest and importance for any reader of Coleridge. It is certainly the most informal and accessible of his major prose works, revealing the vast power and scope of his intellect while also providing moments of insight, jocularly, and self-revelation. It contains some of his best thoughts on politics, linguistics, ethics, and religion, as well as his most sustained investigation of the concept of organic development (in the "Essays on the Principles of Method"). Throughout *The Friend*, Coleridge is concerned with the careless, irresponsible, and unexamined use of language that pervades modern society, and he attempts to remedy this abuse of language by reestablishing the proper meaning of words. Coleridge declares the essential purpose of his periodical in an eloquent defense of his "metaphysics," which he uses "to expose the folly and legerdemain of those who have thus abused the blessed machine of language." He proceeds to make a series of precise verbal distinctions, showing that such near-synonymous terms as *genius* and *talent*, *reason* and *understanding*, *wisdom* and *prudence*, *discovery* and *invention* can be unraveled and elucidated by careful linguistic analysis. In Coleridge's view the progress of human understanding requires the precise conformity of words with the concepts they signify.

Coleridge's method of linguistic analysis enables him to distinguish between words that are closely related in meaning and often regarded as synonymous in ordinary usage. This is his technique of "desynonymization," a term he invented in 1803 to denote the act of distinguishing between apparent synonyms. In the *Biographia Literaria* he describes the contribution of this process to the historical evolution of language, arguing that "in all societies there exists an instinct of growth, a certain collective, unconscious good sense working progressively to desynonymize those

words originally of the same meaning." He suggests that this gradual process of differentiation can account for the entire formation of a lexicon, from a few simple sounds to an immense nomenclature. Coleridge's critical and philosophical vocabulary derives largely from his own frequent habit of desynonymizing. Several of his most crucial distinctions--between *fancy* and *imagination*, *symbol* and *allegory*, *copy* and *imitation*--result from this technique of linguistic analysis. These distinctions play a vital role in the formation of Coleridge's critical discourse in *The Friend*, the *Biographia Literaria*, and his lectures on literature.

After the demise of *The Friend* as a periodical in March 1810, Coleridge remained with the Wordsworths for a few months, unable to write, numbing his loneliness and frustration with large doses of opium. In October he departed from Grasmere, perhaps sensing that he had worn out his welcome, and traveled to London in the company of Basil Montagu, a newfound friend and admirer. Upon their arrival in London, however, Montagu refused to let Coleridge stay in his home, citing the advice of Wordsworth, who had described Coleridge to Montagu as a habitual drunkard and "an absolute Nuisance in his family." Despite the evident truth of these remarks, Coleridge felt himself betrayed by one of his best and oldest friends and refused to have anything further to do with Wordsworth or Montagu, choosing instead to reside with the Morgan family in Hammersmith. John James Morgan, a prosperous businessman living with his wife, Mary, and her witty and attractive sister Charlotte Brent, provided Coleridge with yet another in a series of cozy domestic situations that seemed essential to the growth of his intellect. The quarrel with Wordsworth, however, marked the decisive break in a relationship that had been going downhill ever since the heady days of revolutionary dreams and shared aspirations that surrounded the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. Although their quarrel was patched up in May 1812 through the friendly intervention of Charles

Lamb and Henry Crabb Robinson, it left deep scars that were never fully healed.

During his residence in London, Coleridge contributed more than a hundred articles to the *Courier* and delivered a series of literary lectures that raised him to public prominence as a cultural commentator. Always a spellbinding talker, Coleridge used the medium of public lectures to capitalize on his broad familiarity with English literature and the latest methods of textual analysis imported from Germany. His first series of lectures, on "Poetry and the Principles of Taste," was delivered in 1808 at the Royal Institution, where his friend Humphrey Davy was also giving lectures on new discoveries in chemistry. From November 1811 to January 1812, Coleridge delivered another series of lectures on William Shakespeare and John Milton. These were enormously popular, despite Coleridge's usual difficulty in achieving punctuality and adequate preparation; his spontaneity and unexpected insights astonished and delighted his audience, which included such well-known figures as George Gordon, Lord Byron; Samuel Rogers; Charles Lamb; William Hazlitt; Thomas De Quincey; and Henry Crabb Robinson. Shorthand reports of twelve of these lectures were printed in the *Morning Post* and the *Courier*, thus preserving an approximate viva voce record of Coleridge's lecturing style. He delivered a further series of Shakespeare lectures at the Surrey Institution from November 1812 to January 1813. Moving to Bristol once again, Coleridge offered a series of lectures on Shakespeare and education in October-November 1813, followed in April 1814 by further lectures on Milton, Miguel de Cervantes, and the principles of taste. He returned to the London lecture circuit in January 1818 to discuss poetry and drama, followed in early 1819 by two concurrent series of lectures on literature and the history of philosophy.

Shorthand records of varying accuracy and completeness were kept of some of these lectures, while others survive only in the form of fragmentary notes by Coleridge or as vague

recollections by his listeners. All of these assorted materials have been assembled in a comprehensive volume, *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature* (1987). Coleridge's most seminal literary criticism is contained in these lectures, which established his reputation as a profoundly learned and brilliantly insightful reader of English and European literature. Drawing upon his solid education in classical literature, as well as the innovative techniques of the "new philology" that he encountered at the University of Göttingen, Coleridge introduced new methods of close reading and textual analysis to the study of English literature, emphasizing the integral relation of each detail to the larger structure of the work. Coleridge insisted "that in all points from the most important to the most minute, the judgment of Shakespeare is commensurate with his genius," seeking to refute the common eighteenth-century view of Shakespeare as a wild, untutored genius, "fertile in beautiful Monsters." Coleridge stressed the imaginative coherence of Shakespeare's plays, arguing that all aspects of their portrayal of character, theme, and situation are generated by an organic process of growth and development.

Coleridge's reliance on the metaphor of organic development in his Shakespearean criticism is largely indebted to Schlegel, but his use of the concept in the critical analysis of particular plays is highly original, going far beyond Schlegel in elucidating the deep structure of Shakespeare's language and imagery in relation to specific characters. Coleridge is especially remembered for his penetrating psychological analyses of Shakespeare's tragic heroes; he was the first English critic to develop in circumstantial detail the now-familiar conception of Hamlet as an introverted personality, lost in "speculative gloom" and paralyzed by an excess of thought. Hamlet's "aversion to externals, the betrayed Habit of brooding over the world within him," is expressed in a "prodigality of beautiful words, which are as it were the half embodyings of Thought." Coleridge uses this conception to elucidate Hamlet's inscrutable half-madness,

which emerges as a psychological defense against adult responsibility and a handy excuse for procrastination. This portrait of Hamlet bears no little resemblance to Coleridge's own personality, as he later acknowledged: "I have a smack of Hamlet myself" (*Table Talk*, 24 June 1827).

Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism has been dismissed as formalistic, pedantic, moralizing, and humorless; he has been accused of engaging in "bardolatry" and the "myth of perfection," even of projecting his own psychopathology onto merely fictional characters. There is some justice in these complaints, which may serve to remind us that Coleridge shared many of the limitations and preconceptions of his own period. Yet he did much to advance the techniques of "practical criticism" (a term he invented), and the endurance of his Shakespearean criticism must be attributed largely to the intelligence and sensitivity of his remarks on individual plays. Coleridge typically focuses on a play's opening scenes, examining the texture of the dialogue in rigorous line-by-line analysis, with penetrating comments on the establishments of dramatic situation and character. He explores the delightful absurdity of the wordplay in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the lively wit combats in *Romeo and Juliet*, the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, and "the wild wayward Lyric of the opening of *Macbeth*." In the first scene of *Hamlet*, Coleridge suggests that the guards' speeches reveal their "imaginative terrors" while also preparing the audience for the advent of the ghost. When Hamlet eventually confronts the ghost, his "impetuous eloquence" reveals his capacity for decisive action at moments of crisis, but he soon lapses back into the "ratiocinative meditateness" that shields him from the psychological reality of the apparition and the fateful message it bears.

Coleridge's lectures on literature exerted widespread influence in the subsequent development of Shakespearean criticism. Among his contemporaries, Lamb's essays on Shakespeare's tragedies, Hazlitt's lectures on Shakespeare's characters, and De Quincey's essay

on the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth* are all clearly indebted to Coleridge. Throughout the nineteenth century, the discussion of Shakespeare's characters followed along lines laid down by Coleridge, culminating in the work of A. C. Bradley. In the twentieth century Coleridge helped to inspire the development of historical approaches to Shakespeare, calling as he did for a rigorous knowledge of Elizabethan diction, prosody, history, theaters, and minor dramatists. Coleridge also foreshadowed the major doctrines of the New Criticism in his painstaking scrutiny of language and imagery, his careful analysis of puns and wordplay, and his overarching concern for the integrity of the aesthetic object. These contextual methods of criticism, especially as presented by L. A. Richards in *Practical Criticism* (1929) and *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934), contributed directly to the New Critics' use of such concepts as imagination, symbol, and irony, as well as their techniques of close reading. More-recent critics have suggested that Coleridge's model of reading and writing, with its engagement in textuality, its proliferation of marginal commentary, and its recognition of the dialogical nature of linguistic utterance, remains relevant to the postmodern experience of literature. Contemporary criticism, despite its prevailing hostility to "Romantic ideology," remains heavily indebted to Coleridge's bold exploration of the possibilities of critical discourse.

Coleridge's public lectures were a significant source of income to him, especially welcome during these years because half of the Wedgwood annuity had been withdrawn in November 1812, leaving him with a regular annuity of only seventyfive pounds, which was entirely devoted to the support of his wife and children, still living with Southey in Keswick. Casting about for other sources of income, Coleridge dug out the manuscript for his play *Osorio*, revised it, and sent it off to Drury Lane Theatre with the new title *Remorse*; it was accepted for performance and had a successful run of twenty nights in January 1813. The royalties from *Remorse* amounted to four

hundred pounds, allowing Coleridge to pay off his accumulated debts, send extra money to his family, and lead an active social life in London, where he was becoming something of a literary celebrity.

In early 1815 Coleridge began to lay plans for a collected edition of his poems, evidently hoping to cash in on the new demand for his work. This edition was to be modeled after the recent edition of Wordsworth's poems, which included a theoretical preface. Coleridge projected a similar preface for his own poems, optimistically informing Wordsworth on 30 May that he planned to write his preface "in two or at farthest three days." He set eagerly to work, dictating his preface in daily installments to John Morgan, with whom he was living at Calne in Wiltshire. Stimulated as always by the presence of a sympathetic listener, Coleridge found the project growing in scope and complexity until by midsummer it had become "an Autobiographia Literaria, or Sketches of my literary Life and opinions, as far as Poetry and *poetical* criticism is concerned" (letter to R. H. Brabant, 29 July 1815). By September 1815 Coleridge had completed a draft of this work, now conceived as a companion volume to the collected poems. By May 1816, however, it was apparent that the manuscript for the *Biographia Literaria* was too long to be published as a single volume; Coleridge was advised by his publisher, John Mathew Gutch, to split it into two volumes, each comparable in size to his collected poems. Coleridge found it difficult to extend his material to the length of two volumes, so the entire project ground to a halt in July 1816. Finding a new publisher in early 1817, Coleridge transferred the printed sheets of the still incomplete *Biographia* from Gutch to the partnership of Gale and Fenner (later Rest Fenner), who had agreed to publish all of his future works. Eager to see the volumes in print, Coleridge padded them out by extending chapter 22, adding "Satyrane's Letters" (that lively description of German life previously published in *The Friend*) and a critique of *Bertram* (Charles Robert Maturin's lurid Gothic drama then popular

in London). In July 1817 the *Biographia Literaria* was finally published, bulked out to the length of two volumes with these miscellaneous additions, but still consisting essentially of the autobiographical narrative composed in 1815. The companion volume of his collected poems, *Sibylline Leaves*, was published at the same time.

The unconventional structure of the *Biographia Literaria* is partially the result of its odd publication history. Ostensibly an account of Coleridge's "Literary Life and Opinions," it manages only a brief narrative of his early years before digressing into more abstruse topics in the history of philosophy and the theory of imagination. In the first four chapters, Coleridge describes his education at Christ's Hospital, his early admiration for Southey's poetry, and his collaboration with Wordsworth on the *Lyrical Ballads*. In discussing Wordsworth's unique poetic talents, Coleridge introduces his key distinction between *fancy* and *imagination*, an essential basis for much of his literary criticism. Seeking to discover a firm foundation for these terms in the discourse of contemporary philosophy, Coleridge branches off into a detailed exposition of the "law of association" from Aristotle through David Hartley. After demonstrating the inadequacy of Hartley's mechanistic model of the mind, Coleridge traces an alternative philosophical tradition from René Descartes through Benedict Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Friedrich von Schelling. This philosophical digression reaches its climax in chapter 13, "On the imagination, or esemplastic power," which follows Schelling in establishing the ground of self-consciousness in the synthesizing activity of the imagination. At this point Coleridge abruptly breaks off the exposition, introduces a letter of apology from a fictive correspondent, and proposes complex definitions of *fancy* and *imagination*.

These famous definitions, the result of long meditation on the nature of his own poetic vocation, go to the very heart of human creative

activity. *Fancy*, says Coleridge, "is no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space," a playful juxtaposition of preexistent images. *Imagination*, on the other hand, is a creative power, almost magical in its ability to bring forth being from nothingness. This creative power exists in two different aspects, primary and secondary. Coleridge defines the primary imagination as "the living power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." As a faculty of perception, the primary imagination is always unconsciously at work in every human mind, actively projecting a world of external objects. This phenomenal world is not "given" for Coleridge; it must be constructed by the human mind out of the raw material of sensation. Simply in the act of perception, the "finite mind" creates a world, and in this way it repeats the original creation of the universe out of chaos by "the infinite I AM." The secondary imagination is "an echo of the former," a voluntary creative process that can only occur in the self-conscious mind of the poet. According to Coleridge, "it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create," first breaking the objects of perception into their basic elements, then seeking to recombine these elements in poetic discourse. On a more fully conscious level than the primary imagination, the secondary imagination produces a linguistic analogue of the divine act of creation, using words to shadow forth a microcosm. These gnomic definitions of primary and secondary imagination have been widely discussed and debated ever since their first publication; and they continue to serve as a stimulus for further exploration of the fundamental cognitive and linguistic basis of human creativity.

The remaining chapters of the *Biographia Literaria* are devoted to "practical criticism," the close reading and analysis of literary works for the purposes of understanding and evaluation. Coleridge discusses the original composition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, focusing especially on Wordsworth's preface of 1800 and the critical

controversy that arose from its defense of the "language of real life" as a medium for poetry. He suggests that Wordsworth may have been too narrow in his conception of poetic language, restricting it to the rustic language spoken by peasants and shepherds among the unspoiled natural objects of the English countryside. Coleridge, on the other hand, suggests that a truly natural poetic language is neither regional nor specific to any social class; it is the common property of educated speakers, stemming not from any social or geographical context, but from the inner form of the language at a given moment of historical evolution. This view of language as "the product of philosophers, not clowns or shepherds" informs Coleridge's analysis of Wordsworth's poetic practice. Coleridge argues that Wordsworth's best poetry is not written in rustic dialect, but in standard English informed by his personal sensibility and his enormous powers of imagination. Poetic imagination thus emerges as the essential criterion for Coleridge's evaluation of Wordsworth's poetry.

The *Biographia Literaria* was widely read and reviewed at the time of its original publication and it remains the best known of Coleridge's prose works. It has always been regarded as a great classic of English literary criticism, especially for its brilliant analysis of Wordsworth's preface and its incisive, thoughtful reading of his poems. At the same time, however, its peculiar narrative structure and its extensive reliance on German philosophy have perplexed even its staunchest advocates. The middle section, on the history of philosophy and the concept of imagination, is the most controversial and problematic part of the work, partly because of the inherent difficulty of the conceptual material, and partly because of Coleridge's unacknowledged borrowings from German authors, most notably the intellectual historian Johann Gebhard Ehrenreich Maass and the post-Kantian philosophers Schelling and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Generations of scholars have debated the significance of these unacknowledged borrowings, either condemning Coleridge for his

lack of originality and his moral and psychological weakness, or seeking to exonerate him from these charges. Two major contenders in this controversy are René Wellek, who surveys Coleridge's plagiarisms in his *History of Modern Criticism* (1955-1986), and Norman Fruman, whose book *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (1971) presents the most detailed indictment of Coleridge's intellectual dishonesty over the entire course of his career. Thomas McFarland, in *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1969), offers a compelling counterargument, describing Coleridge's typical compositional practice as the "reticulation" of varied sources, thus creating an argument of substantial originality in the form of a mosaic.

James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, in the introduction to their edition of the *Biographia Literaria* (1983), survey the history of this controversy, concluding that the unusual publication history of the *Biographia* may have contributed to its fragmentary structure and its unacknowledged borrowings. They argue that Coleridge, under pressure to produce copy, may have dipped into his favorite works of German philosophy in order to express ideas that were essentially compatible with his own. In defense of this practice Coleridge asserted that "I regard truth as a divine ventriloquist: I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible." Without resolving the ethical dilemma, this quotation suggests the degree to which Coleridge experienced his own writing as a ventriloquistic process. The *Biographia Literaria*, far from establishing the autonomy of the self-conscious imagination, bears witness to the influx of prior utterance that sweeps aside any attempt at imposing narrative structure or determining the boundaries of discourse. This view of language as undermining authorial intention is implicit in several recent studies of Coleridge's prose, most notably in the work of Jerome Christensen and Jean-Pierre Mileur.

Coleridge's personal life had finally reached a situation of relative stability during the drawnout process of publishing the *Biographia Literaria*. In April 1816 he found a permanent dwelling place in Highgate (a semirural village north of London) with a loyal friend and admirer, Dr. James Gillman. For the rest of his life Coleridge was to reside with the Gillman family in Highgate, enjoying their hospitality while also relying on them to shield him from unwanted visitors and to control his opium habit. Dr. Gillman was fairly successful in treating his opium addiction, allowing him small maintenance doses while preventing access to larger quantities. Coleridge's lifelong pattern of periodic alcohol and opium binges, followed by illness, depression, and crippling remorse, was ended. Henceforth he is transmuted in historical memory into the Sage of Highgate, ensconced in his hilltop sanctuary overlooking Hampstead Heath. In his *Life of John Sterling* (1851) Thomas Carlyle recorded his personal impression of Coleridge in the late 1820s: "Coleridge sat on the brow of Highgate Hill, in those years, looking down on London and its smoketumult, like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battle; attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there.... He had, especially among young enquiring men, a higher than literary, a kind of prophetic or magician character." Carlyle was just one in a series of distinguished visitors to Highgate that included John Stuart Mill, Ludwig Tieck, Gabriele Rossetti, Harriet Martineau, Richard Chenevix Trench, James Fenimore Cooper, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

John Keats met Coleridge on a Sunday stroll across Hampstead Heath in April 1819, recording a vivid and sympathetic picture of his prowess as a talker: "I walked with him at his alderman-after-dinner pace for near two miles I suppose. In those two Miles he broached a thousand things--let me see if I can give you a list--Nightingales, Poetry--on Poetical sensation--Metaphysics--Different genera and species of Dreams--Nightmare--a dream accompanied by a sense of touch--single and double touch--A dream related--First and

second consciousness--the difference explained between will and Volition--so many metaphysicians from a want of smoking the second consciousness--Monsters--the Kraken--Mermaids--Southey believes in them--Southey's belief too much diluted--A Ghost story--Good morning--I heard his voice as he came toward me--I heard it as he moved away--I had heard it all the interval--if it may be called so." Keats's account suggests the freely associative quality of Coleridge's thought, a quality captured in the dozens of notebooks he kept throughout his life, as well as in the table talk that was recorded by Gillman, Henry Nelson Coleridge, and others. The *Table Talk* volume (published posthumously in 1835) confirms this view of the later Coleridge as a man of diverse intellectual interests and relentlessly probing intelligence: provocative, inquisitive, meditative, sometimes witty, and often profoundly insightful.

During his residence in Highgate, Coleridge rekindled his sense of intellectual vocation, seeking once more to discover an enduring medium of expression for the enormous talents that he felt had been frittered away through so many years of ephemeral journalism, public lectures, and failed periodical publications. The *Biographia Literaria* was a good first step in this direction, offering its readers a systematic approach to the central problems of literary interpretation; but Coleridge still needed to confront those ultimate questions of being and knowledge that had inspired his lifelong quest for fixed principles of action and belief. After the publication of the *Biographia Literaria* he largely abandoned the practice of literary criticism and embarked on a series of works that engage the central issues of epistemology, ontology, theology, and biblical hermeneutics.

In December 1816 Coleridge published *The Statesman's Manual; or the Bible the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight*, a work that examines the use and relevance of biblical interpretation in the context of everyday life and political decision making. Coleridge rejects the barren literalism

and the moralizing tendencies of many biblical commentators, arguing that the relevance of the Bible to daily life can emerge only through rigorous interpretation informed by the historical circumstances of its composition and sensitive to its variety of generic forms. He makes a crucial distinction between symbol and allegory as modes of discourse, describing *symbol* as "characterized by ... the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative." Coleridge regards the symbol as a product of the human imagination that bears witness to the presence of the Eternal (or "the infinite I AM") in the most humble images of everyday life. He stresses the concreteness of symbolic language, its ineluctable grounding in the temporal world. *Allegory*, on the other hand, "is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy." Allegory is inferior to symbol because it lacks concreteness, drowning the living image in a welter of abstract notions. In Coleridge's view only the symbolic reading of biblical texts can uncover their essential relevance to modern life; allegorical reading tends to reduce these texts to a series of implausible fables and dry moral maxims.

Coleridge's controversial views on biblical hermeneutics were more fully explained in a manuscript published posthumously as *Confessions of An Inquiring Spirit* (1840), which argues forcefully for the critical interpretation of the Bible in light of the entire history of its composition and transmission. His religious views were further developed in his most substantial theological work, *Aids to Reflection* (published May 1825). Written as a commentary on the aphorisms of Archbishop Robert Leighton, a seventeenth-century Anglican divine, this work provided Coleridge with a framework for his own deepest meditations on spiritual growth and the

role of religion in everyday life. Like *The Statesman's Manual*, this work failed to arouse much interest at the time of its original publication; but it steadily grew in popularity, reaching a second edition in 1831. Indeed, in the later nineteenth century it proved to be Coleridge's most popular prose work, going through numerous editions in England and America. The first American edition (1829), with its eloquent introduction by James Marsh, was particularly influential among the New England Transcendentalists, who admired its reconciliation of German philosophy with traditional religious faith. Marsh stressed the linguistic dimension of Coleridge's philosophy, particularly his view of etymology as containing deep moral and intellectual truths. In "The Poet" (1844) Ralph Waldo Emerson aptly paraphrased this view of etymology in his remark that "language is fossil poetry."

The immediate public reaction to *The Statesman's Manual* was typical of the response aroused by Coleridge's later works on philosophy and religion. It was greeted by a series of viciously antagonistic reviews by William Hazlitt in the *Examiner* (June, September, and December 1816) and the *Edinburgh Review* (December 1816). Hazlitt attacked the book on the grounds of its obscurity, its excessive reliance on German transcendental philosophy, its alleged unorthodoxy, and its general implausibility. Hazlitt's reviews spoke for a large segment of the British reading public who seemed unwilling to exert themselves sufficiently to fathom Coleridge's argument and may have been reluctant to question their own preconceptions in matters of religion. As a result, *The Statesman's Manual* failed to stir much interest or to sell many copies; and its sequel, a pamphlet titled *A Lay Sermon, Addressed to the Higher and Middle Classes, on the Existing Distresses and Discontents* (published in April 1817) fared even worse. Coleridge's prose works were evidently not much in demand, and for the next few years he would experience great difficulty in getting his work into print. Matters became even worse in March 1819

when his publisher, Rest Fenner, went bankrupt, wiping out large sums in royalties due to Coleridge. Once again, Coleridge found himself without a regular income and in search of a new career. Further disappointment followed in May 1820, when his son Hartley was deprived of his fellowship at Oriel College, Oxford, on the grounds of "sottishness, a love of low company, and general inattention to college rules." Despite Coleridge's best efforts, the authorities were adamant in removing Hartley from the college; he was destined to become a wanderer like his father, writing occasional poems and essays, but lacking a stable career and sinking ever deeper into alcohol and opium addiction.

Coleridge faced these personal crises and setbacks with remarkable fortitude and resilience, finding new intellectual activities and sources of income. In spring 1822 Coleridge began a "Thursday-evening class" for young men aspiring to professional careers. Ostensibly intended to provide instruction in logic, rhetoric, and the history of philosophy, the course became yet another outlet for Coleridge's inexhaustible supply of discourse. In a 15 March letter to Daniel Stuart outlining this class, Coleridge describes its subject matter as comprising "the principles and laws of Language, as the Organ of Thinking, of appropriate Language, and the inherent forms of the Understanding, 1. as the Canon or formal Outline of all *conclusive reasoning*--2. as the Criterion for the detection of error in all the possible species of conscious or unconscious Sophistry--and lastly, the principles of Reason as the Organ of Discovery, whether in Man or in the science of Nature." This subject matter formed the groundwork for a new philosophical treatise, variously titled "Logic" or "Elements of Discourse," which he composed over a span of several years. A partial draft was completed in 1828, but Coleridge was unable to find a publisher. Discouraged by the lack of public interest in his philosophical speculations, he set the manuscript aside; it remained unpublished until 1981, when it was published as *Logic in The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

Logic is not, and does not claim to be, a complete system of philosophy; Coleridge regarded it as an introduction to the main exposition of his "Dynamic or Constructive Philosophy" in the great work that had been promised for many years, wherein he would finally reconcile the conflicting claims of traditional religion and the new German philosophy. However, this *Opus Maximum* (as Coleridge called it) was never completed and exists only in manuscript fragments. *Logic* remains the most substantial discussion of Coleridge's mature philosophy, and it is undoubtedly his most coherent and systematic prose work. As Gian N. G. Orsini points out, "it is more detailed and orderly than any of his published works that deal with philosophy and theology. It is not a miscellany like *The Friend*; it does not break down in the middle, like the *Biographia Literaria*, and then turn in another direction; it does not lose itself in a mass of quotations from another author, like the *Aids to Reflection*; nor does it allow itself any excursions into autobiography, like most of these works; but it proceeds continuously with the main topic from beginning to end."

Perhaps the least known of his major prose works, *Logic* deserves careful attention from all readers of Coleridge, since it contains the fullest articulation of his views on the origin and acquisition of language, the relation between grammar and logic, and the role of language in thought. More than just a paraphrase of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), it enacts a linguistic turn on Kant's philosophy. *Logic* argues that epistemological questions cannot be resolved without a prior analysis of linguistic structures, since language itself constitutes the only possible medium of intellectual inquiry. Coleridge sought to rewrite Kant's philosophy in such a way as to reveal its dependence on lexical and grammatical categories which, as innate modes of conception, determine our perception of reality. The activity of thought, in this view, is wholly constituted by the activity of language, since "what is a fact of all human language is of course a fact of all human consciousness." Considered in relation to

Coleridge's earlier works, *Logic* offers a provisional resolution of several key issues concerning the origin of knowledge and the role of language in the formation of human consciousness and social values.

The *Opus Maximum* (soon to be published, as volume 15 of Coleridge's *Collected Works*) pursues this line of thinking into advanced areas of theological speculation. Its alternative title, "Logosophia," provides an indication of its method: Coleridge sees the "Logos" or creative Word of God as a key to the synthesis of all human knowledge, and in this work he attempts to reconcile the totalizing ambition of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* with the orthodox religious doctrine of the Trinity. Coleridge takes as his fundamental premise that God is "Absolute Will," essential "Causativeness or Act." This "infinite I AM" provides the ontological basis for the finite world of nature, history, and individual identity. However, this finite world is not identical with God; Coleridge insists that our individual self-consciousness must retain its autonomy, its otherness. This otherness or "alterity" is grounded in the Logos, the immanent generative force of divine creation. Thus Coleridge establishes the ontological priority of the "Absolute Will" while maintaining the autonomy of the human will (and avoiding the pitfalls of pantheism). This view of the Logos entails a revision of orthodox theology, since the generation of the Logos out of the primordial "I AM" is conceived as a dynamic process, not a discrete event. Coleridge explains that "I place my first principle, the ground and genesis of my system ... in an act, in the language of grammarians I begin with the verb, but the act involves its reality--it is an act of being." Rejecting a merely static conception of the Trinity, Coleridge discovers the absolute origin of being, and the ultimate ground of human knowledge, in the eternal self-generation of the Logos out of the "infinite I AM."

Coleridge found it quite difficult to express his "Dynamic or Constructive Philosophy" in a form that would do justice to the complexity and

originality of his thought without shocking orthodox sensibilities, and perhaps for this reason his "Logosophia" remained forever unfinished. The lack of any realistic prospect of publication must also have dampened Coleridge's enthusiasm to complete the manuscript. Even in its fragmentary state, however, this work has proven a fruitful source of suggestion to later philosophical inquiry. John H. Muirhead, in his study *Coleridge as a Philosopher* (1930), describes the *Opus Maximum* as an early forerunner of post-Kantian idealistic philosophy in England and America. More generally, John Stuart Mill asserted that nineteenth-century England was indebted to Coleridge "not only for the greater part of the ideas which have been thrown into circulation among its thinking men but for a revolution in its general modes of thought and investigation." Coleridge's theological speculation, with its emphasis on individual struggle to resolve the mysteries of faith in the praxis of everyday life, has also been regarded as prefiguring the existentialist philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Coleridge's personal fortunes began to improve by the mid 1820s. In November 1822, his wife and his daughter, Sara, came to visit him in Highgate and remained in the neighborhood for four months, marking the return of good feelings and the beginning of an intense intellectual relationship with his charming and accomplished daughter, who had recently made her literary debut by publishing an English translation of a recondite Latin text on the Apibones, an equestrian people of Paraguay. Bradford K. Mudge's biography of Sara Coleridge reveals how deeply enthralled she was by her father's personality and intellect, despite their relatively brief acquaintance. Coleridge found himself increasingly surrounded by younger admirers and disciples, most notably Joseph Henry Green (a brilliant linguist and surgeon who later became his literary executor) and his nephew Henry Nelson Coleridge. Throughout this period, Coleridge worked intensively on his study of the

Bible and his reading of seventeenth-century English divines such as Richard Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, and Richard Baxter, filling the margins of their books with copious annotations that include some of his most spontaneous and perceptive thoughts on a great variety of topics. In March 1824 he was named a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature with an annuity of £105 in return for occasional lectures.

In 1825 Coleridge declared that he was about to put to press "a small work on the Church," a promise that was fulfilled in 1830 with the publication of *On the Constitution of The Church and State, according to the Idea of Each: with Aids toward a Right Judgment on the late Catholic Bill*. A revised second edition of this book appeared later that year. The last of Coleridge's prose works to be published in his lifetime, it responds to an immediate political crisis concerning the rights of Catholics in a predominantly Protestant society, arguing cogently in favor of civil rights for religious minorities while also stressing the need for mutual respect and understanding among all social groups. Coleridge takes this current political issue as the occasion for a broader reflection on the institutional structures of the English Constitution and the English church; he critically examines their history and present function, lamenting the decline of the Church of England and the corresponding rise of secular, commercial values. Coleridge declares that the established Church must return to its old values if it is ever to recover its leading role in the intellectual life of the English people. This return to fundamental values is the essential task of the "clerisy," a word that Coleridge invented to describe the elite class of professional men of letters who must provide moral and intellectual leadership in all walks of life.

Coleridge's meditation on the Church and State, despite its conservative political orientation, provoked great discomfort in the contemporary religious establishment because of its frank admission of the increasing marginality of the Church in the public life of the nation. Coleridge's

call for reform had little immediate effect, but it exerted a lasting influence in the later years of the nineteenth century, inspiring a gradual reform of the established Church, most notably in the elimination of clerical sinecures and the effort to rediscover the broader role of the Church in society. Such leading intellectual figures as Thomas Arnold, Julius Charles Hare, and Frederick Denison Maurice were profoundly influenced by Coleridge in the development of their religious thought. Maurice, in particular, relied on Coleridge's conception of the "clerisy" in his effort to reawaken the Anglican church to its social and educational responsibilities. John Henry Newman, despite his increasing opposition to the religious establishment, was also deeply influenced by Coleridge in his promulgation of the Tractarian movement. Since the early Victorian period, *On the Constitution of The Church and State* has been regarded as an essential document in the history of religious and political thought.

Coleridge's final years were satisfying and productive despite his increasing illness. Under the competent care of Dr. Gillman and surrounded by his family, friends, and disciples, Coleridge struggled to complete the *Opus Maximum*, while continuing to read and annotate numerous theological works and filling his notebooks with occasional thoughts and reflections. In the summer of 1828 Coleridge went on a tour of the Rhine with Wordsworth and his daughter Dora, immensely enjoying the company of his lifelong friend, their old disputes now forgiven and forgotten. In the last few months of his life, Coleridge worked with his nephew Henry Nelson Coleridge on a collected edition of his poetical works, which appeared shortly after his death. He died on 25 July 1834, leaving behind him a vast and complex assortment of unpublished manuscripts, many in fragmentary states. Some of these manuscripts still remain unpublished, although the steady progress of the Princeton University Press edition of his *Collected Works* has established a more-complete picture of his growth and achievement as a writer.

Coleridge attained only limited professional success in his lifetime. He never reached the enormous popular appeal of Byron or Scott, or the public recognition of Wordsworth or Southey. Yet he always remained in public awareness, and he always found ardent admirers and supporters for his daring aesthetic experiments and his wideranging intellectual exploration. As a youthful iconoclast he swayed the hearts and minds of disaffected idealists, holding out the prospect of democratic reform to those weary of censorship and oppression. As a poet he helped inaugurate the English Romantic movement with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. In his literary criticism he developed bold insights into the nature of poetic language and the contextual structure of literary works. In his later years as a philosopher and theologian he followed the path of intellectual inquiry into realms unimagined by the prevailing school of British "common-sense" philosophy, once again finding himself surrounded by eager listeners and disciples.

After his death, Coleridge's writings gradually came to have wider influence and readership, as the broad scope of his intellectual accomplishment became more generally known. To the typical Victorian reader, Coleridge was known mainly as a poet and religious thinker, although the *Biographia Literaria* and his lectures on Shakespeare were admired by such prominent literary scholars as Matthew Arnold and George Saintsbury. In America the *Aids to Reflection* and *The Friend* were Coleridge's best-known works throughout the nineteenth century, thanks in part to their eloquent prefaces by James Marsh in the American editions. In a journal entry of 1842, Emerson recorded that "at Andover they sell whole shelvesful of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*." In 1853 William Greenough Thayer Shedd (a student of Marsh) published the so-called *Complete Works* of Coleridge, which was the standard American text of his works for almost a century until it was superseded by the *Collected Works*. Although it is far from "complete," Shedd's edition does include most of Coleridge's published prose works and his lectures on

literature. Coleridge's prose works have always remained popular in America, where his reputation as a misty-eyed transcendentalist has unfortunately tended to overshadow his concern for linguistic particularity and his alert, questioning mind.

Only in recent decades have Coleridge's informal prose works--his notebooks, letters, and marginalia--become accessible enough to reveal the vast scope of his intellectual endeavor, making it possible to reassess his achievement as a literary critic, philosopher, theologian, and political commentator. These informal prose writings shadow forth a new Coleridge, more intellectually agile and less ponderous and dogmatic than might have been expected. As a prose writer Coleridge lacks the systematic coherence of John Locke, the elegant sententiousness of Samuel Johnson, or the witty informality of Charles Lamb; yet his writing displays a freshness of expression, a richness of insight, a relentless commitment to the discovery of truth, and a magnificent comprehensiveness of vision, that fully compensate for these weaknesses. In many respects his prose style harks back to the qualities that he admired in his favorite writers of the seventeenth century: the architectural intricacy of Richard Hooker, the curious learning of Robert Burton, the "hyperlatinistic" exuberance of Thomas Browne, and the "impetuous, thought-agglomerating flood" of Jeremy Taylor. Coleridge's achievement as a prose writer is well summarized in his description of Shakespeare: in his works "we see a blended multitude of materials; great and little; magnificent and mean: mingled, if we may so say, with a dissatisfying, or falling short of perfection: yet so promising of our progression, that we would not exchange it for that repose of the mind, which dwells on the forms of symmetry in acquiescent admiration of grace." Coleridge will always remain a dynamic presence in the English literary tradition, offering fresh insights and suggestive models of intellectual inquiry.

Papers: The major manuscript repositories for Coleridge are the British Library in London, the Victoria University Library in Toronto, and the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. The British Library has the most extensive collection of his notebooks, letters, marginalia, and literary manuscripts. The Victoria University Library has numerous Coleridge notebooks, letters, marginalia, and association copies, as well as his manuscript treatise *Opus Maximum*. The Huntington Library holdings include letters, notebooks, his early play *Osorio*, and his late essay "On the Divine Ideas." For a detailed summary of the locations of Coleridge's manuscripts, see Barbara Rosenbaum and Pamela White, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, volume 4: 1800-1900, Part 1: *Arnold to Gissing* (London: Mansell, 1982; New York: Wilson, 1982).

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