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Review Article

"Pleasure from the Activity of One's Own Mind":

Coleridge's *Marginalia*

Marginalia, I, Abbt to Byfield. (*The Collected Worlds of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*). Edited by George Whalley. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Princeton: University Press, 1980. pp. Clxxiv 879. \$ 50.

I can by no mean subscribe to the above pencil mark of W. Wordsworth, which, however, it is my wish, should never be erased. It is his: & grievously am I mistaken, & deplorably will Englishmen have degenerated, if the being his will not, [in times to come] give it a Value, as of a little reverential Relict — the rude mark of his Hand left by the Sweat of Haste in a St. Veronica Handkerchief. Coleridge!

For yourself to reflect on what you read ph by ph; and in a short time you will derive your pleasure, an ample portion at least, from the activity of your own mind. All else is Picture Sunshine (p. 280).

When Coleridge asks the putative reader of his marginal notes on Bohme to read the latter in "meekness" (p. 558) one wonders if he would have recommended the same attitude towards his own notes. As a matter of fact, one does read many of his notes in this very spirit. However, meekness has its limits. And one realizes pretty soon that this volume presents a striking combination of a good deal that is marvellous with a great deal that is simply tedious.

To begin with what is marvellous and perhaps not as familiar as one would have wished it to be. Considering himself to be "a very humble poet," Coleridge compares himself to a bird that cannot fly, and apostrophizes the bird of Jove in words which are more moving than anything one has encountered in the better known poems of Coleridge:

Sovereign of the air [the eagle] . . . I pay thee homage. Thou art my king. I give honour due to the vulture, the falcon, all thy noble baronage; and no less to the lowly bird, the sky-lark, whom thou permittest to visit thy court, and chaunt her matin songs within its cloudy curtains; yea, the

linnet, the thrush, the swallow are my brethren: but still I am a bird, though but a bird of the earth.
 Monarch of our kind, I am a bird, even as thou; and I have shed plumes, which have added beauty to the Beautiful, . . . grace to Terror, waving on the helmed head of the war-chief; and majesty to Grief, drooping o'er the Car of Death (pp. 482-483).

If the feeling that pervades this little "ode" reminds one of "The Ancient Mariner," humility, energy, and vitality of thought and phrase have a religious quality which anticipates Hopkins.

Sometimes, quite unexpectedly, one comes upon a seminal discussion of a concept. Consider, for instance, his discussion of "elegy." He writes in *Athenaeum*: "This is the plague of the Germans. Why not say at once what the word Elegy means, then what it was made to mean, i.e./what it comprehended/ — then, to what it became more especially appropriated; and lastly, find out, if you can, some one character distinctive of the Elegy in all its various kinds — or if not, say so and propose to confine the word to a determinate Genus" (p. 146). Perhaps this is the first proposal in the history of criticism to discuss critical terms on historical principles! Incidentally, Coleridge provides just such a description, though brief, of the elegy when he writes: "Elegia, quasi εὐλογία — inward Discourse — a train of Thoughts, or Reflections on any subject [Whalley notes that this notion is etymologically ungrounded] — but as these are most often occasioned by some *Desiderium*, Elegy came to be chiefly tho' not necessarily amorous or mournful" (p. 146).

Though the comments selected above are literary and critical in character, this is not to suggest that Coleridge's marginalia are of interest only to literary intellectuals. One is also pleasantly surprised when one comes across instances of "class-analysis" in his marginalia. Explaining why Sir Thomas More, who had "freer thoughts of things in his youth," afterwards became, in the words of Gilbert Burnet, "superstitiously devoted to the Interests and Passions of the Popish clergy," Coleridge writes: "I am inclined to believe... that not foreseeing the rise and power of the Third Estate, he saw in the Power of the Clergy and even in the Papal Influence the Sole remaining counter weights to the Royal Prerogative, which the ravage of the Civil Wars, and the consequent prostration of the Nobility had left" (p. 833). In other words, what Coleridge is pointing out is that More took a static view of the situation, ignored its dynamics, and therefore failed to understand the true nature of the class alignments.

While a comment of this type demonstrates that Coleridge is at times an acute historical materialist, the general thrust of Coleridge's thought, as his concern with triads and pentads shows, is idealistic. A mix of this kind of two contrary tendencies, materialism and idealism, is also to be found in Hegel. Unfortunately, no British Marxist either stood Coleridge on his head or read him "materialistically" as Lenin read Hegel.² In short, British Marxism failed to assimilate Coleridge and thus condemned itself to philosophical immaturity and intellectual mediocrity. Only if Coleridge, who has found numerous editors, explicators and disciples, had also found a few gifted readers of the type I have mentioned, British Marxism would have perhaps acquired its own authentic voice.³

This belief is further strengthened when one discovers that from time to time Coleridge tended to take a dialectical view of things. Consider, for instance, what he has to say about monopolies. He writes: "In the infancy of Commerce these chartered Bodies Corporate [like the East India Company] were not only useful but also necessary. So only could the power of Capital be called into action, experience be rendered progressive. But in the adult age of Commerce these Monopolies are dead weights. The general Rule is against them..." (p. 274). What makes this view dialectical is the fact that Coleridge not only recognizes that mercantile capital [chartered Bodies Corporate] played an important role in the early stages of capitalism, he also sees that what was once progressive can become a hindrance or, if you like, reactionary. Therefore Coleridge finds himself championing the cause of another section of the middle class —namely, the Industrial bourgeoisie, who wanted the entire East Indian trade to be thrown open to competition.⁴ Considering that Coleridge expressed this opinion in 1830 (p. 772), one concludes that Coleridge's conservatism did not at times prevent him from recognizing what was utterly retrograde.

These are some of the nuggets of gold that one finds embedded in the sands of *naturphilosophie* and Christian theology in which the Indus of his genius frequently loses itself much to the esoteric delight of some of his admirers who have a talent for mystification. Yet I will turn to these sandy tracts for a few brief moments.

Coleridge's notes on Bohme occupy nearly one hundred and fifty pages and his main concern here seems to be to read into the German mystic's utterances the concepts of *naturphilosophie* as he understands and interprets them, and a few other contemporary notions. Obviously, this is an attempt to update and revise Bohme in terms of the latest intellectual current, it being the fate of outstanding thinkers to be subjected to such modernizations. Unfortunately, however, Bohme, who may otherwise delight by his quaintness and some other fetching

qualities, is, as interpreted by Coleridge, as tedious as the barren, mystifying and pseudo-rational "doctrines" of *naturphilosophie*. Though it is fashionable in certain scholarly circles to consider Coleridge's compulsive pedantries to be "relevant" to our age, one must note that Coleridge's "scientific" speculations are taken seriously not by physicists and chemists but by literary intellectuals for whom—quite understandably—science has a much greater significance than it ever had for Coleridge himself.

To give an interesting example of how disturbingly scholastic Coleridge can be at times and turn even into an Alexandrine "speculation-monger" (p. 653) himself, consider the "play of his mind" on the theme of "the races of man." He begins by announcing his refusal to "detach" the subject from its "historical staple-ring, the Noachidae" (p. 539). With such a "starting-point," the "methodical discourse" that follows cannot be expected to have very much cognitive value. If the Schoolmen united the Bible and the Aristotelian philosophy, Coleridge integrates the "Noachidae" with his pentad of Prothesis, Thesis, Mesotesis, Anti-thesis, and Synthesis which represents a subtle expansion of the famous Teutonic triad. He proceeds to amuse himself by relating Noah to Prothesis, Sham to Thesis, Ham to Indifference (the pentad now becomes a sestet) and Japhet to Anti-thesis. He goes on merrily like this for fifty lines more. The interesting game reminds one of another pastime, patience, which too is subjectively momentous though objectively trivial. Of course, Coleridge's tenacity in pursuing this line of "inquiry" is remarkable, but the theory itself represents little more than a curious aberration.

Similarly, Coleridge's interpretation of myths, though not very significant objectively, tells us a great deal about his own preoccupations, convictions and prejudices. For instance, the myth of the tree of knowledge with its fruit and Serpent receives a characteristically Coleridgean interpretation. This myth, we learn, "speaks to the catechumen and the Adept." "To the Catechumen it states the simple Fact, viz. that Man fell and falls thro' the separation and insubordination of the Fancy, the Appetence, the discursive Intellect from the Faith or practical Reason—" (p. 685). The Serpent represents "intellective Invention" (Fancy?) and the tree is a symbol of "Distinctive and discursive knowledge" (p. 684). It is obvious that Coleridge has read his "philocrysy" into the Egyptian myth. Incidentally, one may recall here Coleridge's criterion for judging interpretations of myths. He writes: "... the simpler [therefore] and more childlike an interpretation is, the more possible ought it to be considered" (p. 684).

Sometimes Coleridge's myth-interpretation presents a baffling mixture of remarkable insights and contemporary prejudices. His hypothe-

sis regarding the origin of Biblical myths is convincing. He thinks that hieroglyphs or stone carvings or "sculptured figures" were translated into words and thus their original significance was lost. (If, say, an "eye" stands for "I" and a Yew for "you," this meaning would be lost in any *literal* translation.) When hieroglyphs are translated into a different dialect, it would make "a most mysterious Mythus, like this of Eve's manufacture". He seeks to recover the original meaning of the mysterious myth and suggests that "perhaps the picture may [have] meant nothing more by the rib, than a bone of the Trunk generally, and by this again nothing more than that God made the Woman in the same mould as he had made the Man, only subtracting the greater Hardness, Stiffness, and self-supporting Character of the latter" (p. 684). Coleridge is obviously thinking here of the gentle-woman of his own class and the "patriarch" who supported her. Not only does this conception of Eve have no use for the thousands of women who had already hardened, stiffened and become self-supporting in the school of Industrial England; it also reads what was only a contemporary sectional reality into primitive times. Though the theory regarding the origin of myths may be sound, the interpretation itself is ahistorical and therefore undependable.

This tendency to read the present into the past affects his interpretation of customs also. Consider his discussion of the feudal lord's privilege of the first night. He writes: "I cannot but think, that in a country conquered by a nobler Race than the Natives, and in which the latter became villans & bondsmen, this custom may have [been] introduced for wise purposes — as of improving the Breed, lessening the antipathy of different races ..." (p. 383). Coleridge has stated here a theory which satisfies all the requirements of logic and reason and most probably it seemed convincing to his contemporaries too. Particularly when nothing scientific was known about the origin of the family, Coleridge's guess was certainly worthier of respect than that of, say, an Anglican Bishop. But when subsequent research has unearthed the socio-historical roots of the feudal custom, the pseudo-rational character of Coleridge's discussion becomes obvious.⁵ It is this pseudo-rationality that is more disturbing than the noble lord's dubious privilege. One can't help recalling that Fascist experiments in eugenics were supported by intelligent men who thought like Coleridge.

The evidence presented so far suggests that if in certain respects Coleridge was ahead of his times, in certain other respects he was very much a man of his own times. But what might startle a non-specialist is that he was a clergyman to boot. Thus he would cancel words that offended his taste (and sometimes so heavily as almost to obliterate them) and resort to Latin to express what he considered to be vulgar or

lascivious. (One must remember, though, that the aim of this literary righteousness was to protect Sara Hutchinson's virgin sensibility from linguistic pollution.) There are several examples of this kind of literary revision in this volume. I shall refer to the most decorous of them. He took exception to Sir Thomas Browne's "that Lecher that carnal'd with a Statua," and cancelled the words so thoroughly that they are, reports Whalley, "indecipherable in this copy" (p. 753). He objected to "the venereal organs of both sexes" (p. 767) and did not approve of "a Jubilee of copulation, that is, a coition of one act prolonged unto fifty years" (p. 768). Whatever one might think of Coleridge's harmless erasures, one must remember that he did not commit the indecency of proposing "emendations."

If Coleridge's sharp and passionate response to things sometimes takes the form of an erasure, at times it expresses itself in a sally of superb invective. When Calvin "in the pride of a Frenchman" "appropriates" Servetus as "the proudest Knave that Spain ever brought forth," Coleridge describes the former as "a barking dog" who "howls" against Servetus in "the canine rabies of his self-assumed Hyperorthodoxy" (p. 477). Or consider this comment. "This vile this [rei] Cacatu indigna Papyrus" (paper unworthy even of excrement, Whalley helpfully adds) which will not receive Plumbago and makes ink go mad, yea, run out of its Senses — this alone has saved Master Heinrichs, page after page, from a sound flagellation for his inveterate Prosaism. — Verily, it provokes me to see such a Dodo attempting to tead an eagle" (p. 487). Or look at his diatribe against Catholicism! "This indeed is the Clue to the murky labyrinth of the Anti-Christian Minotaur [of Romish Ritual] — To disensoul the whole Organism of Religion by rendering it extremely exclusively objective . . . The whole Romish Ritual presents to a truly spiritual Eye dead flesh galvanized by Fraud and remorseless Superstition" (pp. 516-517). What characterizes these outbursts is their energy, their passion, and the author's sense of commitment. Perhaps the privacy of marginal notes facilitated this display of powerful feelings. However, what distinguishes this invective from the eighteenth-century variety (which too is remarkable for its energy, passion and commitment) is that it also exhibits a just, rational, and well-articulated anger.

But there are times when Coleridge's invective does not maintain this high level and seems to be an expression of mere prejudice. To give a few instances. "Sympathy with the common-place Trivial; Wonderment at the Monstrous; are the ground springs of a Scotch Critic's Judgement" (p. 60). "Is it possible that a man should have written this? — O Lord! Yes! anything is possible from a Scotchman" (p. 75). Commenting on Anderson's remark that Mallet's *Life of Bacon* "ranks

with the best piece of biography in our language," Coleridge says: "The Devil, it does! — Poor Language! — But Anderson, perhaps, meant Scotch language" (p. 75). Scotch-baiting is a peculiarly English pastime and it would seem that Coleridge enjoyed it as much as his famous *bête noire*, Dr. Johnson.

To turn from the author of marginalia to their editor, one can not say enough in praise of Whalley. Painstaking, exemplary scholarship is the most obvious feature of this edition. When Coleridge, while commenting on William Browne, says in a rather Johnsonian moment that "Nightingales never visit Devon or Cornwall" (p. 47), Whalley provides the note with scientific confirmation by pointing out that *Handbook of British Birds* (5 vols, 1749) II, p. 189 says the same thing. He follows this up with a comment on Coleridge's "alert attention to birds throughout his life" and refers the reader to CN II App F. Information of this kind would be useful to specialists as well as laymen. (He could have also referred the reader to his own valuable note at I³ on p. 482.)

To give another example of his thorough editing, the first reference to Aquinas in one of Coleridge's notes draws this note from Whalley: "C borrowed Aquinas from the Durham Cathedral library 25 Jul to 24 Aug 1801. *Durham L. B. 2*. See also CN I 973 A and n. C later owned a 5-vol set of Aquinas" (p. 50). Whalley has set a standard for scholarship which is difficult to match. A typical Whalley note will make clear what I mean:

C was particularly interested in the history of medical science and how ignorance, prejudice, and superstition had persistently interfered with scientific inquiry. At the age of thirteen or fourteen he had walked the wards of the London Hospital with his brother Luke, and, thinking to become a physician himself, read medical books voraciously at that time. His early association with Thomas Beddoes and Humphry Davy consolidated both his interest and knowledge, and turned his thought in speculative as well as hypochondriacal directions. In medical science, as in so much else, he looked for first principles, and developed views on psychosomatic illness and psychiatric treatment that are notably sensible and humane, and far in advance of the doctrine and practice of his time. See e.g. CN III 3441. After taking up residence with James Gillman, C read a wide range of medical books and periodicals; some marginalia in these are preserved (p. 282n).

Whalley's comments are not only informative and engaging, many of them possess contemporary relevance too. At 7² p. 35 of this book occurs the following moving note by the editor:

When C wrote: 'Men, I still think, ought to be weighed and not counted. Their worth ought to be the final estimate of their value' (*LS — CC — 221*), he can hardly have foreseen, after the slave-trade had been

finally abolished, the incredulous shock of horror that Primo Levi was to feel in 1944 when, at the mustering of Italian Jews for transport to Auschwitz, a corporal in reply to his officer's question 'Wieriel Stuck?' reported that there were six hundred and fifty "pieces" and that all was in order.' Primo Levi *Se Questa e un huomo* (Turin 1958) tr. Stuart Woolf (1959) 7."

This is a happy moment for Coleridge scholarship since it demonstrates that Coleridge is our contemporary.

The same is true of another note which refers to an even more recent event. One is a little surprised to come across an allusion to the Watergate scandal in this scholarly work. While commenting on Coleridge's notion of *Jus divinum*, Whalley points out that both "the divine right of kings" and "executive privilege" claim dispensation from the law in the arbitrary exercise of high authority" (p. 295, n 24/1). Whalley may have to annotate this note in the next edition. Or, perhaps, it could be replaced with even more contemporary versions of *jus divinum* of which, one expects, there will be plenty.

Sometimes Whalley's comments are more engaging than Coleridge's marginal notes. His gift for the lively, appropriate anecdote enlivens what could well have been a dull tone. Thus, for instance, while commenting on Coleridge's expression "mumpsimus Church hirelings," Whalley writes: "The word [mumpsimus] often used to mean an old fogey, originally meant a person who obstinately adheres to old ways in spite of clear evidence that he is wrong, alluding to the story told by Richard Place (c. 1482-1536) in his *De Fructu* (1517) of an illiterate English priest who, when corrected for mispronouncing the liturgical phrase *quod in ore sumpsimus*" replied: I will not change my old mumpsimus for your new sumpsimus" (p. 260n).

If the above note is dismissed as an anecdote of the type which revives the flagging attention of a bored audience, I may refer to another which packs in a good deal of information in an almost casual manner. Commenting on Coleridge's expression "Dominican Virulence," Whalley writes: "In the early attempts of the Roman Church to deal with heresy and before an Inquisition had been formally established, members of the Dominican order, because of their learning and disinterestedness, were chosen to inquire into divergencies from orthodox beliefs. Their zeal and ferocity in carrying out their commission, in the thirteenth century, against the Albigensian heresy established their reputation as merciless professional inquisitors, the fear and hatred of them being concentrated in the punning name *Domini canes* —hounds of the Lord" (pp. 349-350).

Whalley's careful editing and informative comments have their lighter moments too. In his comment on Sir Thomas Browne's reference to "the mutation of sexes, or transition into one another," Coleridge identifies the "mutation" as "a mere disease of the ΚΛΙΤΟΠΙΣ." Here is Whalley's note: "C has transliterated the English word 'clitoris' into Greek character; the Greek form is ΚΛΕΙΤΟΠΙΣ" (779). Indeed, it would seem that Coleridge's Greek was not as perfect as one would expect it to be, for Whalley corrects it at several places.

As one would expect from some one well-versed in Greek and Latin, Whalley has done excellent lexicographical work here. He has identified a considerable number of Coleridgean coinages not noticed before and pointed out the inadequacies of several entries in the *OED*. Though the following list is by no means exhaustive, it will give some idea of Coleridge's linguistic inventiveness and Whalley's editorial thoroughness: abeternal ("from eternity," not in *OED*, p. 696); aei-partheny ("perpetual virginity," not in *OED*, p. 504); ammaximation ("the bringing up to a maximum," not in *OED*, p. 579); anarthrons ("lacking articulation," this sense is not recorded in *OED*, p. 574); anti-frictionist (the earliest use is assigned to Carlyle, though Coleridge used it seven years earlier in Sept. 1830, p. 527); crambist ("one who serves up warmed-up leftovers," not in *OED*, p. 528); differencible (not in *OED*, p. 579); disensoul (not in *OED*, p. 517); egometical ("from egomet, the emphatic form of 'I,' not in *OED*, p. 346); eposy (seeing, not in *OED*, p. 652); gradative ("step by step," *OED* does not refer to Coleridge's use of this word, p. 550); hodiernity ("today-ness," not in *OED*, p. 410); hylotheist ("One who identifies God with matter." This use by Coleridge is earlier than the one recorded in *OED*, p. 620); hystery (a portmanteau word combining mystery, history, and hysteria, not in *OED*, p. 526); imparticipability (not in *OED*, p. 60); impetite (a desire or seeking directed inward, not in *OED*, p. 819); incoherentic (not in *OED*, p. 780); inner — verb (*OED* records it for 1890, but Coleridge coined it between 1808 and 1826, p. 637); intellecturition (not in *OED*, p. 653); neologist (*OED* cites Newman 1827) for the first use, but Coleridge's use is earlier, p. 305); neo-platonist (while *OED* records the earliest use for 1837, Coleridge used it in 1817 or later, p. 296); occidentized (Westernized, not in *OED*, p. 578); outer — verb (Though *OED* records it for 1890, Coleridge coined it sometime between 1808 and 1826, p. 637); outerance (not recorded in *OED*, p. 638); preposterize ("to make an after-event come first," not in *OED*, p. 602); propaideutic ("pertaining to preliminary instruction." Coleridge's use of this word is earlier than that recorded in *OED*, p. 595); reintroitive (not in *OED*, p. 667); uppropment (not in *OED*, p. 507); *OED* has not recorded sixteen of these words and it wrongly assigns

the first use of several others to later authors. By the time Whalley completes the fifth volume of *Marginalia*, one expects the list of such words to grow into a sizeable Appendix.

It is possible that because this edition sets such a high standard, one is a little disappointed when sometimes Whalley is not as thorough as one expects him to be. For instance, when Coleridge compares Richard the Second to "an Indian Fig-tree, as described by Milton," Whalley is content with referring the reader to *Paradise Lost* IX: 1001-7 (p. 401n); but he does not care to identify the tree. Surely, an editor who refers the reader to *British Birds* could be equally exact about this Indian wonder.

Again, when Coleridge points out that during "the three first Ages" the Christian Church was "wholly innocent of the fiction [of Purgatory] and that for "yet another 3 centuries it was but a tolerated Guess," one expects a note on "this most pernicious Article" tracing its history as briefly as possible. But Whalley prefers to steer clear of Purgatory.

Finally, when Coleridge writes in a comment on Joseph Blanco White: "Frame to yourself a diary of the Life of St. Patrick, as recorded by the authority of the successive Heads of your [Roman] Church — & then tell me whether such a life is not of necessity incompatible with or at least making of no effect, the large number of [Scripture] precepts given to all men!" (522), one needs a little editorial assistance to judge the accuracy of Coleridge's observation. A brief description of the salient features of such "lives" could have been provided to help the non-Anglican, non-Catholic reader along if not familiar with Christian folk-lore.

It is clear, then, that non-literary intellectuals can contribute much to the editing of Coleridge's marginalia that is not easily supplied by mere literary specialists. And this is but inevitable because Coleridge belonged to the tradition of gentlemen-scholars who claimed all knowledge for their province and who were at home in different fields of inquiry, including alchemy, theology, history, political economy, philosophy, natural philosophy, and perhaps even *naturphilosophie*.

NOTES

1. *Marginalia*, p. 41. Subsequent references to *Marginalia* will be made in parentheses.
2. V. I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks, Collected Works*, XXXVIII (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), pp. 85-320.
3. I have discussed this view at some length in "Romanticism: a Critique of Marxist Critiques," *CIEFL Bulletin*, 13, No. 1 (1977), pp. 1-17.

4. It is not very often that Coleridge came out on the side of Industrialists. As a matter of fact, he expressed his opposition to the civilization inaugurated by Industrial capitalism in his *Church and State*. We come across another instance of this opposition in one of his marginal notes on Marcus Aurelius. Commenting on the Roman's dictum "don't ramble from one thing to another," Coleridge says: "Most important maxim / & of especial use in the present Age. The minds of men from great Cities, from Newspapers, Reviews, Magazines, 'Beauties' or Selections, from Routs (2 or 3 perhaps in the same night) have become more & more discontinuous" (p. 164). However, Coleridge does not seem to have realized that in asking for an end to the rule of monopolies he was promoting that very industrial ethos to which he was firmly opposed. Coleridge did not and could not see this contradiction because he did not rise superior to the limitations imposed on him by his sectional outlook.
5. For a discussion of "the right of first night" as a relic of group marriage, see Frederick Engels, *Origin of the Family, State and Private Property* in *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), III, pp. 227-229.