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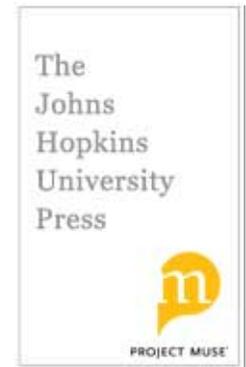
Coleridge and German Philosophy. The Poet in the Land of Logic by Paul Hamilton (review)

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fields panoplied with flowers, and trees blooming in spring (Keats stretched out atop one of them enacting a dream). It's a feast for the eyes. But the other senses, even if they are more difficult to evoke in this medium, are rarely if ever given play. Even the musical score is restrained, an occasional violin wisp of Mozart. The sensuous auralty of Keats's poetry, the rout of the senses, never comes across, and no attempt is made by the actors to convey the synesthesia of his poetry in their deliveries, which all seem so mournful and solemn, as if they were performing a funeral oration. The film cries out for the fleshly poetry of *Endymion*—a brothel of wet bowers and slippery blisses—or lines from “The Eve of St. Agnes” or from the final anguished lyrics to Fanny Brawne herself. Where's the face swelling into reality? Where are the palate-passions, the “apple tasting—pear-tasting—plum-judging—apricot nibbling—peach scrunching”? Where's the nectarine going down “soft pulpy, slushy, oozy—all its delicious embonpoint melt[ing] down my throat like a large beatified Strawberry” (Rollins, *Letters* 2: 149, 179)? Everything is too clean here, swept bright, as if all the interiors were lifted from Banana Republic or an advertisement for The Gap. The viewer yearns for a little more gustatory brio (and less cat-petting) and for more veritable nineteenth-century grubbiness.

In the end, “Bright Star” is less a celebration than an elegy for Keats, a visual postmortem that begins by seeing him from the fresh perspective of Fanny Brawne but concludes by interring him in embalmed darkness and then swallowing both characters in his grave. Campion has composed a cinematic version of Shelley's “Adonais” but without either the soaring valedictory stanzas or the jubilant rebirth that culminates this poem. The funereal tone of the film is unlikely to win new converts to Keats's poetry. Nor will Abbie Cornish's exaggerated and prolonged hysterics at the foot of the stairs on hearing of his death generate much additional sympathy for Fanny Brawne. The scene is oddly clinical, inhibiting the viewer from sharing in the traumatic shock she's experiencing. The void created by the sheering away of both lead characters in the final scene leaves us nowhere to turn, nothing to hang onto but a lugubrious and painfully long rendition of “Ode to a Nightingale” and a pocketful of brightly colored images.

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Paul Hamilton. *Coleridge and German Philosophy. The Poet in the Land of Logic*. London: Continuum, 2007. Pp. 175. \$130.00.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's status as a philosopher continues to be a subject of debate among Coleridge scholars. His failure to produce other than

fragmentary accounts of his own philosophical system during his lifetime leaves only the surviving fragments of his *Opus Maximum* as indicators of what a Coleridgean system might have looked like, and his notorious unacknowledged borrowings from Schelling and other thinkers, as well as the fact that many of his philosophical insights emerge in the process of reading and as marginalia to the work of others make it difficult to clearly assess Coleridge's significance as a philosopher in his own right. Meanwhile, Coleridge's continued attempts to employ the latest developments in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophical thought for ultimately religious and theological ends lead some critics to dismiss him as a philosopher altogether. Coleridge's deep and lasting interest in philosophical questions, however, and his commitment to the philosophical debates of his day, are beyond any doubt, as is his conviction that principled philosophical argument is necessary to ground a meaningful discussion in matters of poetics, criticism, politics, and religion. In this context, the particular importance of German philosophy for Coleridge's work and thought, the topic of Paul Hamilton's latest book, *Coleridge and German Philosophy*, can hardly be overstated.

In his study, Hamilton does not quite aim to present an assessment of Coleridge as a philosopher, or to provide an overview of all the influences and debts to German philosophy to be found in his work. Rather, it is Hamilton's goal to place "Coleridge's mode of thinking within a German Romantic philosophical context as the place where his ideas can naturally extend themselves, stretch and find speculations with which to compare themselves" (3). Hamilton, that is, seeks to ease Coleridge's historical and cultural predicament as a mediator of German philosophical thought in a hostile British empiricist environment by staging him as a direct interlocutor of Schelling, Hegel, and the Jena Romantics. By placing Coleridge's ideas in a more congenial context than the empiricist one he sought to overcome, Hamilton has, to an extent, himself chosen a speculative rather than an empirical framework for his study. Accordingly, he makes it clear from the beginning that "[a] book taking this approach is not going to be zealous in uncovering exact sources," and that it "looks for the same tolerance or latitude from the reader" the author has taken with respect to its subject matter (2–3). Unconstrained by the limits of direct influences and overt intertextual connections, Hamilton is free to construct Coleridge's place in the philosophical discussion of the Romantic period in more imaginative ways.

Probably the most unusual argumentative strategy this approach makes possible is Hamilton's decision to examine Coleridge's positions through the narrative lens of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. While Coleridge's affinities with Schelling run deep, his direct engagement of Hegel did not exceed a few marginalia to the opening pages of Hegel's *Science of Logic*,

and there is hence little material evidence to warrant a rapprochement of these two thinkers. From Hamilton's speculative position, however, it seems precisely unusual *not* to engage Coleridge on Hegelian terms. "One of the benefits of the freedoms this book takes with a conventional history of ideas," Hamilton states, "is to keep Coleridge in the Hegelian picture to which he evidently belongs" (7).

Hamilton's unorthodox pairing of Coleridge and Hegel allows him to highlight the rift between the dejections of "Coleridge the introspective poet of self-consciousness" and the attempts of "Coleridge the philosopher of his times" to provide stability and salvation for the foundering empirical self in a sphere of supra-individual and divine mediation (32). Coleridge ultimately comes to embody the precarious moment on which the narrative of Hegel's *Phenomenology* hinges, the moment when the self, having run the course of individualist philosophical positions, gives up on the primacy of individual agency and transfers ultimate authority to a mediator. Famously, Hegel's philosophical narrative reverses its course at this moment of dejection of the "unhappy consciousness," shifting focus from an individual to a supra-individual perspective, aiming to show that the development of self-consciousness must be understood as a phenomenology of the historically unfolding relations of Spirit with itself.

Hamilton develops the dialogue with Hegel in chapters devoted to the *Biographia Literaria* and Coleridge's notion of autobiography, where the *Phenomenology's* way stations of stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness serve as heuristic frames for Hamilton to analyze Coleridge's literary life narrative. After the personal crisis that found expression in poetic form in the 1802 verse "Letter to Sarah" and "Dejection: An Ode," Hamilton suggests, "Coleridge's autobiography in its major gestures continues, in Hegel's terms, to be Spirit-directed rather than a phenomenology of self-consciousness; its subject is presented as shaped, that is, by substantial ethical, cultural, moral and religious orders" (35). Coleridge's Hegelian trajectory will culminate, Hamilton proposes, in his idea of the clerisy, developed in *On the Constitution of the Church and State* of 1830. The clerisy, Coleridge's idea of a national church, a class of teachers distributed throughout the country, charged with the task to aid the nation's cultivation and spiritual growth, could, because their training allows them to recognize not only absolute principles but also their historically changing embodiments, secure both the permanence and the progression of the British nation. As members of a class and as individual instantiations of a national institution, the members of the clerisy thus complete in Hamilton's view the Hegelian "move from self-consciousness to Spirit" (32). This rapprochement of Hegel and Coleridge yields its most interesting results when it allows Hamilton to focus repeatedly on Coleridge's conception of self-

consciousness as inherently relational and social in a Hegelian sense, dependent on the recognition and approval of others, created of necessity through a dynamic set of interrelationships.

Legitimizing the introduction of Hegel into the discussion of Coleridge's philosophical thought then also allows Hamilton to situate Coleridge as a participant in the debate between Hegel and his former friend Schelling about the philosophical conception of the Absolute. Here, Coleridge is seen to side with Schelling, and Hamilton's assessment of the relationship between these two thinkers can proceed in less speculative fashion. Rather than rehearse the familiar connections between Coleridge and Schelling's nature philosophy of the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Hamilton emphasizes the continued closeness of Coleridge's thought to the work of the later Schelling, as expressed in *On the Nature of Human Freedom*, the unpublished drafts of *The Ages of the World*, and the late philosophy of mythology and revelation. Hamilton focuses, that is, on the Schelling whose thought has seen a resurgent interest in recent years, thanks in particular to the work of Manfred Frank and Slavoj Žižek. Hamilton, who is not only well-versed in the philosophical discussion of the Romantic period, but also in the contemporary discussions in philosophy and literary theory thus also brings Coleridge's positions in contact with current debates about freedom, the presence of evil in the world, and Schelling's anticipation of Marxist historical materialism and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Coleridge, Hamilton shows, agrees with Schelling in the dispute with Hegel about the Absolute in insisting that the Absolute cannot be an immanent principle, not even one that comprises the totality of history and the developing processes of the universe we perceive. This absolute totality, Schelling argues, must be seen as only one possibility into which an absolute ground that could have taken shape quite differently has contracted, and through which it thus only becomes accessible to us *via negationis*. As Absolute Will it produces all of nature and human consciousness but is not present in its products. The true Absolute according to the later Schelling can only be understood as the identity of the absolute totality of all perceivable differences in our world *and* the ground of Being that must be posited as preexisting, underlying and subtending it in a chaotic extra-temporal realm of complete freedom and absolute indifference.

But Coleridge also differs from Schelling, Hamilton demonstrates, in insisting on the need for a personal relationship even to this Absolute, a relationship that can for Coleridge only be found in the sphere of Christian religion. Coleridge needs, and needs to support, a philosophical argument for a personal god, an Absolute Will that cannot be indifferent but must be identifiable in its intent so that individual human beings can relate to and embrace it. For Coleridge, this need finds its clearest theological expression

in Christian conceptions of the trinity, a form of which Coleridge develops in his own theological model of the Divine *Tetractys*, the unity of Absolute Will or Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Schelling's view, the Absolute, as the ground subtending all relations, must of necessity be beyond relation altogether, while for Coleridge, even this Absolute needs paradoxically to be brought into relation with the knowing subject to fulfill its function in a philosophical position that is compatible with religious faith. The discourse about the Absolute, as Hamilton rightfully points out, hence creates the enormous attraction of German post-Kantian thought for Coleridge, even as it produces a considerable source of tension with the latter's religious views.

Ultimately, Hamilton finds Coleridge's most original contributions to the debate in what he describes as Coleridge's "linguistic turn." As a poet, Coleridge is finely attuned to our situatedness within language and the fact that our processes of individuation, self-reflection and philosophical abstraction are necessarily linguistic ones. Borrowing from an essay of Richard Eldridge's on Stanley Cavell, Hamilton calls this linguistic understanding of the philosophical project "reading from the inside": "It is this reading from the inside, this understanding and criticizing of the network from within which one must work, think and act, that Coleridge so typically practices and encourages, although 'by the way', as if an aside from his ostensible projects. The larger linguistic dimension which interpretative activity throws up by default shadows all his work" (107–8). Famously, this philosophical activity within the linguistic network "from within one must work, think and act" is for Coleridge the activity of desynonymization, a clarification and delimitation of the meaning of words, which should lead to greater clarity of thought and ultimately to a clearer basis for human action and interaction. Coleridge hence has, in Hamilton's words, a continued "interest in original expression as original philosophy" (109).

One of Coleridge's original coinages, the term *tautegory* then serves a central function in Hamilton's argument. Coleridge employed the term in *The Statesman's Manual, Aids to Reflection* and, most significantly for Hamilton, in his 1825 lecture for the Royal Society of Literature "On the Prometheus of Aeschylus," published in 1834, from where it was indeed borrowed by Schelling—with an acknowledgment of the source and a hint at the irony of the appropriation—for one of his lectures on the Philosophy of Mythology. In *Aids to Reflection (Collected Works*, ed. John Beer [London: Routledge, 1993] 9: 206) Coleridge defines the adjectival form of his neologism, *tautegorical*, as "expressing the *same* subject but with a difference" and sees it "in contra-distinction from metaphors and similitudes, that are always allegorical (i.e. expressing a *different* subject but with a resemblance)." In *The Statesman's Manual*, Coleridge claims that the true symbol

is always tautegorical, and the term tautegory provides Coleridge with a linguistic means to express his desire for an absolute sameness and identity behind linguistic and historical differences. As Hamilton puts it, "Coleridge's idea of tautegory, which anticipates Schelling's historicist philosophy of revelation while Schelling himself is not publishing, is also a theory of how relationships can be maintained across time and between us and our productive origins" (90). Coleridge's "linguistic turn" is thus not an embracing of the disseminative power of language in the vein of twentieth-century deconstruction. On the contrary, Coleridge's impulse, as Hamilton finds it expressed in one of Coleridge's notebook entries, is to create an "anti-Babel" in the effort to fully accept the diversity of all proliferating discourses, while insisting that they ultimately all spring from a single source and common ground.

Coleridge's positions indeed emerge more clearly and as peculiarly his own, when they are presented as part of a debate with his various German interlocutors, and Hamilton's experimental approach to the history of ideas allows for a portrait of Coleridge that shows him deeply engaged in the philosophical idiom of German Idealism and German Romanticism, an idiom Coleridge found ideally suited to his own philosophical and poetic temperament. It is unfortunate, however, particularly given Hamilton's extensive knowledge of Coleridge, German Idealism, and contemporary twentieth- and twenty-first century philosophy, that he did not find a way to present his narrative more clearly. The "road-map" Hamilton offers in the first chapter of his book does not give the reader a clear sense of the ultimate structure of the argument to follow, and the individual chapters, too, provide for the most part little guidance in this regard. Particularly since Hamilton's style is often digressive, keeping him company on his path is not an easy task. Given the inherent difficulty of the material treated in his study, a more transparent presentation would have greatly benefitted Hamilton's readers, all the more so as one of his hopes is to "win[] converts to the idea that Coleridge found philosophical speculation in the dominant idiom of his time exciting, vertiginous and as imaginatively engaging as poetry" (3). *Coleridge and German Philosophy* presents an abundance of material to situate Coleridge within the German philosophical discussion of his time, but despite the insights it provides, it ultimately misses a chance to convince a broader audience that "Not only the poet but also the philosopher has his raptures," as Schelling, quoted by Hamilton, puts it in one of the drafts of *The Ages of the World*.

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