

Robin Schofield, *The Vocation of Sara Coleridge: Authorship and Religion*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pp. 260. £79. ISBN 9783319703701.

Robin Schofield begins his engaging book by focusing on Sara Coleridge's relative neglect in literary history. Coleridge's life has mainly been studied in relation to the Lake Poets, and a number of biographical monographs are dedicated to her interactions with her uncle, Robert Southey, family friend, William Wordsworth, and her often-absent father, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Schofield recognises this in his introduction, and instead aims in this study to be the first to place the central focus on Coleridge herself, and her literary works.

Although twenty-first-century scholars have begun to explore Coleridge's writings, Schofield's central premise emphasises 'Sara's religious writings of her final decade, and how she became a religious author of such distinct originality' (5). He goes on to show how Coleridge was the contemporary of influential theologians such as F. D. Maurice and John Henry Newman. Schofield then stakes the claim for her being remembered as their equal, due to Coleridge's ability to 'exploit and subvert the gender conventions of her times' (16). The development of her professional career, irrevocably linked with that of her religious ideas, runs through the core of the book, with each of the five further chapters exploring a period in Coleridge's life and subsequent development in her writings.

Schofield's second chapter covers how collaboration and dialogue were mainstays in Coleridge's work from the very earliest of her writings, the first of which was a Latin translation published anonymously in 1822 when Coleridge was nineteen. Whilst critics have generally accepted that 'translation is a subordinate literary activity', Schofield counters this with his claims that for Coleridge, translating was not just 'empowering', but 'of decisive importance for Sara's future literary activities' (34). The chapter concludes with Schofield's analysis of Coleridge's early works, including *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children* (1834) and *Phantasmion* (1837), noting how these works 'had origins in the family circle' (52), as they were written for her eldest son, Herbert. Schofield's notable interest in the way Coleridge's family and associates' views influence and are challenged by her resonate throughout his work.

The third chapter, "On Rationalism": "The Authoritative Word" and "Liberty of Conscience", describes Coleridge's little-studied essay 'On Rationalism' (1843), and explores its 'assured and forthright critique' (67) of the theology espoused by John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement. Finishing by detailing Coleridge's rejection of Tractarianism, and the similarities between Newman and Coleridge's authorship, Schofield moves on in the fourth chapter to focus on her role as editor of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge republished her father's work in 1847, complete with a new introduction written by herself. This chapter also looks in detail at the ways in which Wordsworth and Southey influenced Coleridge's works, and how she dealt with the claims of her father's plagiarisms. Chapter 5, entitled, 'The Theory and Practice of Polemical Writing: Religious Authorship, 1847-1849', explores Coleridge's religious authorship during these two years, as she writes about Kantian philosophy, post-baptismal sin, and regeneration in both her prose and poetical works. The final chapter uncovers Coleridge's 'experiments with a style of dialogue' (184) discovered in *Biographia Literaria*, which she utilised in her mostly unpublished series of texts, *Dialogues on Regeneration*, produced in 1850-51.

The Vocation of Sara Coleridge admirably addresses Coleridge's extensive body of work and, whilst focusing primarily on the last ten years of her life, provides a succinct and enlightening exploration of her entire career, beginning with her earliest translations and ending with 'For My Father on His Lines Called "Work Without Hope"'. The book's strength lies in its ability to perform close analysis on a number of Coleridge's little-known and understudied works, combining this with a study of early-nineteenth-century religion. Schofield's book is

certainly an original contribution to Coleridge studies, as the author explores not only the influence of religious thought, but that of her various famous friends and relations, in order to turn the spotlight on Coleridge's own achievements and career. It also provides a valuable reassessment of Coleridge's relationship with her father's literary legacy, emphasising Coleridge's role as a key editor of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. The author dedicates a large amount of discussion to *Biographia*, and Coleridge's edition of her father's work is worthy of a monograph study in itself.

Coleridge died aged just forty-nine in 1852, after suffering from breast cancer. She left her final work, an autobiography written for her daughter, Edith, unfinished. As a poet, prose writer, literary editor, and religious thinker, Coleridge's output during her short life was prolific. As Schofield concludes by contending, she certainly 'occupies a unique and significant position in early Victorian religious and literary history' (244). With this in mind, Schofield's book is a catalyst for future research, and demonstrates that further study of Coleridge's life, letters and predominantly her works would be welcome.

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