

David Ward, *Coleridge and the Nature of Imagination: Evolution, Engagement with the World, and Poetry*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. £50. ISBN 9781137362612.

The nature and role of the human imagination was extensively theorised in early nineteenth-century literature, and it continues to be considered a central element of Romantic-era writing and philosophy in modern scholarship. David Ward offers a fresh perspective on this element of human experience by mapping Coleridge's imaginative work and philosophy of mind onto twentieth- and twenty first-century brain science and grounding it in an understanding of evolutionary biology. Ward's study focuses on how Coleridge theorised mental processes and his attempts to represent them in his creative work, and even invoke them in his reader.

Chapter 1 begins with an analysis of Coleridge's complex understanding of the relationship between thought and feeling. Ward outlines the importance of looking back to the origins of the human mind to understand the integral role of the imagination in human development, justifying the subtitle that places 'evolution' foremost. He argues that language developed because of the imagination: the need to explain situations outside of immediate sensory experience (13). The power of the human mind above animal life is, after all, to subjectively represent or recreate the world. This faculty remains key to the analysis of Coleridge's work: the creative process and human ability to interpret symbols and images are at the fore of this study.

Chapter 2 examines Coleridge's drive for unity, and the 'One life' he refers to in his conversation poem, *The Aeolian Harp*. The analysis concentrates on perception, or impression, versus reality. Here Ward offers a biographical reading, tracking Coleridge's unhappy union with Sara Fricker and its influence on his philosophy of religion and the mind. Coleridge's experiments with Schillerian 'joy' (34) and the tensions between active and passive modes of imagination provide the focus of Chapter 3. Ward describes this concept as the idea that man, as both sensory and rational animal, acting on nature and being acted upon, must obtain balance between feeling and reason, and being shaped by and shaping the world. Chapter 4 further examines the role of memory and imagination in Coleridge's work, drawing striking comparisons with modern understandings of cognitive processes and faculties.

These first chapters provide the foundation for Ward's discussion of the poems *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Christabel* in the final three chapters. Ward focuses on the creative process, while reminding us that 'we should not ask what the poet wishes to say but what he wants to do' (138). Coleridge's creative intent remains at the foreground of Ward's analysis. It is here that we see the imagination as the interactions between the conscious mind and the unconscious 'patterns of mind and structures of brain' that have accompanied human evolution (1). Supporting this biological methodology are the well-known biographical connections Coleridge had to contemporary scientists such as Humphry Davy, who was experimenting with mind-altering gases to create liminal states akin to those described in Coleridge's poetry.

Ward demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of Coleridge's work, parsing the coherent from the contradictory in a confident manner. He dedicates whole chapters to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Christabel* but also focuses on Coleridge's conversation poems and long treatise, *Biographia Literaria*. Use of Coleridge's correspondence provides a further insight into a complex philosophy of mind. Throughout, Ward draws on twentieth- and twenty first-century psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology and these comparisons are persuasive and do not feel anachronistic. Instead, Ward reveals Coleridge's nuanced and intuitive understanding of the imaginative processes of the mind.

This is an engaging and persuasive study, accessible and useful to those familiar with Romantic literature. It will be particularly enjoyed by those with an interest in the history of the human mind. The book joins the advancing field of Romantic-era literature and science scholarship alongside texts such as Alan Richardson's *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (2005) and Michelle Faubert's *Rhyming Reason: The Poetry of Romantic-Era Psychologists* (2009).

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