

## *Book Review*

Ewan James Jones. *Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014

*Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form* (2014) is Ewan J. Jones' first published book. He is currently Lecturer at the English Department of Cambridge University. The book is a welcome addition to Coleridgean scholarship, as precious links between his poetry and his philosophy are highlighted. By stressing that form engenders meaning, Ewan J. Jones is building on Kenneth Burke's explorations into symbolic actions and semiotics. Without realizing it, Jones is also influenced by Murray Krieger, who discussed vital formalism in his seminal study *Theory of Criticism* (1976) and defined it, taking Coleridge's theory of the imagination as a case study, in terms of the poet's conscious artistry. Furthermore, using metre in poetry should be understood as a conscious act on the part of the poet, an act of will and reason, whose aim is to produce aesthetic pleasure. Jones is echoing Coleridge and Krieger's discussions of metre when he asks "if metrical variations are by their nature affective, how do we attain the specific shade of passion ('eagerness'), except through a metre that we can only know by voicing it in a certain way?" (129).

From the outset of his book, Jones states that "by stressing the philosophical significance of Coleridge's verse technique, I differ from previous dedicated studies of genre" (15). The outset of the project distances Jones from acknowledged studies such as Hamilton's *Coleridge's Poetics* (1983), which discusses issues of poetics having *Biographia literaria* as a starting point, and not the poems themselves. However, there is a critic whose book also explores Coleridge's verse – J. C. C. Mays' *Coleridge's Experimental Poetics* (2013). In an interview for BARS, Jones mentions the fact that Mays' study was published too late for him to engage with it. The former also states that he doesn't worry "about too large an overlap, however: rather, [he] see[s] both projects as a hopeful sign that Coleridge's poetry might once again come in for the sort of sustained attention that it merits" ("Five Questions: Ewan Jones on Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form").

By discussing poems such as "Christabel" or "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Jones shows that basic elements of poetic expression such as metre or rhythm enabled Coleridge to think in an original manner. Other formal structures Jones explores are the hemistich (13), anapestic substitutions and the octosyllable in the poem "Christabel" (97-98). Jones mentions the fact that conversation poems are irregular versions of the Pindaric Ode, the latter being an example of form structure bearing an affective content, both in Antiquity and as understood by the Romantics themselves. By extrapolating the idea that the concept of form means so much more than a mere external device juxtaposed to the creative process, Jones concludes his study by rhetorically asking "but what if Coleridge's verse writing never did only imply the autonomous and autotelic nature of the single, lonely poem?" In order to enforce this view, he adds that "this work has argued precisely that it never did" (199).

Yet another task that Jones wishes to accomplish is to show that affect is rendered through determinate form, or, in his own words, “poetic form... is itself affective” (104). As an aid to discussing the relationship between form and affect, Jones makes use of a lesser known Coleridgean primary text entitled “On the Passions”, in which Coleridge disagrees with Descartes on the passions: “the theory of affect developed in ‘On the Passions’ therefore represents a thorough-going reconceptualisation of the Cartesian model, where passionate states are alternately (never concurrently) passive or active” (90).

Jones is also concerned with the issue of compositional histories. Here is a sample of Jones's criticism of Coleridge's late poem “Limbo”:

my reading of ‘Limbo’, for instance, attempts to wrest it away from the standard editorial presentation of a single, integral poem. The poem’s manuscript evidence reveals a more complex compositional history, in which the formal element (in this case, the heroic couplet) is no simple aesthetic choice, but is mediated through a range of expressive and political histories. (10)

Apart from the poem “Limbo”, “Eolian Harp” also had many editions which evince “the movement across states of passivity and animation, silence and voicing” (19). At times, Ewan Jones is so engaged in his close reading of various poems that his attention shifts completely from any issues regarding content and themes. For instance, there is no discussion of the themes or “Limbo” or the relationship between the characters of “Christabel”.

Overall, Jones is an advocate for a reappraisal of Coleridge the poet, after many scholarly studies dedicated to Coleridge's religious prose works and their engagement with religion and Kantian philosophy, works such as Douglas Hedley's *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion. Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (2000) or Paul Hamilton's *Coleridge and German Philosophy. The Poet in the Land of Logic* (2007). We can only expect Ewan J. Jones to continue assessing Coleridge's lyric and enriching our understanding of the latter's poetics as an embrace of poetry and philosophy.

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