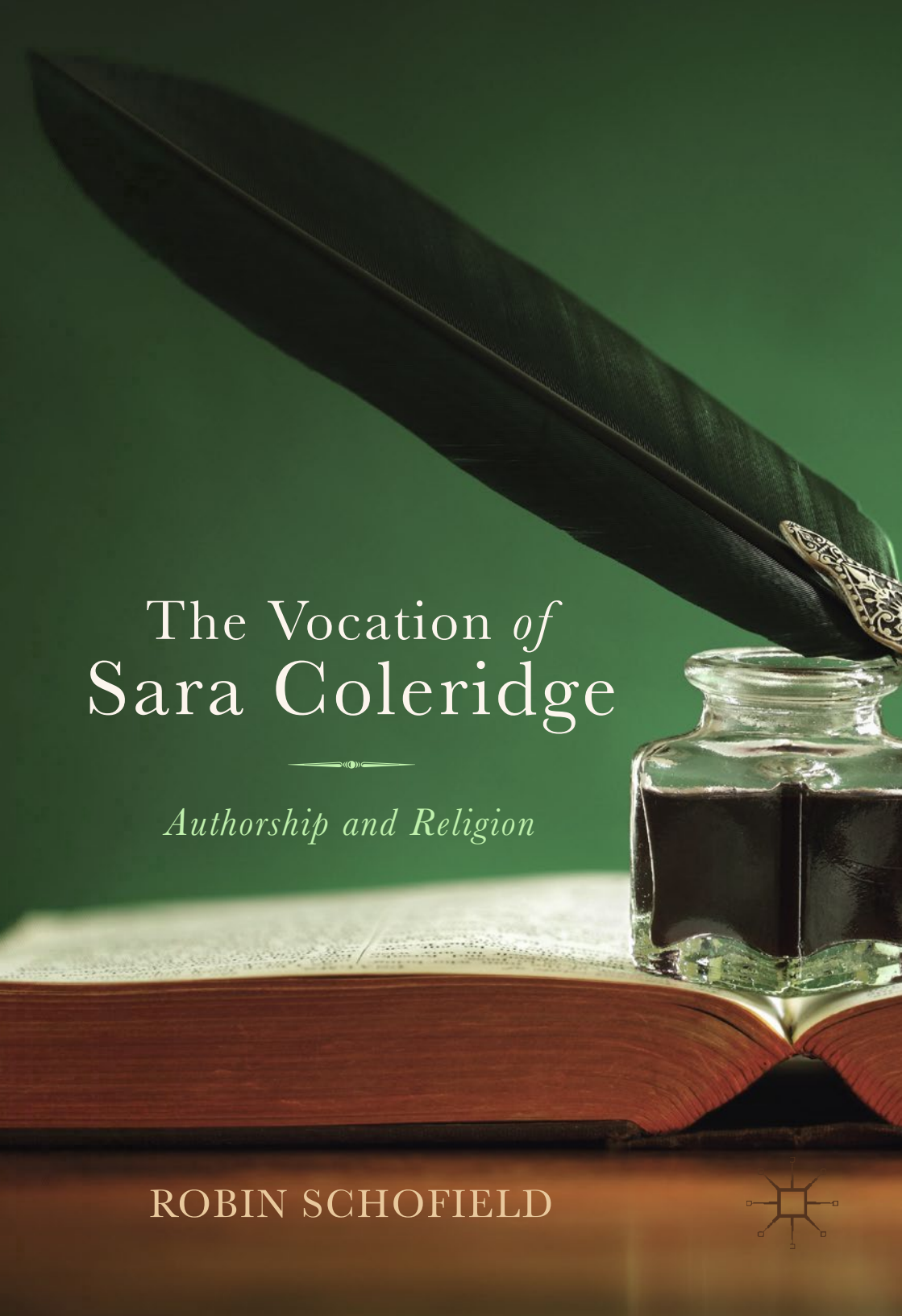

The Vocation *of* Sara Coleridge

Authorship and Religion

ROBIN SCHOFIELD

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For Ness, Smudge and Brian, with love

Preface: The Coleridge Family and the Problem of Names

Previous studies of Sara Coleridge have conveyed the impression that her activities were confined to, and associated with, the private sphere. By contrast, this book presents her as an author active in the public sphere who intervenes decisively in what was a masculine genre of religious polemics. I show Sara Coleridge to have been the peer of such major religious figures as John Henry Newman and F. D. Maurice, and recognized as such in her lifetime. This study aims to make a significant contribution to feminist literary studies, therefore, and to celebrate Sara Coleridge's radical and subtle subversions of the conventions of patriarchal authorship. Given this feminist viewpoint, and my contention that Sara Coleridge is the most original and innovative critic of the Oxford Movement, my use of her first name may seem incongruous. Like most other contemporary Sara Coleridge critics, I have adopted this practice in the interests of clarity to avoid confusion with her father, a risk which applies especially to a study such as mine, in which I frequently discuss Sara and her father together.

All students of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's children must confront the problem of how to refer to this generation without colluding in their diminution. In the interests of equality, therefore, I avoid entirely the surname 'Coleridge' and its adjectival form, 'Coleridgean'. I use the epithet STC for Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and first names for Sara Coleridge's brothers, Derwent Coleridge and Hartley Coleridge; and also for Henry Nelson Coleridge, Sara's first cousin, whom she married.

Oxford, UK — Robin Schofield

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I owe the deepest debt of gratitude to my PhD supervisor at Oxford Brookes University, Simon Kövesi. His thorough, rigorous professionalism and warmly genial guidance enabled me to discipline my passion for Sara Coleridge's work into focused and well-grounded academic research. For all Simon's invaluable encouragement and support, I wish to express my heartfelt and warmest thanks. I wish also to thank others who helped and guided me in various important ways while I was at Oxford Brookes: Nicola Pohl, Caroline Jackson-Houlston, Simon White and Charmian Hearne.

I would like to thank Jeff Cowton for enabling me to consult transcripts of letters by Sara Coleridge held by The Wordsworth Trust, Dove Cottage, Cumbria, and for allowing me to quote from them. I am grateful, also, to Rick Watson at the Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, for allowing me to consult, and quote from, Sara Coleridge's manuscripts in the Center's holdings.

My capabilities in IT leave much to be desired, alas. My warm thanks are due to Tomas Feeney, without whose expertise and patient, long-suffering technical assistance I could not have produced the text of this book.

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Contents

Abbreviations

ARCC	*Aids to Reflection*, ed. by John Beer, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols (London: Routledge. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press (1969–2002), IX (1993)
Biographia 1847	*Biographia Literaria*, *or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, second edition prepared in part by the late Henry Nelson Coleridge, completed and published by his widow*, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1847)
BLCC	*Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols (London: Routledge. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969–2002), VII (1983)
CF	E. L. Griggs, *Coleridge Fille: A Biography of Sara Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940)
Criticism	*The Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. by Peter Swaab (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)
CSCC	*On The Constitution of Church and State,* ed. by John Colmer, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* 16 vols (London: Routledge. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969–2002), X (1976)

Essays	*Essays on His Own Times: Forming a Second Series of the Friend* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. by his Daughter, 3 vols (London: Pickering, 1850)
Extracts	'Extracts from a New Treatise on Regeneration', by Sara Coleridge, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection,* ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge, sixth edn, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1848), II
HCL	*Letters of Hartley Coleridge*, ed. by G. E. Griggs and E. L. Griggs (London: Oxford University Press, 1937, repr. 1941)
HCPW	*The Complete Poetical Works of Hartley Coleridge*, ed. by Ramsey Colles (London: Routledge, 1908)
HRC	Sara Coleridge Collection, MS 0866, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin
M & L	*Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, ed. by Edith Coleridge, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: King, 1873)
Mudge	Bradford Keyes Mudge, *Sara Coleridge: A Victorian Daughter. Her Life and Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989)
NCIS	Note on the "Confessions of An Inquiring Spirit", in *Confessions of An Inquiring Spirit*, ed. by H. N. Coleridge (1849); repr. from 3rd edn, 1853, ed. by H. St J. Hart (London: Black, 1956)
OR 1843	'On Rationalism', by Sara Coleridge, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge, 5th edn, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1843), II
OR 1848	'On Rationalism', by Sara Coleridge, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge, 6th edn, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1848), II
Poems	*Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, ed. by Peter Swaab (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007)
PWCC	*Poetical Works*, 3 vols, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969–2002), XVI (2001)
TTCC	*Table Talk*, ed. by Carl Woodring, 2 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols (London:

Routledge. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969–2002), XIV (1991)

WPTV William Wordsworth, *'Poems in Two Volumes', and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis, *The Cornell Wordsworth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Sara Coleridge and the Contexts of Authorship

Innovation and Subversion

In her final religious works, the unpublished *Dialogues on Regeneration* (1850–51), Sara Coleridge rejects the monologic medium of the essay for the polyphonic form of dialogue. This extract, from the beginning of a scene, suggests the subtle flexibility of dialogue in a religious context:

Irenia:	How is it, Mr Thychnesse, that you have quite deserted our colloquies on the New Birth, you who used to be so warm and confident a defender of the Catholic tenet?
Mr Thychnesse:	The Catholic tenet, my dear Miss Marvell, needs no defender, and to say the truth, debate has its limits. There are people that can be convinced and people that can't be convinced. If it is mere waste to wash an ass's head with soap, to spend eau de Cologne on it is still more wasteful.
Una:	Well, though the ass may not be much brighter, yet the atmosphere cannot but be refreshed by the odiferous operation.
Thychnesse:	For myself the discussion was quite superfluous. I have studied the subject of regeneration thoroughly—thoroughly—and had placed my faith in it on the strongest possible basis.

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Irenia: You used to say that no faith is sure but that which is implicit.

Thychnesse: And so I say still. All stable genuine faith is that which is taken in with childlike simplicity and humility from our spiritual superiors.

Irenia: Then why did you take such pains to study the question, if study is not the way to a knowledge of the truth?

Thychnesse: I studied the subject of regeneration not in order to discover the truth but that I may be able to defend it against its enemies. Yes, my dear young lady, I obtained in this way the sharp sword of Inspired Scripture. I armed myself with the breastplate of authority and held before me the sevenfold shield of theological divinity. Sevenfold do I say? Seventy and seven strong hides for my buckler were fastened by that cloud of witnesses. You may smile, Miss Una, but I can tell you that this is no exaggeration. Seventy seven is under the mark. Hundreds of pious and learned divines testify to the truth that Baptism is regeneration. Why the very heathen called Baptism a regeneration!

Una: But the heathen could only have meant that it symbolized change of mind and life. (HRC)

Sara presents an egalitarian model of discourse in which dialogue collapses hierarchical distinctions. Informal conversation enables the two women to encounter their male interlocutor on equal terms. Although Mr Thychnesse adopts a pompous style ('my dear young lady', 'thoroughly – thoroughly') that seeks to maintain patriarchal dominance, the women are clearly and subversively in charge.

As the scene progresses, Una and Irenia draw out Mr Thychnesse to express himself with increasing absurdity; Una can barely contain her mirth at his absurd, quasi-biblical hyperboles. The comic theatricality of the scene, which satirizes Thychnesse's unreflecting acceptance of the authority of 'our spiritual superiors', recalls Molière's *Tartuffe*, in which the maid Dorine exposes her master Orgon's ludicrous self-delusions. Underlying Sara's comedy is her ongoing critique of the Oxford theology, which conceives of discourse in monologic, authoritarian terms, its dogmatic purpose to 'convince', rather than to collaborate and explore. Its

exponents, therefore, reject engagement in dialogue, expressed by Thychnesse's ludicrous trope of wasting perfume on a donkey. As this brief glimpse suggests, Sara's *Dialogues on Regeneration* are characterized by literary innovation, genial humour, linguistic vitality and a subversion of gender conventions. Such qualities serve Sara's radical commitment to religious inclusivity. These pioneering works will be explored in Chap. 6.

The term 'vocation' in my title refers to Sara's dedicated commitment to religious authorship in the final decade of her life, in which she perpetrates a subtly radical subversion of Victorian gender codes. In addition, 'vocation' carries the more general sense of 'an occupation' or 'profession' (OED). In using the term, I am influenced by Elaine Showalter, who observes: 'Victorian women were not accustomed to *choosing* a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself.'[1] From late 1837, when Sara embarked upon her first original religious work, to November 1851, six months before her death, when she completed the *Dialogues on Regeneration*, she flouted convention by 'choosing' her 'vocation' (in the sense of an 'occupation' in the public sphere). Furthermore, the interlinking strands of her work, as STC's editor and as religious author, were dedicated, with a Miltonic sense of purpose, to the causes of religious liberty and spiritual devotion. Ultimately, as this study will show, Sara's public vocation and domestic concerns, as widow and single parent, would coalesce.

It might reasonably be objected that, across Sara's literary life as a whole, her engagements were varied and occasional, and lacked the unified focus of a vocational commitment. Undeniably, the first two decades of Sara's writing life, up to late 1837, do not reflect the single-minded drive of her contemporary Elizabeth Barrett, for example, who, according to biographer Margaret Forster, by the age of twenty-one 'considered [herself] irrevocably set upon [her] future course [as] a poet', and for whom writing was already a 'serious … business', demanding wholehearted, unconditional commitment.[2] I contend in this study that Sara develops in purposeful focus through her writing career, and that, in the closing decade of her life, her profound and sustained engagement in religious polemics intensifies into a devotional calling. In her 'Introduction' to *Biographia 1847*, she characterizes STC's 'vocation' in terms that apply to the mature phase of her own writing life. His 'vocation', she contends, was 'to examine the truth of modes of thought', and 'to defend the Holy Faith by developing it and shewing its accordance and identity with the ideas of reason' (*Biographia 1847*, I, p. lxii, p. lxv). As this study will show, Sara pursues a similar 'vocation' as religious philosopher in her responses

to the politico-theological disruptions of her times. In doing so, she undermines decisively the masculine domain of academic theology.

'[T]he Thoroughness of [Southey's] Instruction': Sara Coleridge's Formative Context

Sara Coleridge is a neglected figure in literary history. She was born in December 1802, and died prematurely of cancer in May 1852, aged forty-nine. She had two surviving elder brothers: Hartley, born in 1796, and Derwent, born in 1800. Her father, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was absent for much of her childhood and adolescence, during which her parents lived together for 'less than two years' (Mudge, p. 19). For more than a decade, between April 1812 and January 1823, Sara never saw her father. She grew up in the household of her uncle, Robert Southey, at Greta Hall, Keswick, in which she was born. She and her mother lived there as Southey's dependants until Sara's marriage to her cousin, Henry Nelson Coleridge, in 1829. Southey developed a close friendship with the Wordsworths, with whom the Coleridge family already had intimate connections. Southey and Wordsworth were Sara's paternal influences in moral and intellectual terms, as she explains in the final year of her life:

> I knew dear Mr. Wordsworth perhaps as well as I have ever known any one in the world – more intimately than I knew my father, and as intimately as I knew my Uncle Southey … [M]y mind and turn of thought were gradually moulded by [Wordsworth's] conversation, and the influences under which I was brought by his means in matters of intellect, while in those which concerned the heart and the moral being I was still more deeply and importantly indebted to the character and daily conduct of my admirable Uncle Southey. (*Criticism*, p. 96)

Relative to the common experience of middle-class women in the early nineteenth century, Sara received a remarkably advanced education. The home schooling for the children of Greta Hall was systematic and followed a regular timetable. Sara's aunts, mother and Southey were the teachers. As Kenneth Curry remarks, '[t]he scholarship of Sara Coleridge … is evidence of the thoroughness of [Southey's] instruction'.[3] Southey told Unitarian minister John Estlin that she 'has received an education

here at home which would astonish you' (Mudge, p. 22). Sara benefited also from the use of Southey's extraordinary library, which contained 'the impressive total of 14,000 books' (Curry, p. 45). De Quincey observes that the library 'was placed at the service of all the ladies'.[4] Sara benefited conspicuously from Southey's scholarship and generosity. As I will show, he was a significant influence upon her literary career. Like him, she would become a writer of politico-religious polemic, and would revisit topics on which he had written, such as Methodism. Southey's household offered an academically and socially stimulating environment for the young Sara. As Poet Laureate from 1813, Southey was a public figure who received eminent visitors: a 'non-stop flow of bishops, politicians, academicians, poets, judges, dons, merchant bankers and Harley Street consultants … visited Greta Hall during [the] summer seasons'.[5] This stirring formative setting, combined with her remarkable home education, helped to form the basis for Sara's equally remarkable literary career.

The story of Sara Coleridge's life has been uncovered in a number of biographical studies. My priority, by contrast, is Sara's religious writings of her final decade, and how she became a religious author of such distinct originality. The predominantly biographical focus upon Sara continues in the present decade: in Jeffery W. Barbeau's *Sara Coleridge: Her Life and Thought* (2014); Katie Waldegrave's *The Poets' Daughters: Dora Wordsworth and Sara Coleridge* (2013); and Molly Lefebure's *The Private Lives of the Ancient Mariner: Coleridge and his Children* (2013).[6] Barbeau followed his book with a biographical essay in 2015, 'Sara Coleridge on Love and Romance', which focuses on her relationships with Henry Nelson Coleridge and Aubrey de Vere.[7] Waldegrave reflects a tendency to combine a study of Sara with that of another figure, or figures. Eleanor A. Towle's *A Poet's Children* (1912) places Sara's life story alongside Hartley's, and Kathleen Jones, in *A Passionate Sisterhood*, narrates Sara's life in a context of the wider female community of the Lake Poets' circle.[8] Such approaches highlight Sara's relationship with her literary fathers in personal rather than literary terms, and emphasize Sara as STC's daughter, rather than Sara Coleridge the writer. Her life story has been foregrounded as an exemplar of female filial subjection, and to lend new insight into STC and the Lake Poets' circle. I aim to redress the balance, and to show, through critical analysis, how Sara becomes a religious author, and her practice and conception of this vocation.

Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Studies

Religious and political instability determined Sara Coleridge's authorial vocation, and enabled her to participate in a sphere of public authorship. However, that Sara's mature writings are located in theological polemics is a principal reason why she has been neglected as an author: her themes soon lost their topicality in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is true, also, of other writers of the period of the Oxford Movement: for example, Sara's theological opponent Robert Wilberforce, who had the 'misfortune to produce his great doctrinal synthesis', on Incarnation, Baptism and the Eucharist, 'in the three years which lie either side of 1850'.[9] Doctrinal controversy would soon become insignificant in the wake of two decisively influential publications: Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859, and *Essays and Reviews* in 1860, which subjected the Bible to modern scholarly criticism. Wilberforce's 'writings, therefore, became out of date before they had had a chance to make the impact they deserved' (Newsome, p. 373). Sara's religious writings were subject to the same circumstances. In the 1840s, though, the subjects she addressed, such as the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, were matters of urgent public debate. Their reverberations registered in the sphere of party politics. Sara's polemical writings confront live politico-religious issues in the two decades following the Reform Act of 1832. When these issues lost their urgent topicality, her writings in response to them fell from view.

Two decades later, Sara's daughter sought to redeem her from obscurity. In 1873, Edith Coleridge published in two volumes the *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, which, according to E. L. Griggs, 'was apparently widely read, since four editions appeared within a year' (*CF*, p. 189). Edith Coleridge emphasizes religious subjects in her selection of correspondence. The *Memoir and Letters* appears to have been successful in temporarily boosting interest in Sara's life and work. A reviewer of the volumes in January 1874, though, perpetuates the myth of Sara's literary subservience: he describes her as Henry's 'zealous helpmate', and STC as her metaphysical 'Pope'. Nonetheless, he concedes that, as editor of STC, she 'proved … an efficient substitute' after Henry's death.[10]

Henry Reed, an American scholar who had corresponded with Sara near the end of her life, published a biographical tribute to her in July 1852, two months after she died. Reed's account established a gendered interpretation of Sara's work. He constructs Sara's 'career of womanly

authorship' in terms of a feminine ideal. He refers to the 'maidenly modesty' of her early translations, which were published anonymously and sanctioned by her uncle. Reed describes her volume of children's poetry, 'a mother's work', as an expression of 'matronly modesty'. Written for her children, the poems would have remained in the domestic realm had it not been for Sara's husband's insistence on their publication. Her 'editorial … labours' were 'a fit filial and conjugal work', Reed contends, and her 'high intellectual powers were held in harmony with … feminine delicacy and gentleness'. Reed approves of Sara as STC's editor, because the role implies pious subjection to father and husband.[11]

E. L. Griggs follows Reed in foregrounding Sara's gender. In *Coleridge Fille* (1940), he emphasizes her 'humility' and 'filial devotion'. Although it remains a valuable quarry of information on Sara's life, Griggs's biography is circumscribed by his belittling preconceptions of female authorship. He remarks that, in Sara's literary criticism, 'a feminine bias often interferes with her judgment'. He cites her alleged failure to 'appreciate the increasing use of the novel for sociological purposes', and her conception of 'fiction as a representation of life' (*CF*, p. 166, p. 215). Sara favours 'the novel of every day life' as the form 'in which women … have such perfect success' (*Criticism*, p. 187), and regards Jane Austen as the 'princess of novelists'.[12] Griggs reveals his own masculine 'bias' in referring Sara's literary judgements to the criteria of a patriarchal canon: '[i]f she failed to recognize Browning, Tennyson, and Landor as we do to-day [sic], at least she did not set up Letitia Landon, Hannah More, and Mrs. Hemans as leading figures' (*CF*, p. 215). Griggs's disparaging attitudes towards women's authorship limit his attention to Sara's religious writings. He notices that Sara's theology in 'On Rationalism' differs from STC's, but fails to develop this significant observation. Griggs does not treat chronologically the last nine years of Sara's life, which are her most productive. Therefore, the structure of Griggs's study occludes her development into authorial maturity. Virginia Woolf's eloquent and sympathetic essay on Sara is a review of Griggs's biography. Unsurprisingly, then, she is unaware of Sara's achievements as a religious author.

Bradford K. Mudge's *Sara Coleridge: A Victorian Daughter* (1989) appeared almost half a century after Griggs's *Coleridge Fille*. Like Griggs's biography, Mudge's is an indispensable resource; this ground-breaking study reverses Griggs's bias and presents a feminist reading of Sara's life.

Mudge recognizes that editing STC offers her an opportunity to enter the literary marketplace. The Sara he constructs, however, conditioned to believe in 'the impropriety of female authorship', chooses to remain subservient to patriarchy (Mudge, p. 157). For Mudge, 'On Rationalism' was a matter for Sara of '[d]iscovering her father within herself', while in her editorial contributions to STC's work she 'renounc[ed] authorship and embrac[ed]' patriarchal 'authority' (Mudge, p. 99, p. 157). Mudge's misinterpretation of Sara's literary relationship with STC arises from his lack of attention to her religious writings, in which her consummate mastery of STC's ideas and their sources enables her to appropriate, redevelop and exploit them in pursuing her own distinctive agenda. For example, Mudge ignores Sara's commitment to her religious dialogues when he asserts that she 'abandoned' her autobiography in autumn 1851 'in order to devote herself exclusively to a new edition of her father's poems' (Mudge, p. 10). Although Sara collaborated with Derwent in preparing the 1852 edition of STC's *Poems*, and wrote most of the notes and the brief 'Preface', the project that occupied her from September to November 1851 was an original and innovative religious work, the *Dialogues on Personality*. In this work, Sara appropriates ideas of STC, Aquinas and Leibniz in critiquing the doctrinal theories of Robert Wilberforce, a leading Anglo-Catholic theologian. The 'Preface' to STC's *Poems*, just over seven pages long, was written later, in March 1852, which suggests that Sara gave priority in her final illness to the completion of original work. Mudge's book has been highly influential in the reception of Sara Coleridge. For example, twenty-one years after its publication, Joanne Wilkes reinforced Mudge's view of Sara's literary relationship with STC. Sara prioritized her 'quest to promote her father's genius', Wilkes argues, in preference to producing original writings of her own. Wilkes reads Sara's subtle tactic of publishing 'On Rationalism' as 'Appendix C' of *Aids to Reflection* (1843 and 1848) as an act of 'subordinat[ion] … in the service of her father's output'.[13] However, to borrow Mary Poovey's terms, Sara exploits 'strategies of indirection and accommodation' in her publication of 'On Rationalism' that enable her 'to make [her] presence felt'.[14] The success of her tactics is reflected in the Bishop of London's high praise for the essay. Wilkes echoes Mudge in stating that Sara 'abandoned' her 'autobiography … for the sake of yet more editing of her father's work', and does not take into account the polemical *Dialogues on Personality* which she produced in the autumn of 1851 (Wilkes, p. 39).

Twenty-First-Century Editions and Studies

In the twenty-first century feminist scholars have begun to investigate Sara's writings. Donelle Ruwe's chapter 'Opium Addictions and Meta-Physicians: Sara Coleridge's Editing of *Biographia Literaria*' (2004) is a case in point.[15] Ruwe argues that Sara's account of STC's medical condition, in which she emphasizes 'the bodily nature of the mind', undermines the dominance of a male-orientated creativity based in a disembodied transcendental imagination. Ruwe refers to Isobel Armstrong's suggestion that, in the nineteenth century, 'illness and physical weakness experienced by … women writers gave them access to sensory knowledge that could be maneuvered into a position of intellectual authority' (Ruwe, p. 243). Ruwe argues that Sara's account of STC's nervous disorder challenges his concept of the relation of body and mind. She revises earlier readings, therefore, in which Sara's authorial individuality is subordinated to that of STC. In a chapter also published in 2004, Alison Hickey emphasizes the significance of collaboration in Sara's work. In this respect, she follows the lead of Jack Stillinger's seminal study, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991). Stillinger regards Sara's 'creative editing' of *Biographia 1847* as a practice of 'collaborative authorship'.[16] Hickey similarly holds that Sara, as editor, becomes 'a co-producer' of STC's 'work'. She maintains that Sara's 'threefold paternity' makes her particularly receptive to the concept of 'multiple authorship'.[17]

Dennis Low makes a case for Sara as an author in her own right. His chapter on her earlier work in *The Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets* (2006) is a valuable and pioneering contribution to the study of Sara as author.[18] Low traces the development of her writings from the translation of Dobrizhoffer to her novel, *Phantasmion* (1837). Low contends that Southey is an enabling influence for Sara in supporting her early translation projects. I am indebted to this discussion and build on Low's helpful insights into Sara's formative literary relationship with Southey; and I aim to show the continuing influence of Southey in her later religious works. Low also relates the essential conception of *Phantasmion* to STC's literary theories. Sara's concurrence with STC's principles in *Phantasmion*, Low contends, demonstrates her 'actively creative correspondence with her father's ideas and values', and constitutes 'a live, imaginative extension, rather than a nostalgia-driven imitation, of [STC's] literary corpus' (Low, pp. 141–142). This paves the way for my account of Sara's innovative

exploitation of STC's metaphysics in her later religious writings. Because Low focuses on women writers of the 1820s and 1830s, his account of Sara's authorship inevitably ends at 1837. This is the year in which she begins to form the agenda for her projects in religious writing.

Interest in Sara Coleridge has grown significantly since the publication of Peter Swaab's pioneering edition of her *Collected Poems* (2007), in which 120 of the 185 poems it contains were published for the first time. In 2012, Swaab published a selection of Sara's literary criticism. The texts included were either published for the first time or recovered from out-of-print nineteenth-century editions. Swaab's 'Introduction' to this volume presents the most balanced survey of Sara's intellectual and authorial characteristics to date, and emphasizes her linguistic vitality. He excludes her religious writings, except where they have literary implications—such as her comments on Newman's prose style. Swaab has written authoritatively on Sara as a critic of Wordsworth. My study draws on his essay 'The Poet and Poetical Artist: Sara Coleridge as a Critic of Wordsworth' (2012), particularly his emphasis upon the religious inflection of Sara's response to Wordsworth, as shown, for example, in her discussion of 'A Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle'.[19] Swaab's editions are absolutely indispensable for students of Sara Coleridge, and are the most important publications on her since the *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge* appeared in 1873.

Alan Vardy, in 2010, produced an interesting and provocative study of the Coleridge family's attempts to restore STC's reputation in the two decades following his death.[20] Sara's contributions feature significantly in Vardy's study, in which he argues that the family sought to re-market STC as a High Tory, High Anglican reactionary. Vardy implicates Sara in this scheme of alleged cultural falsification. He argues that *Table Talk* is a product of Henry's ideology, and is actually 'Henry's [b]ook', rather than a balanced and accurate representation of STC's thought (Vardy, pp. 45–63). Henry's brother, John Taylor Coleridge, and brother-in-law Derwent are also implicated in this supposed cabal of 'reactionary bigotry' (Vardy, p. 135). Vardy regards Sara's treatment of STC's plagiarisms as an element of the wider family conspiracy. He attacks her for what he regards as culpable distortion in her presentation of STC's political thought; in certain respects, Vardy asserts, her political judgement 'comes close to obscenity' (Vardy, p. 134). He attributes Sara's alleged failure of political principle to her marriage to 'an ultra-Tory who kept her isolated in Regent's Park' (Vardy, p. 141). Vardy particularizes instances in which Sara expresses conservative attitudes in her letters, for example in relation to Chartism, in

which he correctly notes an 'ambivalence', in which Sara acknowledges that Chartism's 'demands were in themselves reasonable' while describing its strategies as 'misguided' (Vardy, p. 135, p. 130). He cites a letter of April 1848 in which Sara is afraid of Chartist 'violence' and, quite understandably as a widow and single mother, is concerned for her personal safety in the event of civil disorder (Vardy, p. 128). Equally, though, it is possible to cite letters and texts which show Sara not to have been influenced by Henry's politics, and that he encouraged and supported her in publishing her work, including 'On Rationalism', which is radical in its politico-religious sympathies, as Chap. 3 will show. There are letters in which Sara expresses liberal viewpoints and unequivocal approval of Whig Prime Minister Lord John Russell. This is particularly true of her attitudes towards the Gorham case, in which she strongly opposes the High Church and High Tory position.

The co-existence of conservative and liberal attitudes in Sara's politics is a common trait of her historical setting. Historian George Herring observes: 'the combination of conservatism and radicalism within the same individuals and movements was actually very much a characteristic feature … and at the root of much of the social reform of the period'. Herring cites Richard Oastler, a 'traditional' Tory, who 'initiated a movement of clearly radical [factory] reform'.[21] Meanwhile, the combination of conservatism and radicalism in the Oxford Movement led to its decline as a political force. Newman set out from a High Church, High Tory position to assert the authority of bishops; but, as he moved from the late 1830s with increasing inevitability towards Roman Catholicism, he subverted the episcopal authority which he had sought to defend. As Owen Chadwick observes, 'Newman, high Tory defender of the established Church, had a streak of revolution'.[22] Similarly, Hurrell Froude, the most reactionary of the Oxford theologians, advocated the radical policy of disestablishment, in asserting his wish for a 'real' church rather than a 'national' church.[23] In this context, observes Chadwick, the Oxford Movement's adherence to 'primitive tradition is not only a preservative idea, but a quest for reform'.[24] Sara, likewise, connected by marriage to the High Tory branch of the Coleridge family, herself retaining some elements of social conservatism, adopts radical and liberal positions. Her covert manipulation of authorial gender conventions is potently subversive; and, in the religious writings that are the main focus of my study, her viewpoint is distinctly and independently liberal. Vardy's condemnation of Sara's politics reflects his adoption of Slavoj Žižek as his model of political

analysis. Žižek's Marxist ideology, adapted to what he terms 'postmodern *post-politics*', cannot be directly applied to an historical setting in which twenty-first-century concepts of political Left and Right did not exist.[25] As James Vigus notes, Vardy's book displays considerable 'inconsistency' in its political and biographical interpretations.[26]

Two biographical studies were published in 2013: Katie Waldegrave's joint study of Sara Coleridge and Dora Wordsworth, and Molly Lefebure's *Private Lives of the Ancient Mariner*. Waldegrave provides a wealth of contextual material: for example, on the sustaining family circle in which Sara grew up. Lefebure presents a revisionary study that ranges widely across STC's activities and family relationships. She offers new insights into Sara's relationship with her father, and the ways in which his neglect, continuing into adulthood, damaged her psychologically. Jeffrey W. Barbeau's biographical study of Sara, published in 2014, seeks to tell the story of her life and to explain her intellectual ideas. My study, which employs literary and critical methodology, enlarges the perspectives presented by Barbeau, particularly regarding Sara's uniquely innovative responses to the Oxford Movement and her deft subversion of conventions of authorship and gender. Barbeau employs a narrative approach and is interested in the content of Sara's thought; I am interested in the underlying processes of her intellectual and literary production. Also, as a biographer, Barbeau aims necessarily to be comprehensive, which inevitably limits the space he is able to devote to Sara's editing of STC and the religious writings of her final decade. In providing a detailed account of these key areas, and applying literary and critical methodology to them, I am able to build on Barbeau's study by examining Sara's religious works in the context of their literary forms and use of language. In an essay of 2015, Joanne E. Taylor argues that, in writing *Phantasmion*, Sara finds her own imaginative space independent of 'those of her precursors'. In focusing on Sara's quest for literary 'autonomy', Taylor's illuminating essay paves the way for my study of Sara's attainment of authorial independence in her mature religious writings.[27]

Theorizing Sara Coleridge

My theoretical approach is distinct from that of previous commentators on Sara Coleridge. Barbeau assumes, in writing a thinker's life, a traditional pre-Barthesian concept of personal authorship and the literary text, as do earlier writers on Sara. My approach draws upon post-structuralist recon-

ceptualizations of the relationships of texts, contexts and authors. Indeed, Sara's own theory and practice anticipate post-structuralism in certain respects. For Sara, a text is a composite product 'made of multiple writings', to borrow Barthes's phrase.[28] While a study such as Hickey's refers to the collaborative nature of Sara's literary activity, I analyse the dialogic nature of her texts. Two complementary theoretical models permeate my reading of Sara: M. M. Bakhtin's concepts of hybrid construction and dialogism; and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory. I am indebted, also, to Michael Macovski's discussion of Bakhtinian methodology, in which Bakhtin 'conceives of literary discourse as a composite of voices – interactive personae that not only are contained within the literary text but extend beyond it, to other works, authors and interpretations'.[29] This conception applies to Sara's analyses of STC's texts, and to her development of dialogic forms of theological writing. Macovski explains Bakhtin's distinction between Platonic and Socratic methodology. This distinction informs my critical approach to Sara's use of Socratic dialogue in her late works on baptismal regeneration, in which form and meaning are inseparable:

> In contrast to the 'already found, ready made' truisms established by Platonic dialectic, Bakhtin stresses the ongoing construction of knowledge, an epistemological openness that he traces to the 'Socratic method of dialogically revealing the truth'. Such a method holds that knowledge belongs not to an 'exclusive possessor', but 'is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction'. (Macovski, p. 27)

Sara's analysis of the *Biographia* text reveals STC's 'searching for truth' by dialogic means. He regards 'truth' as a 'Divine Ventriloquist', rather than the 'exclusive property of this or that individual' (*Biographia 1847*, I, p. xiv, p. xvii). Ultimately, Bakhtinian theory helps me to redefine the relationship between Sara's editorial work and her independent writing: her ethic of religious discourse in the *Dialogues on Regeneration* is based on a collective and dialogic methodology.

Hermeneutic activity is at the heart of Sara's literary career. As translator, poet, editor and religious polemicist, her writing is rooted in the interpretation of others' texts. Therefore, Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* enables me to develop my understanding of the dialogic nature of Sara's works. For Gadamer, 'the hermeneutic phenomenon … implies the

primacy of dialogue and the structure of question and answer'.[30] Bakhtin and Gadamer's ideas inform my understanding of Sara's redefinition of religious discourse as a collaborative enterprise. Reactions to political and religious reform between 1828 and 1833 precipitated a crisis that was essentially hermeneutic, and continued for the two remaining decades of Sara's life. The interpretation of Scripture and Christian tradition was the site of polemical contest. Sara develops her dialogic approach, therefore, in response to hermeneutic division. She engages in dialogue with STC's Christian philosophy and 'brings [it] down into the present hour' (*Essays*, I, p. lxxxiv). To apply terms Gadamer uses in relation to Hegel, Sara's treatment of STC's ideas 'consists not in the restoration of the past but in thoughtful mediation with contemporary life'.[31] Gadamer explains that such 'mediation' involves a 'fusion' of the interpreter's present 'horizon' with that of the 'past':

> [T]he horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.* (Gadamer, p. 317; Gadamer's emphasis)

In the 'fusion' of her own present with STC's historical 'horizon', Sara rewrites and revitalizes his 'past' ideas for a new context.

In the penultimate section of her 'Introduction' to *Essays on His Own Times* (1850), Sara explains her hermeneutic relationship with STC. Ostensibly, she is asking the reader's 'pardon' for having strayed beyond the confines of discussing STC's journalism:

> In the foregoing sections I have noticed some salient points of my Father's opinions on politics,—indeed to do this was alone my original intent; but once entered into the stream of such thought I was carried forward almost involuntarily by the current. I went on to imagine what my Father's view would be of subjects which are even now engaging public attention. It has so deeply interested myself thus to bring him down into the present hour,—to fancy him speaking in detail as he would speak were he now alive. (*Essays*, I, p. lxxxiv)

Sara describes how she has to free herself from the relentless momentum of STC's ideas. His 'thought' is a strong 'stream' in which she becomes immersed, and for a time she is carried forward 'almost involuntarily'. '[A]lmost' is the vital word. It indicates that Sara struggles successfully to attain intellectual independence, despite the force of STC's 'thought'.

Her independence then becomes mastery: she replaces the passive ('I was carried') with the active ('I went on'). No longer immersed in STC's thought, Sara stands apart from it and subjects it to critical analysis: 'I went on to imagine what my Father's view would be of subjects which are even now engaging public attention'. Sara takes charge of STC's ideas and applies them to the service of her own immediate agenda: '[i]t has so deeply interested myself to bring him down into the present hour'. Sara's emphatic 'myself' privileges her over STC ('him') and indicates her literary dominance. In her transposition of STC's work to 'the present hour', Sara locates STC as a contributory voice within her own polyphonic texts. Her appropriation of STC's work is a coolly clinical process. It is not a spontaneous, subconscious phenomenon, but a 'bold' hermeneutic 'attempt' upon which she has engaged deliberately. Sara's description of this process anticipates Gadamer's theory, in which, according to Robert Piercey, 'the goal of hermeneutics is not to reconstruct the past, but to mediate between traditional texts and contemporary life' (Piercey, p. 153).

Sara's authorial context in the decades following the 1832 Reform Act was significantly different from that in which STC had worked. As eminent biblical scholar F. J. A. Hort observed in 1856: '[t]he prodigious changes which have taken place in the last forty years render much of the *Aids to Reflection* very perplexing to those who forget the time when it was written'.[32] In STC's critique of eighteenth-century mechanistic empiricism, and its deadening influence on the established church of the early nineteenth century, he 'rethink[s] … the Christian Platonic tradition, principally through his wrestling with Kant and contemporary German Idealism'. Douglas Hedley goes on to locate STC within 'an Idealistic tradition in British thought whose provenance lies in the Florentine Renaissance and passes through later antiquity to Plato'.[33] STC's Neo-Platonism is a significant factor in his struggle against Lockean modes of thought. However, in Sara's appropriation and development of STC's philosophy, she tends to occlude its Neo-Platonism, while exploiting overtly its Kantian elements. In her 'Introduction' to *Biographia 1847*, she foregrounds STC's application of Kantian metaphysics to Christianity, but