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Frederic S. Colwell. *Rivermen: A Romantic Iconography of the River and the Source*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1989. pp. 220. \$29.95.

The subtitle bears scrutiny. *Rivermen* is "romantic" in more than its subject matter: the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and some of their mates at the helm. In its often lyrical style, in its interest in the "confluence of myth and psychology" (186), and in its own *pothos* or *sehnsucht* the book runs deeply with the Romantic stream. As the reference to *sehnsucht* or intense longing for harmony in being (Colwell's reference, see 154) hints, Colwell's depiction of romantic rivermen, their river journeys, and their quests, failed or otherwise, for the headwaters and sources is iconic; he blends his modulation with the vocal streams of the romantic verse he explicates. What Colwell draws for us are pictures of sacred places and the poets who seek them. The river is the "feeding source" (Wordsworth's description of Imagination in Book 14 of the 1850 *Prelude* 1. 193) of the poet's song, and to find this source is to take a journey both historical and psychological, both in time and out of time. In the course of the book, Colwell travels from Wordsworth's Derwent to the Nile on which the Witch of Atlas floats, and his book re-enacts the rite of passage he so sedulously and learnedly describes.

Before the traveller's log begins, we have a "Prologue," in which Colwell sets the tone of what is to follow. In setting out ancient attitudes to water, he draws upon voices from East and West; Thales, Pindar, the *Puranas*, Heraclitus, Saint Francis, and Mircea Eliade all speak of water's creative and generative power in the first paragraph. It goes without saying, perhaps, that the spirit of God is figured as water in both the Old and New Testaments. God speaks and the waters part, eventually forming not only oceans but also lakes and rivers and streams and springs. Like all things which are divided, water seeks to reunite with its beginnings, and thus from the beginning of a river's life, it seeks its own deep beginning in the parental ocean from which it once came. The cycle is unending, and in

its very repletion it offers what Colwell nicely calls (late in the book) "a larder of oxymora" (170): beginning and ending, fixity and change, creativity and destruction, life and death. The river challenges us to plumb its mysteries, and its passage to the sea, as Colwell describes it, "may have inspired the entire range of philosophic inquiry: cosmogony and autogeny at the source, the problems of ontology, being and becoming, palpably rendered by its passage, the *telos* of the estuary" (4). The poets, however, quest belatedly for the source of their inspiration, for the self-creating moment, and Colwell's focus is on "the poetry of the early nineteenth century" (94), especially on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley. In pointing out the Romantic poets' connections to "the classical world and its mythologies," Colwell suggests a revision of our sense of the radical aspects of Romanticism: "Romanticism's concern with the psychological dimensions of mythogenesis reveals it as more radically atavistic than the most conservative of Neoclassicisms" (5-6).

Colwell himself offers a summary of the book: "Chapter one identifies the river as the most salient and compelling feature of the physical and mental landscape of the paradigmatic Romantic poem, *The Prelude*. . . . Two series from Wordsworth's later career, *The River Duddon* and the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, evidence the dominance of the river, but serve to illustrate how and why this most commanding and resonant of figures does not invariably buoy its author or his poem. . . . Chapter two turns to the river's source and the fascination it holds for the mythological and religious imagination and, most important, the role it rehearses in its natural enactment and embodiment of the creative impulse" (6). Chapter three traces the "role of the guardian or numen of the source" backwards through several of Wordsworth's poems to the figure of Lucy. Chapter four turns to Coleridge and his ambiguous traffic with the female of the river. Chapter five, the central chapter, collects references, both literary and social, to the English nymph and that most aqueous of conditions, nympholepsy. Whereas Colwell deals with Wordsworth and Coleridge in the first half of his book, he turns to Keats and Shelley in the second half, devoting two chapters to each. His range of reference, however, is large, and readers of *Rivermen* will find such lesser known writers as Horace Smith, Dr. John Armstrong, and Richard Chandler.

For me, Chapter one is the weakest of the chapters. Colwell's thesis here is straightforward: the image of the river establishes the narrative "as well as [the] psychological and metaphysical dimensions" of *The Prelude* (9). Herbert Lindenberger noted long ago that wind and water are the "dominating images" of *The Prelude* (71), and he also pointed out that the images *are* the plot of the poem, not merely the vehicle for some detachable tenor. This is, at least in part, Colwell's drift. Wordsworth is both affected by rivers and is himself a river.

The river Derwent assisted in the nurture of the young Wordsworth, "providing the child with an intimation of the 'calm that is nature' which he will consciously recognize in later years as the nine-year-old boy of Winander who approaches the threshold of awareness of his patrimony" (10). Just what implication the glide from river to lake might have, and what evidence is available for equating Wordsworth with the boy of Winander who died "ere he was ten years old" Colwell does not explore. Working within his riverine course, Colwell does not examine as closely as he might the poem through which he travels. For example, he includes as illustration of points passages from both the 1805 and 1850 versions without explaining why he prefers the one over the other or what significance a change from the earlier to the later version might have. The connection of voice to river — the babbling brook — remains a region unexplored, although several passages quoted invite the kind of reading we have on drier ground in Douglas Kneale's *Monumental Writing: Aspects of Rhetoric in Wordsworth's Poetry* (1988).

More interesting perhaps is Colwell's treatment of *The River Duddon* and the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*. He does not attempt a rescue of poems that flounder, but he does illustrate their course and intent, and he offers interesting evaluations. The first series of sonnets "introduces a continuous antiphon between levels of poetic speech, between form and its subject" (25), and although it is not an example of the work of the prolific genius, it does show Wordsworth's interest in creating a genuine local myth. The same cannot be said for *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* which travel a "droughty" path. Wordsworth conceived of the series as a whole — one poem — but Colwell sees the result of Wordsworth's exercise in faith as "neither a single poem nor a sequence, but a collection" (34).

Rivermen begins to flow in the second chapter where Colwell explores the mythic headwaters of ancient rivers. The classical antecedents of the river poem are many and Colwell's erudition is impressive, but his destination is the "englishing" of the river poem. Here Wordsworth serves him well, and in chapter three he traces backwards from "The Triad" (1828) to the Lucy poems of the Goslar winter (1978) the course of Wordsworth's mythopoeic river. The argument here is that Lucy is Wordsworth's strong and domestic depiction of the mere mortal bodied forth in vision which Wordsworth, in "the Triad," says he chooses over a Naiad from a flood or a Dryad or Sea Nymph. Wordsworth, as Geoffrey Hartman eloquently argued, participates in the westering of the spirit that brought the like of Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia to Britain's green fields and shining water-courses, but under guises more suited to that green and pleasant land; Wordsworth gives us what Hartman calls "myth without myth" (198). The argument is attractive and Colwell's scholarship is impres-

sive indeed, but I suspect a certain lubricity in all this. The Jungian placement of the feminine at the headwaters of creation, the guardian of the springs of invention, might well take a different shape from the attractive one offered by Colwell if we used a Lacanian model, especially one redirected by feminist theory. Lucy here becomes one in a series of feints on the part of the male poet to idealize the female, to keep her rolling around in earth's diurnal course, or to allow her only existence as a projection (a Blakean Emanation?) of the masculine imagination.

Such a caveat might apply to the rest of *Rivermen* which traces the anima figure in several other contexts, including Coleridge's "Lewti," "The Picture" and "Kubla Khan," Keats's *Endymion* and *Lamia*, Shelley's *Alastor* and *The Witch of Atlas*. Complementing the anima figure is the destructive female, the wailing woman as opposed to the Abyssinian maid. Problems exist here too, although the depiction of the *femme fatale* as dramatized by Keats is a healthy revision of the Mario Praz school of gender classification. "The true *femme fatale*, as Keats knew her, merely goes about the business of being herself. Whether she is Keats's Lady, Coleridge's Geraldine, Wedekind's Lulu, or Heinrich Mann's Lola Lola, she is culpable by all conceivable moral standards, but these scarcely apply to one who is wholly unaware of their existence. She is neither ravening nor destructive, merely self-sufficient and surpassingly, fatally desirable" (134). These words hold both promise and confusion. They promise a fruitful direction for investigation, one that does not damn the lady before understanding her; yet they confuse when they speak of her as self-sufficient and culpable. At least they confuse me; one must conclude that self-sufficiency is in itself culpable in a woman. Later in his book, Colwell speaks of "the quintessential and undifferentiated feminine: priestess, . . . virgin, witch, and whore" who "continues to exert an autonomous life in the adult unconscious, and finds her mythic expression in the great Goddess or universal Mother who embodies the whole complex of female attributes both benign and threatening" (151-52). For "adult unconscious," we might read "adult male unconscious."

But *Rivermen* does succeed admirably in its own terms. Convincing is Colwell's mapping of the historical and mythopoeic geography of Shelley's *Alastor* and *The Witch of Atlas*. The kind of exploration which finds its type in John Livingston Lowe's *The Road to Xanadu* (Colwell refers in a footnote to Lowe's "magisterial authority" [196]) meets a formidable fellow explorer in Colwell. The tracing of the poet's journey in *Alastor* to the campaigns of Alexander strikes me as ingenious, and the explanation of the poem's two voices, which commentators since Wasserman have assumed to be Wordsworthian and Shelleyan voices, as a function of "twofold nature of the quest, geo-

graphical and psychological" (158) is stimulating. The poem emerges from Colwell's reading as a unified and intricately structured work which explores terrain both historical and psychological. Colwell's conclusions are rarely surprising (*Alastor* holds no fire, no hope), but his explorations are always informed and informative.

Even more bracing is the style in which Colwell presents his arguments. He likes the evaluative line; speaking of Leigh Hunt's *The Nymphs*, Colwell notes that if Keats's poetry was writ in water, "then Hunt's cloud-nepheliad land is fashioned from blancmange" (107). His wit takes a more rhetorical turn in this learned passage: "Claims for the prototype of Xanadu's river have ranged from the Acadian Alpheus and the Blue Nile to Wookey Hole's Axe. The watersheds of the Nile and Alpheus lay beyond Coleridge's immediate experience, although not beyond the scope of his reading. He was probably aware that the limestone riverbeds of Greece, like those of Somerset, were known for their bewildering habit of swallowing and regurgitating their freight. The mysterious *katavothra* of the Peloponnese captured the imagination of the ancients and swelled rivers such as the Alpheus to mythic dimensions, while the swallets or sink-holes of Somerset snared only the occasional witless sheep" (87). In short, Colwell's prose is lively, at times bantering and at times intense, but always on course. He has written a book that does not confront recent passages in critical theorizing about the Romantics and their period, but he has written a work of deep fascination for anyone interested in the river and its source.

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- R. RAWDON WILSON. *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, and Narrative Theory*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1990, pp. 317. \$39.95.

In the penultimate paragraph of *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga concludes his thoughts on the play element in contemporary civilization with the following deceptively simple statement: "The human mind can only disengage itself from the magic circle of play by turning toward the ultimate" (212). Since the ultimate continues to elude us, in *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, and*