

## From Text to Work Digital Tools and the Emergence of the Social Text

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J. C. C. Mays' much longed-for edition of Coleridge's poems and plays, the *Poetical Works*,<sup>1</sup> has finally, magnificently, appeared. Like another important edition of our time, Gabler's *Ulysses*,<sup>2</sup> these six books — three volumes, each in two parts — set an inspiring example of scholarly thoroughness and integrity. But their strength rests ultimately in something else — something quite rare in the scholarly editions of English speaking authors produced in the last 50 years. Mays is deeply sympathetic to Coleridge's poetry — not unaware of or reticent to address its failings and limitations, but fronting all the work with what Desmond McCarthy, writing of Coleridge, called “the most delicate sympathy.” “When he writes of it [...] his words are singularly moving in their subtlety and simplicity” (xc) That is McCarthy's description of Coleridge on the subject of “affection-love” — a shrewd judgment unearthed by Mays from a 1939 newspaper review. The words perfectly describe Mays's editorial treatment of Coleridge.

The edition also has a most delicate sympathy with our own epoch and its remarkable scholarly adventures, of which Gabler's *Ulysses* has been a famous instance. Mays's edition is every bit as significant and challenging, and in this paper I want to investigate some of the issues raised by his work. They will help to clarify my principal subject, which I pose as a question: where is information technology driving literary and cultural studies and — not least of all — scholarly editing, the foundational discipline of those broad fields of work?

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. C. Mays, (ed.), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works. Vols. I–III, Parts 1, 2.* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Hans Walter Gabler et al., *Ulysses. A Critical and Synoptic Edition.* Vols. 1–3 (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1984).