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De Groot H. B.,

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H.B. de Groot.

The Development of Coleridge's Nature Poetry,
1788-98.

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INTRODUCTION.

If one takes "nature" in its wider sense, almost all important poetry can be called nature poetry, since it is concerned with the relationship between man and the universe. At the same time there has always been a great amount of poetry which described external nature, either for its own sake or, in the Pastoral tradition, to state or imply a contrast between the sophistication (or corruption even) of the city and the simplicity of country life. The Romantic period, however, differed from the age which preceded it in its wide-spread assumption that by experiencing the nature of trees and birds one intuitively gained insight into something deeper, attaining

a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. (1)

Coleridge expressed what is basically the same thought in This Lime-tree Bower my Prison, although here this "sense" is not related to "the mind of man" and although Coleridge characteristically guarded himself against any charges of pantheism by finding God rather than "a motion and a spirit" in the landscape(2):

(1) Wordsworth, Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, ll. 95-102 (Poetical Works, II, p.262).

(2) Coleridge, This Lime-tree Bower my Prison, ll. 37-43 (CPW, I, pp. 178-181).

So my friend
 Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
 Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
 On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
 Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
 As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
 Spirits perceive his presence.

This does not imply that there is little poetry about nature dating from the earlier part of the eighteenth century. There is in fact a great deal; most of it is reflective poetry which combines an element of personal observation (slight in the case of Collins, considerable in a poet like John Dyer) with a frequently rather self-conscious use of the tradition of the Pastoral, derived from Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penseroso⁽¹⁾ or transmitted through Pope's Pastorals.

Some of this poetry is very fine and it is perhaps a pity that two of the most important and influential critics of this century have dismissed this type of reflective eighteenth century poetry as a by-line. In Revaluation Dr. F.R. Leavis wrote:

But when we think of Johnson and Crabbe, when we recall any example of a poetry bearing a serious relation to the life of its time, then Gray, Thomson, Dyer, Akenside, Shenstone and the rest plainly belong to a by-line. It is literary and conventional in the worst senses of those terms. It keeps its monotonous tenour along the cool-sequestered vale of Polite Letters. (2)

This is not altogether fair to some of the poets mentioned. Thomson in his exploration of nature, science and religion stands apart from the other writers and in this exploration his poetry does "bear a serious relation to the life of its time". Dyer is a distinctly minor poet, but his best poems are fresh and lively in spite of his dependence on L'Allegro as a model:

(1) or in the case of Collins from Lycidas, cf. the account of Collins' indebtedness to that poem in F.R. Leavis, Revaluation, pp.131-3.

(2) Revaluation, p. 105.

I am resolv'd, this Charming Day,
 In the open Field to stray,
 And have no Roof above my Head,
 But that whereon the Gods do tread.
 Before the yellow Barn I see
 A beautiful Variety
 Of strutting Cocks, advancing stout,
 And flirting empty Chaff about.
 Hens, Ducks, and Geese, and all their Brood,
 And Turkeys gobbling for their Food;
 While Rusticks thrash the wealthy Floor,
 And tempt all to crowd the Door. (1)

In Revaluation Dr. Leavis' rather cavalier treatment of this "by-line" is balanced by a fine critical evaluation of Gray's Elegy and Collins' Ode to Evening (2). In T.S.Eliot's introduction to Johnson's satires the lively style hardly conceals the lack of a balanced appreciation:

The eighteenth century in English verse is not, after Pope, Swift, Prior, and Gay, an age of courtly verse. It seems more like an age of retired country clergymen and schoolmasters. It is cursed with a Pastoral convention - Collins's Eclogues are bad enough, and those of Shenstone consummately dull - and a ruminative mind. And it is intolerably poetic. (3)

The influence of eighteenth century Miltonic and reflective verse can be seen in many of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's early writing, perhaps most notably in Songs of the Pixies (4). How close even Coleridge's most mature poetry can be to the dominant reflective-Miltonic style in late eighteenth century verse can be shown by comparing a poem called Moon-light, signed P.H., in the

-
- (1) John Dyer, The Country Walk, ll. 5-16, in Miscellaneous Poems and Translations. By several Hands. Publish'd by Richard Savage, London, 1726, pp. 48-9.
 (2) Revaluation, p.103 and pp. 106-9.
 (3) T.S.Eliot, Poetry in the Eighteenth Century, in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, IV, pp. 274-5.
 (4) CPW, I, pp.40-44. Cf. F.R.Leavis, Coleridge's Beginnings in Revaluation, pp.142-7, and below, Chapter I, pp.40-2.

Gentleman's Magazine of 1789 (1) with The Nightingale (2), written in 1798. This is the opening of Moon-light:

Here on this bank, while shine the stars so clear,
Come, Lucy, let us sit: how tranquil seems
All Nature! with what mildness from above
Yon regent of the night looks down on earth,
And gives to every herb, tree, plant, and field,
Of softer green;

The Nightingale begins:

No cloud, no relique of the sunken day
Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip
Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues.
Come, we will rest on this old mossy bridge!
You see the glimmer of the stream beneath,
But hear no murmuring: it flows silently,
O'er its soft bed of verdure. All is still,
A balmy night!

There is the same conversational tone, the same invitation to sit down and contemplate the scene, the same stress on the tranquillity of the night. The main difference between the openings is that Coleridge emphasizes the absence of light, whereas P.H. elaborates on the clarity of the stars and the mildness of the moon. The similarities, however, are deceptive and the differences become obvious when one takes the remainder of both poems into account.

Coleridge goes on to assert the joy of the song of the nightingale, traditionally a melancholy bird. The opening of the poem is deliberately conventional, so that the un-literary enjoyment of nature which follows will stand out the more. The remainder of Moon-light is nearer to Coleridge's early works. P.H. proceeds

(1) Volume LIX, p.448. The poem is referred to and the opening five-and-a-half lines are quoted in Robert Mayo, The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads, PMLA, LXIX, 1954, p.494.

(2) CPW, I, pp. 264-7. For a fuller account of the poem cf. below, Chapter III, pp. 123-133.

to compare his Lucy to the moon, just as Coleridge chose the simile of the evening star to compliment Mary Evans in To the Evening Star (1) and Sara Fricker in the first draft of The Eolian Harp (2):

Nor, Lucy, on thy paler beauty dwells
Less sweet serenity.

P.H. then gives his variant on that literary cliché, derived from Catullus, that the moon and other heavenly bodies disappear only temporarily but that there will be no such second life for his Lucy. Rather coyly he omits the sexual conclusion which one would expect; instead he describes how a cloud moves towards the moon, obscures it for a moment and then passes on. Like Coleridge in the very early Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon (3) he draws a generalized moral from this and interprets it as an unsuccessful assault of "fell Envy" on "lucid Virtue". He then substitutes a rather more specific moral in which the cloud becomes a "dread storm....sweeping by the throne/Of England". With that the poem ends, rather abruptly.

Thomson's Seasons are to a certain extent written in the tradition of Miltonic reflective verse of which Moon-light forms the decadent tail-end, but he is also striving to give a poetic account of religion and contemporary science. This side of The Seasons is developed later in the century by Erasmus Darwin in his Botanic Garden, a poem which shows a fascinating attempt at combining an account of scientific processes with an epic style and a mythological framework in heavily Miltonic verse cast in heroic couplets. There is evidence that Coleridge connected the two older poets, since the first entry in the Gutch Notebook contains the words:

(1) CPW, pp. 16-7; cf. below, Chapter I, pp. 29

(2) CPW, II, p.1001; cf. below, Chapter II, pp.66.

(3) CPW, I, p.5; cf. below, Chapter I, pp.21-8.

The Vernal Hours.

Leg. Thomson. (1)

Considering that the following entry was inspired by Darwin, J. Livingstone Lowes linked this not only with Thomson's Spring but also with the lines from Darwin:

Unite, Illustrious Nymphs! your radiant powers,
Call from their long repose the Vernal Hours. (2)

Coleridge with his strong interest in science, both for its own sake and as a subject for poetry, would be likely to be fascinated by Darwin and, although he took a dislike to his poetry at a fairly early stage (3), Darwin figures quite prominently in Coleridge's early poems (4). The younger poet also followed Darwin's example in giving his poems scientific footnotes. Lowes has shown how a note to Shurton Bars describing electricity in flowers had been taken verbatim from Darwin, who in his turn had taken it from a French writer (5).

Coleridge made a similar use of Thomson's poetry. Lowes has indicated how Coleridge followed up the references in a footnote about Lapland in Thomson's Winter and used them in The Destiny of Nations (6). The Seasons, however, is more than an extended illustration of scientific processes. It combines generalized accounts of natural phenomena with particularized description.

(1) N, I, 9.

(2) The Botanic Garden (1791), I, pp. 41-2. Cf. J. Livingstone Lowes, The Road to Xanadu, pp. 35-6.

(3) cf. CL, I, p. 216: "As to Harmony, it is all association—Milton is harmonious to me, & I absolutely nauseate Darwin's Poem." (Letter to Thelwall, May 13, 1796).

(4) cf. for a strong link between The Botanic Garden and The Destiny of Nations a note by Kathleen Coburn, N, I, 40n.

(5) cf. CPW, I, pp. 99-100, The Botanic Garden, Part II, pp. 182-3, and The Road to Xanadu, pp. 464-5.

(6) The Road to Xanadu, p. 36, p. 50. Cf. Thomson, Complete Poetical Works, p. 244.

A modern scholar has described the poem as a work with a large variety of patterns:

....there is the long ascent up the philosophical ladder that admits of an account of various levels of being. There is also the drama of the forces of nature within the extensive prospects: obscure impulses and instincts, vibrations and echoes in earth and air, the ceaseless, shifting play of light and color. All this has philosophical and religious implications, but it may at times be accepted without analysis. Sometimes it is not seen vividly and breaks down into lists and catalogues. Sometimes there is delicate notation of detail that is all the more striking because of its position in a larger scheme. (1)

The Seasons has always been a widely read poem and considering this great variety of aspects it is not surprising that there has been an equally great variety of critical opinions about the poem. Joseph Warton began his Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope with strong criticism of Pope's Pastorals, in which "the descriptions and sentiments are trite and common". They are said to form a misguided attempt at imitating Theocritus, who "described what he saw and felt" in Sicily (2). In contrast, Thomson is praised for his originality and his fidelity to personal observation:

Thomson was blessed with a strong and copious fancy; he hath enriched poetry with a variety of new and original images, which he painted from nature itself, and from his own actual observations: his descriptions have therefore a distinctness and truth, which are utterly wanting to those, of poets who have only copied from each other, and have never looked abroad on the objects themselves. Thomson was accustomed to wander away into the country for days and for weeks, attentive to, "each rural sight, each rural sound"; while many a poet who has dwelt for years in the Strand, has attempted to describe fields and rivers, and generally succeeded accordingly. (3)

This is the attitude to nature of which Coleridge, when

(1) A.D. McKillop, The Background of Thomson's Seasons, p.130.

(2) Warton, Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope, p.3.

(3) Warton, op.cit., p.42.

he wrote The Nightingale, would have approved. Warton, however, combines this interest in painting "from nature itself" with an emphasis on "moral sentences and instructions" which Coleridge (in 1798, at any rate) would have less congenial:

It is one of the greatest and most pleasing arts of descriptive poetry, to introduce moral sentences and instructions in an oblique and indirect manner, in places where one naturally expects only painting and amusement. (1)

James Beattie, writing in 1762, was very conscious of the beauty of nature and of the need for a poet to imitate nature accurately:

...he who would imitate the works of Nature, must first accurately observe them; and accurate observation is expected from those only who take great pleasure in it. (2)

Elsewhere Beattie's Essay anticipates Coleridge's indictment of those "youths and maidens most poetical" who waste the spring evenings "in ball-rooms and hot theatres" (3):

Even those who pretend to sensibility, how many are there to whom the lustre of the rising or setting sun; the sparkling concave of the mid-night sky; the mountain-forest tossing and roaring to the storm, or warbling with all the melodies of a summer-evening; the sweet interchange of hill and dale, shade and sunshine, grove, lawn, and water, which an extensive landscape offers to the view; the scenery of the ocean, so lovely, so majestic, and so tremendous, and the many pleasing varieties of the animal and vegetable kingdom, could never afford so much real satisfaction, as the steams and noise of a ball-room, the insipid fiddling and squeaking of an opera, or the vexations and wranglings of a card-table! (4)

Beattie's emphasis on the moral and educational value of nature

(1) Warton, op. cit., p. 30.

(2) James Beattie, An Essay on Poetry and Music, as they affect the Mind, in Essays (1776), pp. 31-2.

(3) cf. The Nightingale, ll. 35-7 (PW, I, p.265).

(4) Beattie, loc. cit., pp. 30-31.

points forward to both Frost at Midnight and The Nightingale:

This happy sensibility to the beauties of Nature should be cherished in young persons. It engages them to contemplate the Creator in his wonderful works; it purifies and harmonizes the soul, and prepares it for moral and intellectual discipline; it supplies an endless source of amusement; it contributes even to bodily health; and, as a strict analogy subsists between material and moral beauty; it leads the heart by an easy transition from the one to the other; and thus recommends virtue for its transcendent loveliness, and makes vice appear the object of contempt and abomination. (1)

Beattie, however, goes on to say that "an intimate acquaintance with the best descriptive poets, Spencer [sic], Milton, and Thomson,will promote this amiable sensibility in early years" (2), an observation which does not agree with the bias against literariness in The Nightingale.

Beattie's argument in favour of the moral power of nature is closely echoed in a letter written by Coleridge to George Dyer on March 10, 1795 (3). A different emphasis, however, emerges when Coleridge, quoting from Thomson's Castle of Indolence, contrasts the beauty and the "Moral Effect" of the country with the atmosphere in the city:

It is melancholy to think, that the best of us are liable to be shaped & colored by surrounding Objects—and a demonstrative proof, that Man was not made to live in Great Cities!..... Thompson [sic] in that most lovely Poem, the Castle of Indolence, says—

[']I care not, Fortune! what you me deny—
 You cannot shut the Windows of the Sky,
 Through which the Morning shews her dewy face—
 You cannot bar my constant feet to rove
 Through Wood and Vale by living Stream at Eve'—/

(1) Beattie, loc.cit., p.32

(2) ibidem, p.33.

(3) CL, I, p.154. The passage is quoted below, Chapter II, p. 58.

Alas! alas! she can deny us all this—and can force us fettered and handcuffed by our Dependencies & Wants to wish and wish away the bitter Little of Life in the felon-crowded Dungeon of a great City!— (1)

Beattie quotes the same passage from Thomson (2) but goes on to say:

To a mind thus disposed no part of creation is indifferent.
In the crowded city, and howling wilderness;.... (3)

Elsewhere in his Essay Beattie is a typical eighteenth century critic in his use of the Horatian "si vis me flere" (4) and his preference of the general to the particular (5). When we come to his comment on Thomson, we find a conviction that descriptions of nature are much more interesting if they are alternated with descriptions of human activities or even little anecdotes:

Do not all readers of taste receive peculiar pleasure from those little tales or episodes, with which Thomson's descriptive poem on the Seasons is here and there enlivened? and are they not sensible, that the thunder-storm would not have been half so interesting without the tale of the two lovers; nor the harvest-scene, without that of Palemon and Lavinia; nor the driving snows, without the exquisite picture of a man perishing among them? (6)

This is the kind of attitude against which Wordsworth was reacting, when in the Essay, supplementary to the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, (1815) he suggested that Thomson achieved his popularity for the wrong reasons. To Wordsworth Thomson was important, because The Seasons was

a work of inspiration; much of it is written from himself, and nobly from himself. (2)

(1) CL, I, pp.154-5.

(2) Beattie, loc.cit., p.31.

(3) ibidem, p.32.

(4) cf. ibidem, pp.56-7.

(5) cf. ibidem, pp.61-2.

(6) ibidem, p.36.

(7) Wordsworth, Poetical Works, II, p.419.

What Beattie admired in the poem Wordsworth considered a very minor point which had been unduly exaggerated by eighteenth century readers:

He likewise abounds with sentimental common-places, that, from the manner in which they were brought forward, bore an imposing air of novelty. In any well-used copy of the "Seasons" the book generally opens of itself with the rhapsody on love, or with one of the stories (perhaps "Damon and Musidora"); these are also prominent in our collection of Extracts, and are the parts of his work which, after all, were probably most efficient in first recommending the author to genefal notice. (1)

Both Wordsworth's and the two eighteenth century comments on Thomson are limited appreciations, since The Seasons is much more than either a transcript of accurate observation or a series of descriptions interlaced with episodes. Yet the difference in attitude between Beattie's Essay on Poetry and Music and Wordsworth's Essay reflect an interesting change in the literary climate in the intervening period. This change is partly due to a change in attitude to the aim of poetry. Wordsworth in his Essay is concerned with the value of The Seasons as self-expression and as imitation of external nature, whereas in Beattie's critical work self-expression is only just beginning to emerge. Beattie is equally concerned with poetry as imitation, but still greater stress is put on the effect of poetry on its audience. There is, however, also another factor, a reaction against Warton's precept to "introduce moral sentences and instructions in an oblique and indirect manner" (2). This does not mean that Wordsworth and Coleridge disapproved of the reflective poem of the later eighteenth century (Coleridge's conversation poems clearly reflect a personal development of this kind of poem) but they did react against any loose conjunction of natural

(1) Wordsworth, Poetical Works, II, p.421.

(2) cf. above, p.8.

description and moral sentences. Wordsworth and Coleridge, if they knew Beattie's comment on The Seasons, would also have disliked the decorative value given to man, an attitude which led Beattie to write, without a trace of irony, about "the exquisite picture of a man perishing" in a snow-storm.

When one traces the genealogy of Coleridge's conversational poems, Cowper's The Task is of great importance. In this poem Coleridge found a conversational tone, a strong interest in nature and in the analysis of one's own thoughts, but also a lack of cohesion, a loose combination of description and moralizing (1). Coleridge's response to Cowper led him in 1797 to make plans and sketches for a poem like The Task, but with greater unity, an organic unity deriving from its subject, a living organism, a brook. As Coleridge described this later in the Biographia Literaria:

I had considered it as a defect in the admirable poem of the TASK, that the subject, which gives the title to the work, was not; and indeed could not be, carried on beyond the three or four first pages, and that, throughout the

-
- (1) Humphry House (Coleridge, p.73) is excellent on the "deeper psychological analysis" and the tighter structure of Coleridge's conversational poems compared with The Task. In a recent study, however, the criticism of Cowper seems to have gone too far: Max F.Schulz criticizes Cowper for using the euphemism "a stercorarious heap" for "manure" (cf. Cowper, The Task, III,1.462 in Poetical Works, p.174, where "stercorarious" is changed to "stercoraceous" in accordance with the third edition of The Task of 1787. Schulz follows the reading of the first edition of 1785.). Dr. Schulz contrasts this with "Coleridge's prosaic description in Reflections of the honeymoon cottage" (The Poetic Voices of Coleridge, p.77). It is only fair to add that in Coleridge's "prosaic description" there is no room for manure under any name. Coleridge's greater "natural"-ness also represents a narrowing of interests. To call Cowper's satiric mode a "subterfuge" (cf. Schulz, op.cit., p.77) is to look at The Task as a crude Romantic conversation poem instead of accepting it as, among other things, a comic epic.

poem, the connections are frequently awkward, and the transitions abrupt and arbitrary. I sought for a subject, that should give equal room and freedom for description, incident and impassioned reflections on men, nature, and society, yet supply in itself a natural connection to the parts, and unity to the whole. (1)

His aversion to the poems in which description of nature is little more than an excuse for moralizing sententiousness comes out clearly in an oft-quoted passage from a letter to William Sotheby (September 10, 1802):

Bowles's Stanzas on Navigation are among the best in that second Volume/but the whole volume is woefully inferior to it's Predecessor. There reigns thro' all the blank verse poems such a perpetual trick of moralizing every thing—which is very well, occasionally—but never to see or describe any interesting appearance in nature, without connecting it by dim analogies with the moral world, proves faintness of Impression. Nature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of it's own, & that we are all one Life. A Poet's Heart & Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature—& not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similies. (2)

Coleridge proceeds to say that there is a less serious kind of poetry in which "formal Similies" are appropriate. A distinction between Greek and Hebrew poetry follows:

It must occur to every Reader that the Greeks in their religious poems address always the Numina Loci, the Genii, the Dryads, the Naiads, &c., &c—All natural objects were dead, mere hollow statues—but there was a Godkin or Goddessling included in each—In the Hebrew poetry you find nothing of this poor Stuff—as poor in genuine Imagination as it is mean in Intellect—/At best, it is but Fancy, or the aggregating Faculty of the mind,—not Imagination, or the modifying, and co-adunating faculty. (3)

Bowles's moralizing blank verse poems clearly belong to the Fancy.

(1) BL, I, pp. 128-9. Cf. below, Chapter III, pp.95-8.

(2) CL, II, p. 864.

(3) CL, II, pp.865-6.

Coleridge's criticism of Bowles's later work also stands as a reflection on his earlier poetry and on Coleridge's own early works, written in professed imitation of Bowles (1). Thus the early Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon (2) starts off with an extended description of nature, but in the ninth line ("Ah such is Hopâ!....") it becomes clear that the moon in the sky is an image for hope in one's mind, although it should be added that the weight of the poem falls on the vehicle and not on what it is supposed to stand for. The Preface to the Sheets of Sonnets, which dates from 1796, is in complete contrast to the critical pronouncements in the letter to Sotheby:

In a Sonnet then we require a development of some lonely feeling, by whatever cause it may have been excited; but those Sonnets appear to me the most exquisite, in which moral Sentiments, Affections, or Feelings, are deduced from, and associated with the scenery of Nature. Such compositions generate a habit of thought highly favourable to delicacy of character. They create a sweet and indissoluble union between the intellectual and the material world. Easily remembered from their briefness, and interesting alike to the eye and the affections, these are the poems which we can "lay up in our heart and our soul", and repeat them "when we walk by the way, and when we lie down and when we rise up." Hence, the Sonnets of BOWLES derive their marked superiority over all other Sonnets; hence they domesticate with the heart, and become, as it were, a part of our identity. (3)

The sonnet The Faded Flower (4), though not included in

(1) cf. BL, I, p.8. For a fuller account of Bowles's influence on Coleridge's early poems, cf. below, Chapter I, pp.29-38.

(2) CPW, I, p.5.

(3) Preface to A Sheet of Sonnets, bound up with Sonnets and other Poems by the Rev. W.L.Bowles, Bath, 1796, 4th edition (in the Dyce Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum), reprinted in CPW, II, p.1139.

(4) included in a letter to Henry Martin, July 22, 1794 (CL, I, p.95), also in CPW, I, pp.70-1. The quotations which follow are taken from the Letter version.

Coleridge's earliest collection is representative of the way "in which moral Sentiments, Affections, or Feelings, are deduced from, and associated with the scenery of Nature". The starting-point of the poem is a flower which someone has plucked and then thrown away. The speaker sympathizes with the flower ("Poor faded Flowret!") and condemns the man who plucked it "on his careless way" ("Ungrateful He"). The poem then continues:

Ah melancholy Emblem! had I seen
 Thy modest Beauties dew'd with evening's Gem,
 I had not rudely cropt thy parent stem;
 But left thee blushing 'mid the enliven'd Green.
 And now I bend me o'er thy wither'd Bloom,
 And drop the tear—as Fancy at my Side
 Deep-sighing points the fair frail Abra's Tomb,—....

The words "melancholy Emblem" indicate the function of the flower which has no life of its own but exists for the sake of the reflections which it stimulates. The last few lines point away from the flower in a rather far-fetched simile. Here the flower is compared to "Fair frail" Abra and the Wanderer who plucked it to Abra's ravisher, "whose selfish Joy/Tasted her vernal sweets—but tasted to destroy!".

The Gutch Notebook contains an entry which, as Professor Griggs has observed, "seems to be related to the subject-matter of this sonnet" (1), although Professor Coburn tentatively suggests 1795 as the date of the entry (2), which would mean that the Notebook entry was written after the poem. The entry reads:

(1) CL, I, p.95n.

(2) N, I, 15n. Miss Coburn's dating is plausible, since some of the preceding entries belong almost certainly to early 1795 (cf. notes to N, 9, 10, 11, 12).

Little Daisy—very late Spring. March—Quid si vivat?—Do all things in Faith. Never pluck ~~an~~ flower again!—Mem.— (1)

An action similar to the one related in the poem The Faded Flower is again used to point a moral which could easily be summarized in one sentence: "It is wrong to pluck a flower, since that means ~~•~~ killing a living thing." The stress, however, is on the crime against nature. The flower is not used to formulate an attitude towards sexual morality.

The difference between this early poem and this early Notebook entry on the one hand and Coleridge's later writings on the other, can easily be seen, if one compares these early utterances with The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. The Mariner's crime in shooting the albatross resembles that of the "careless" Wanderer, who plucked the flower and then threw it away. Yet it is obvious that the moral of The Ancient Mariner cannot be so easily summarized. One could say that the poem shows that it is wrong to kill living things, but such a summary does not do justice to the complexity of the poem. This is precisely the reason why the moral as stated in the poem is so unsatisfactory:

He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (2)

It is likely that it is the inadequacy of these lines which Coleridge had in mind, when he remarked that

the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. (3)

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- (1) N, I, 15.
 (2) The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, ll. 612-7 (PW, I, p.209)
 (3) Table Talk, May 31, 1830, Miscellaneous Criticism, p.405.
 cf. Humphry House, Coleridge, pp.90-2.

On his voyage to Malta in May 1804 Coleridge recorded a scene which reminds one of the theme of The Faded Flower, the early Notebook entry about the "little Daisy" and The Ancient Mariner:

Hawk with ruffled Feathers resting on the Bow-sprit—Now shot at & yet did not move—how fatigued—~~a~~ third time it made a gyre, a short circuit, & returned again/5 times it was thus shot at/left the Vessel/flew to another/& I heard firing, now here, now there/& nobody shot it/but probably it perished from fatigue, & the attempt to rest upon the wave!—Poor Hawk! O Strange Lust of Murder in Man!—It is not cruelty/it is mere ~~an~~ non-feeling from non-thinking. (1)

The Ancient Mariner's crime too arose out of "non-thinking" rather than deliberate cruelty and the same thing could be said of the wanderer in The Faded Flower "on his careless way", who

Inhal'd awhile thy odours on his walk,
Then onward pass'd and left thee to decay.

Nothing, however, could show the development of Coleridge's attitude to nature more clearly than a comparison between The Faded Flower and the 1804 Notebook entry. Although the latter passage is very clearly concerned with moral issues, the scene recorded has a vivid life of its own. It is not merely related as an excuse for moralizing reflections.

Coleridge's early poems mingle descriptions of nature and sentimental reflections in the manner of Bowles' sonnets and the works of other minor poets writing in the last few decades of the eighteenth century. The mature conversation poems are, as has been shown by Robert Mayo (2), still written in this tradition of Miltonic reflective verse as far as much of their form and tone is concerned. They do not, however, present a loose mixture of

(1) N, II, 2090.

(2) cf. above, pp.3-4 and p.4n.

description and moralizing. Still less do they contain descriptions of nature which are mere excuses for moral observations. They show an interest in nature for its own sake and in nature's significance to man which links them to Thomson's Seasons. There is a difference, however. In The Seasons this significance of nature is presented through an account of science and of natural theology, whereas in Coleridge's mature poetry (and in that of Wordsworth) it is, in Donald Davie's words, "perceived in a leap of insight" (1).

This is, of course, a difference in kind, not in quality, though it is possible to base some evaluative observations on this distinction. In Coleridge's later poetry the theological and scientific notes which grace such poems as Religious Musings and Shurton Bars disappear. In their presentation of intuitive experience the conversation poems form more close-knit entities than The Seasons, in which there is a lack of integration in the variety of patterns outlined by Professor McKillop (2). On the other hand, it can be said that Coleridge's conversation poems form more of a unity because there is less to unify. Their lack of concern with science (in spite of Coleridge's strong scientific preoccupations) and natural religion present a certain narrowing of interests. Their strong emphasis on intuitive experience can be seen as a step towards the common nineteenth century assumption that reason and feeling/intuition were opposed qualities, to be expressed in prose and poetry respectively, a distinction seen at its silliest in Matthew Arnold's conception of Pope as "the high priest of an age of prose and reason".

(1) cf. Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse, p.42.

(2) cf. above, p. 7.

(3) cf. Matthew Arnold, The Study of Poetry, in Essays in Criticism, Second Series, p.40.

The "nature poetry" in the title of this essay refers to poetry about external nature, but it should be added that Coleridge's early "nature poetry" tends to be little more than poetry in which images from nature are used, whereas the later "nature poems", the conversation poems, do give a central place to the presentation of external nature but are about a great deal else besides. The following chapters will be concerned with tracing the development of Coleridge's "nature poetry" from his early "moral similies" to his later conception of the unity of nature as expressed in the letter to Sotheby (1). The development will be followed with the poetry as the main object of investigation, but constant reference will be made to the Letters and Notebooks. Tracing this development will involve studying to what extent Coleridge in his poetry succeeded in making a unified creation out of observation of natural phenomena and other areas of experience, such as politics, religion and relationships with other people.

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(1) cf. above, p. 13.

CHAPTER I
Beginnings, 1788-1794

Little critical attention has been given to Coleridge's early poetry. Although there have been a few detailed accounts (1) of single poems, there has been only one survey dealing with most of Coleridge's early work, made in The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (2) by Marshall Suther. This survey, however, is exclusively concerned with tracing the development of two symbols, that of the moon (and other half-lights), which Suther shows to be associated with the imagination and the world of poetry, and that of the wind, acting as both inspirer and destroyer. It is undeniable that already in these early years the moon and the wind represented something important to Coleridge. Yet Suther, in reading these early poems for the symbolism only and with the later poems, especially Dejection, in mind, gives a very one-sided account of Coleridge's early nature poetry by stressing his treatment of subject-matter and images taken from nature. It has already been emphasized (3) that most of these early poems can only be called nature poems in a very loose sense; often the

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- (1) notably I.A.Gordon, The Case-history of Coleridge's "Monody on the Death of Chatterton", RES, XVIII, 1942, pp.49-71.
F.R.Leavis, Coleridge's Beginnings, in Revaluation, pp.142-7 (on Songs of the Pixies).
W.K.Wimsatt Jr., The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery, in The Verbal Icon (pp.108-110 on Sonnet to the River Otter).
- (2) cf. the account of the period with which this Chapter deals, op.cit., Chapter III, pp.67-78.
- (3) cf. above, Introduction, p.19.

nature element is subordinated to an account of emotions or moralizing reflections with which it is only loosely associated. Little direct observation of nature occurs until near the end of the period described in this Chapter. The diversity of the material involves that Coleridge's early poetry can only be treated in the form of a survey showing how he reacted to the various poetic influences to which he was subjected.

It may seem unfair to Coleridge to subject Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon (1) to a thorough verbal analysis, for, although there does not seem to be any certainty about the date of composition, it must be a very early poem. E.H.Coleridge assigns it to 1788, in the absence of a manuscript, ^{probably} partly on stylistic grounds, partly because Coleridge classed it among his Juvenilia in a letter to Thomas Poole of November 1, 1796 (2). From this letter it appears that Coleridge did not think very highly of these Juvenilia:

....then another title page, with Juvenilia on it & an advertisement signifying that the poems were retained from the desire of some friends; but that they are to be considered as being in the Author's opinion of very inferior merit. In this sheet will be 1 Absence—2 Fayette—3 Genevieve—4 Kosciusko—5 Autumnal Moon—6 To the Nightingale—7 Imitation of Spencer [sic] — 8 Poem written in early Youth,—all the others will be finally & totally omitted. (2)

It is clear from a letter by Charles Lamb which E.V.Lucas dates December 2, 1796, (3) that Coleridge had decided to alter the

(1) CPW, I, p.5.

(2) CL, I, p.243.

(3) The Letters of Charles Lamb, I, p.61: "I told you, I do not approve of your omissions....At all events, let me plead for those former pages - 40. 63. 84. 86." (The sonnet had been printed on p.63 of the 1796 edition.)

plans for the second edition of Poems as laid down in the letter to Poole and intended to leave out the poem along with some early works. Lamb protested against the omission of several poems including Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon. Apparently, Coleridge did not accept Lamb's advice on this point, for in the 1797 edition there is no section of Juvenilia and of the eight poems mentioned in the letter to Poole only the last two were included. The poem was again inserted in the 1803 edition of Poems (as were several other early poems, not included in 1797), but this should not be taken to mean that Coleridge had come to think more highly of it, for this edition came at a very low point in Coleridge's career as is clear from his letters dating from this period (1). As a result of his bad health and extremely low spirits the volume was seen through the press by Charles Lamb, who apparently received few instructions (if any) from the author and, as he himself indicates, felt inclined to keep all the early poems in:

I told L[ongman] I was sure that you would omit a good portion of the first edition. I instanced several sonnets, &c.—but that was not his plan, and, as you have done nothing in it, all I could do was to arrange 'em on the supposition that were to be retained.....For my part, I had rather all the Juvenilia were kept—memoriae causa. (2)

Although the poem is no more than one of the first efforts of a sixteen-year-old schoolboy Coleridge's early dismissal of the poem and Lamb's continued partiality for it give it importance as a stage in the author's development. Although Coleridge considered himself to have outgrown this style as early as 1796, it was sufficiently attuned to the sensibility of the late eighteenth

(1) Cf. especially the letter to Godwin, June 10, 1803 (Letters, II, p.950).

(2) The Letters of Charles Lamb, p.347.

century to be enjoyed by an intelligent reader like Charles Lamb. The "memoriæ causâ" in the second of Lamb's letters quoted from suggests that by 1803 Lamb's reasons for liking this poem and other Juvenilia may have become purely sentimental.

The octave of the sonnet contains an account of the various appearances of an autumn night. After the invocation three descriptions are given: one of the moon covered by a thin layer of clouds (but not hidden by it), the second of the moon completely covered by black clouds, the third of the moon suddenly revealing itself:

Mild Splendour of the various-vested Night!
 Mother of wildly-working visions! hail!
 I watch thy gliding, while with watery light
 Thy weak eye glimmers through a fleecy veil;
 And when thou lovest thy pale orb to shroud
 Behind the gather'd blackness lost on high;
 And when thou dartest from the wind-rent cloud
 Thy placid lightning o'er the awaken'd sky.

The sestet shows that the octave is only part of a simile: the three descriptions all stand for hope. They represent hope only just visible, hope hidden by despair and hope suddenly appearing:

Ah such is Hope! as changeful and as fair!
 Now dimly peering on the wistful sight;
 Now hid behind the dragon-wing'd Despair;
 But soon emerging in her radiant might
 She o'er the sorrow-clouded breast of Care
 Sails, like a meteor kindling in its flight.

At first sight the poem seems an intellectual exercise in which there is the same logical connection between octave and sestet as between the two terms of an epic simile. The different descriptions seem as sharply differentiated as the two antithetical halves in a line from a heroic couplet. If one looks more closely, however, it is clear that this is not so. It is striking that in

the sestet the image of a man's mind as the sky is never lost sight of. Hope is still "dimly peering" or "hid behind" or "emerging in her radiant might", all very much like the moon in the sky, but hardly suggesting a conflict between hope and despair in a man's mind. "Dragon-wing'd Despair" seems singularly inappropriate, as Despair is evidently still seen in the shape of a cloud.

"Sorrow-clouded breast of Care" emphasizes the sky imagery and also contributes to the confusion. In an account of the various appearances of Hope/moon and Despair/clouds one would expect the struggle to take place in the mind/sky, instead of which Hope is said to sail "o'er the sorrow-clouded breast of Care". "Sails" is acceptable, for when the moon suddenly appears in a cloudy sky, it often seems as if the moon is moving, but the use of Care suggests that Coleridge has lost the thread of the argument and that such logical structure as still existed has become so weak that "sorrow-clouded" has received undue stress and that "sorrow" is taken up again in "Care".

The last line contains a new natural image, that of a meteor in the sky, stressing the brightness of sudden Hope, but showing how Coleridge has lost sight both of the initial picture of the moon in the sky and of his account of Hope in a human mind. On the one hand, the movement of a meteor is most unlike that of the apparent movement of the moon in a cloudy sky and, on the other, if it is seen as Hope, it carries the unfortunate suggestion that Hope provides no more than a momentary flash, so that it would be singularly ineffectual.

It is true that the changeful nature of Hope has already been emphasized, but the image of the meteor suggests a very different and inappropriate picture of very short flashes alternating with

long periods of unrelieved gloom.

The main question which this ^{poem} ~~question~~ poses is one of subject-matter: is it about the moon or is it about Hope? The answer is that Coleridge is trying to write about both and does not succeed in writing adequately about either. The poem is not really about Hope, as one would suspect is is after the line

Ah such is Hope! as changeful and as fair!

Not only is the poem addressed to the autumn moon, but the moon images are carried over into the section about Hope, and, in contrast to the fairly good descriptions of the moon and the sky in the octave, the capitalized Hope, Despair and Cafe remain "shadowy nobodies" (1). Yet, although the weight of the poem falls on the descriptions of the moon, no contrast in the syntactical structure is made to parallel the difference in these descriptions. This results in a great lack of vividness and in the two final lines of the octave the potential force of "dart'st" and "awaken'd" is lost.

Wordsworth's poem A Night-piece (2), written on January 25, 1798, and very similar in its phrasing to Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal entry of the same date (3), describes a winter night in which the atmospheric conditions are comparable to those described in lines 3-4 and 7-8 of the Sonnet:

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- (1) The phrase is from Coleridge's own letter to Robert Southey, written circa 17 July 1797, used about the Monody on the Death of Chatterton (CL, I, p.333; quoted below, p.44). Cf. also his criticism of Gray's The Bard in the Biographia Literaria (I, p.12).
- (2) Wordsworth, Poetical Works, II, p. 208.
- (3) Dorothy Wordsworth, Journals, I, p.4.

—The sky is overcast

With a continuous cloud of texture close,
 Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
 Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
 A dull, contracted circle, yielding light
 So feebly spread that not a shadow falls,
 Chequering the ground—from rock, plant, tree, or tower,
 At length a pleasant instantaneous gleam
 Startles the pensive traveller while he treads
 His lonesome path, with unobserving eye
 Bent earthwards; he looks up—the clouds are split
 Asunder,—and above his head he sees
 The clear Moon, and the glory of the heavens.
 There in a black-blue vault she sails along,
 Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small
 And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
 Drive as she drives:.....

Humphry House has sharply criticized these lines, contrasting them with the famous description of the moon in Christabel (1), probably also connected with Dorothy's Journal entry:

The whole Wordsworth poem is an attempt to expand, rather in the manner of Cowper, according to a method in which rhythm has little part; to win assent to the delight by mere accumulation of circumstance and detail. (2)

This is an accurate comment on the opening six lines (the only lines which House quotes), but it is also true that through the broken-up sentence structure Wordsworth does make some attempt to convey the force of what a man feels on suddenly seeing the full brightness of the moon:

he looks up—the clouds are split
 Asunder,—and above his head he sees
 The clear moon,.....

There is nothing of this in Coleridge's Sonnet. In this poem it seems that the full force of the natural description was deliberately toned down, so that the syntax of the two halves

(1) CPW, I, p.216, ll. 14-9.
 (2) House, Coleridge, p.124.

between "I watch..." in the third line and "But soon emerging...." in line 12 would fit into a fairly rigid pattern:

I watch.... - Now dimly peering....
 And when..... - Now hid behind....
 And when.... - But soon....

There are close parallelisms between the two halves: the first two lines correspond to line 9, lines 3 and 4 to line 10, lines 5 and 6 to line 11 and lines 7 and 8 to lines 12, 13 and 14. The use of "sails" indicates that Coleridge has noted the apparent movement of the moon on a windy night, but this piece of observation is lost amidst the confused metaphors. By contrast, Wordsworth, observing the same thing and using the same verb to describe it, makes much fuller use of its poetic possibilities.

Coleridge was trying to write two different poems: a poem about the moon which would connect the natural and the intellectual world through a moral simile, and a poem about Hope, introduced by a long simile taken from nature in which the whole description of the moon in the sky would run exactly parallel with the workings of Hope. As a result he did not succeed in writing either poem: the force of the descriptions in the octave is too much toned down to make it a successful nature poem, while the personifications in the sestet are too weak and rely too much on material carried over from the octave to make it a successful poem about Hope.

Another early poem, Life (1), written in 1789, has a structure very similar to Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon. In Life the octave contains a description of which initially only part is visible, but which provides a widening view at every step. The sestet

(1) CPW, I, p.11

likens this expanding view to what the speaker desires his life to be, for ever to be widened through newly discovered "Knowledge" and "Wisdom" until death. The two terms compared may seem to be more distinct than they are in Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon, for in Life the river imagery is not carried through in the sestet in the way the moon imagery is in the earlier poem. Yet in Life the ~~two~~ terms are linked through an emotional factor absent in Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon. In the latter poem Hope and the sudden appearance of the moon may have been combined through an atmospheric suggestion in the poet's mind, but if so, this is entirely played down in the poem, in which the simile between the moon and Hope is arrived at through an intellectual process of noting the similarities between three different appearances of the moon and three mental states. In Life the emotional connection becomes half explicit in the first stanza:

As late I journey'd o'er the extensive plain
 Where native Otter sports his scanty stream,
 Musing in torpid woe a Sister's pain,
 The glorious prospect woke me from the dream.

In other words, the speaker was initially sad, a state of mind caused by his sister's illness which coloured his impression of the landscape. The Otter is not a charming brook, but is called "scanty" in a derogatory fashion. The view, however, became more and more impressive and led the speaker on to more cheerful thoughts. It transferred his attention from his sister's illness to the possibilities which his own future ~~provided~~ ^{provided} this thought process, however, is never wholly brought into the open. Coleridge does not go on to say (as Bowles might have done) that the view made him feel happier, but proceeds to make an intellectually worked-out simile between the view and his own life.

A similar emotional ^{connection} ~~claim~~, not made fully explicit, between two things compared is present in To the Evening Star (written about 1790).⁽¹⁾ Here the evening star is compared with the speaker's beloved, both "serenely brilliant". Perhaps the connecting factor is a link between Venus the evening star and Venus the goddess of love, but the tone of the poem makes it clear that the two terms are also more directly connected through an associational and emotional link; gazing at the evening star and the sunset puts the speaker in the right frame of mind for thoughts about love.

Pain,⁽²⁾ probably dating from the same time, may be said to be an early version of the theme of Dejection. In this sonnet the connection between one's emotional state and one's outlook on nature becomes quite explicit. No beauties of nature or music or other enjoyments in life can make one happy if one is too ill to enjoy them.

This intermixing of the natural world and human emotions may be due to the influence of the poetry of Bowles. According to Coleridge's own statement in the Biographia Literaria (3), he did not become familiar with Bowles' sonnets until his seventeenth year. If one accepts 1788 as the date of Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon, this would mean that Life, To the Evening Star, and Pain are among the first poems written with Bowles in mind. In the Biographia Literaria Coleridge mentions his high estimation of Bowles, though in slightly apologetic terms:

The reader must make himself acquainted with the general style of composition that was at that time deemed poetry in order to understand and account for the effect produced on me by the Sonnets, the Monody at Matlock and the Hope of Mr. Bowles;.....in the more sustained and elevated style

(1) CPW, I, p. 16.

(2) CPW, I, p. 17.

(3) BL, I, p. 8.

¶ [than Percy's Ballads], of the then living poets Bowles and Cowper were, to the best of my knowledge, the first who combined natural thought with natural diction; the first who reconciled the heart with the head. (1)

These claims for Bowles as one of the two poets of the time with a "unified" sensibility must strike us as excessive. The first sentence of the quotation and the qualifying "to the best of my knowledge" suggest that the mature Coleridge would have agreed. Bowles' poems substitute "a perpetual trick of moralizing" (2) for real intellectual discipline and, far from achieving a unified sensibility, sacrifice both heart and head to indulgence in melancholy pleasure.

One of the reasons why Coleridge and his contemporaries were so impressed by Bowles must have been that his poetry afforded them a way of reacting against what seemed to them the absence of feeling in Augustan poetry. Coleridge's comments on the Augustans in the Biographia Literaria show his inability to do justice to the complexity of the best of their poetry:

I was not blind to the merits of this school, yet as from inexperience of the world and consequent want of sympathy with the general subjects of these poems they gave me little pleasure, I doubtless undervalued the kind, and with the presumption of youth withheld from its masters the legitimate name of poets. I saw that the excellence of this kind consisted in just and acute observations on men and manners in an artificial state of society as its matter and substance—and in the logic of wit conveyed in smooth and strong epigrammatic couplets as its form. (3)

As this passage shows, Coleridge admitted in 1815 that he had

(1) BL, I, p. 15A footnote seems to rule out Cowper's The Task as an early influence on Coleridge ("I was not familiar with it till many years afterwards.").

(2) cf. above, Introduction, p. 13.

(3) BL, I, p. 11.

undervalued "the kind", but he never questioned his description of Augustan poetry as a mere intellectual exercise, based on "just observations".

Lamb's letters show quite clearly that he, Coleridge's friend, looked upon Bowles' poems as a means for indulging in emotions. His comment on Coleridge's poem On a Discovery made too late, an unrestrained outpouring of grief, was "most exquisite and most Bowles-like" of all" the poems in the 1796 edition (1). Here "Bowles-like" becomes almost synonymous with sentimental. Coleridge's own comment on this poem was as succinct, though rather more apt:

When a Man is unhappy, he writes damned bad poetry, I find. (2)
Lamb's attitude becomes more explicit in a letter written in November 1796:

Coleridge, I love you for dedicating your poetry to Bowles. Genius of the sacred fountain of tears, it was he who led you gently by the hand through all this valley of weeping, showed you the dark green yew trees and the willow shades where, by the fall of waters, you might indulge an uncomplaining melancholy, a delicious regret for the past, or weaving fine visions of that awful future,..... (3)

Coleridge's own attitude in the Preface to the first edition of Poems on Various Subjects of 1796 is rather similar though more restrained in its expression:

Compositions resembling those of the present volume are not unfrequently condemned for their querulous Egotism. But Egotism is to be condemned then only when it offends against Time and Place, as in an History or an Epic Poem. To censure it in a Monody or Sonnet is almost as absurd as to dislike a

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- (1) ^{The} Letters of Charles Lamb, I, p. 18. Coleridge's poem is in CPW, I, p.72.
(2) Letters to Southey, 21 October 1794 (CL, I, p. 116).
(3) The Letters of Charles Lamb, I, p.56.

circle for being round. Why then write Sonnets or Monodies? Because they give me pleasure when perhaps nothing else could. After the more violent emotions of Sorrow, the mind demands amusement, and can find it in employment alone; but full of its late sufferings, it can endure no employment not in some measure connected with them.....The communicativeness of our Nature leads us to describe our own sorrows; in the endeavour to describe them, intellectual activity is exerted; and from intellectual activity there results a pleasure, which is gradually associated, and mingles as a corrective, with the painful subject of the description. (1)

Lucyle Werkmeister has suggested another reason which may have attracted Coleridge to Bowles (2). As she points out, Coleridge's earliest poems testify to a Stoic belief in virtue as the sole means to happiness:

Yet he who Wisdom's paths shall keep
And Virtue firm that scorns to weep
At ills in Fortune's power,
Through this life's variegated scene
In raging storms or calm serene
Shall cheerful spend the hour. (3)

Quae nocent docent (4), however, written in 1789, shows that "Learning" was not sufficient to master "Sloth" and "the Passions". On this Lucyle Werkmeister writes:

With every period of "fruitless tears", Coleridge was bound to find the consolation derived from "feelings" increasingly and consequently bound to regard the sources of such consolation, namely, poetry, nature, and domestic affection, as increasingly valuable. Without the assistance of Bowles, therefore, he had come to a real crisis in his thinking. On the one hand, he had begun seriously to doubt the ability of "reason" to fortify youth against the demands of the passions; on the other hand,

(1) quoted in CPW, II, p. 1144.

(2) Coleridge, Bowles, and "Feelings of the heart", Anglia, Vol.78, 1960, pp. 55-73.

(3) Easter Holidays, ll. 25-30 (CPW, I, p.2).

(4) CPW, I, pp. 7-8.

he was too much of a Stoic to regard "feelings" as anything other than consolations for, and hence symptoms of, moral weakness. What he needed was a means of amalgamating Stoicism and sentimentalism, and this means he could not find in the Enneads. It was under these circumstances that he became acquainted with the poetry of Bowles. (1)

In other words, unable to suppress emotions through the study of philosophy and metaphysics, Coleridge sought a legitimate outlet for them and found this in the poems of Bowles, which combined feeling and moralizing and which thus seemed to unify "the head" and "the heart".

The clear division between octave and sestet in Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon is very unlike Bowles' sonnets, in which natural observations are more intermixed with accounts of emotions or moralizing passages. A good example is his Sonnet, To the River Itchin (2), of which Professor Wimsatt has given a very fine analysis (3). Most of his sonnets follow the same pattern: the landscape is associated with a certain experience, in this case the speaker's boyhood, and the description of the landscape is mixed with an account of the thought and the feelings produced through this association. Sometimes his poems end with a generalized moral observation, deduced from the landscape and the thoughts and feelings which it occasions. Thus in Sonnet VII, beginning "Evening, as slow thy placid shades descend", (4) the landscape and the atmosphere remind the speakers of those lonely individuals who, "by melancholy led", go on a solitary evening

(1) Lucyle Werkmeister, loc.cit., p.62.

(2) Bowles, Sonnets, p. 19.

(3) W.K.Wimsatt, Jr., in The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery (The Verbal Icon, pp. 105-7).

(4) Bowles, Sonnets, p. 17.

walk in order to escape from misery and to lose themselves in happier fantasies. The atmosphere and its associations together provide the conclusion:

Ah! beauteous views, that hope's fair gleams the while
Should smile like you, and perish as they smile! (1)

Lines 19 to 34 of the Monody, written at Matlock (1), a poem specifically mentioned by Coleridge in the Biographia Literaria(2), are a good example of the pathetic fallacies which Bowles could perpetrate. The river Derwent "complains like one forsaken and unheard", and seems to regret that spring and summer have passed; the sound of the wind in the trees ("sad autumn's voice") makes the speaker

...think of poor Humanity's brief day,
How fast it's blossoms fade, it's summers speed away.

How much Coleridge's early poetry owed to Bowles is clear from a comparison between the opening lines of Bowles' Sonnet XIII, Written at Ostend. July 22, 1787 (3) with Coleridge's Pain(4).

Bowles' sonnet opens:

How sweet the tuneful bells' responsive peal!
As when, at opening morn, the fragrant breeze
Breathes on the trembling sense of pale disease,
So piercing to my heart their force I feel!

The beginning of Pain reads:

Once could the Morn's first beams, the healthful breeze,
All Nature charm, and gay was every hour:—
But ah! not Music's self, nor fragrant bower
Can glad the trembling sense of wan Disease.

The slackness of both poems is indicated by the phrases

(1) Bowles, Monody, written at Matlock, pp. 2-3.

(2) BL, I, p. 15.

(3) Bowles, Sonnets, p. 23.

(4) CPW, I, p. 17.

"pale disease" and "wan disease", in which the adjective add little to the nouns they qualify. The dullness of "fragrant breeze" and "fragrant bower" comes out, if one compares these phrases with the way in which Thomson is able to express both scent and weight in "fragrant load", a combination altogether different from the "finny race" and "plummy people" type of phrases:

Evens stooping age is here; and infant-hands
Trail the long rake, or with the fragrant load
O'ercharged, amid the kind oppression roll. (1)

After the first stanza Coleridge's Pain develops in a very different way from Bowles's Sonnet. It would be difficult to make large claims for Pain (calling it an early version of the Dejection theme brings out its lack in depth and complexity), but it has a certain strength through a directness which is absent in Bowles' emotionalisms linked through association. In Bowles the sound of the bells first reminds the speaker of the fresh morning wind blowing into a sick-room and then of summer and his own youth, so that the poem ends by stating his nostalgic regrets. In Coleridge's sonnet the speaker states that at one time he, like other young and healthy people, could find pleasure in the charms of nature and in other enjoyments in life, but that illness has made this impossible. The thinness of Pain, however, is clear from the fact that it contains little which cannot be communicated by paraphrase and from its repetitiveness.

And seas of Pain seem waving through each limb
repeats the line

Now that the frequent pangs my frame assail,
while the two final lines are also rather repetitive:

Ere Tyrant Pain had chas'd away delight,
Ere the wild pulse throbb'd anguish thro' the night.

(1) Thomson, Summer, ll. 358-360 (Complete Poetical Works, p. 66).

The influence of Bowles in Happiness (1) has also been pointed out by Lucyle Werkmeister (2). Yet the poem has strong Augustan affinities; there are occasional attempts to make one half of an octosyllabic rhymed couplet contain an antithesis and, especially in the first half of the poem, a couplet often forms a sentence, so that one's reactions on reading parts of Happiness are similar to those of the young Coleridge to Augustan poetry:

.....a point was looked for at the end of each second line, and the whole was as it were a sorites or, if I may exchange a logical for a grammatical metaphor, a conjunction disjunctive of epigrams. (3)

The contents and the moralizing tone of the following passage are not unlike those of the illustrating similes in Pope's Moral Essays, although the comparison shows up the lack of technical skill in Coleridge's poem:

Yet sudden wealth full we all know
 Did never happiness bestow.
 That wealth to which we were not born
 Dooms us to sorrow or to scorn.
 Behold yon flock which long had trod
 O'er the short grass of Devon's sod,
 To Lincoln's rank rich meads transferr'd,
 And in their fate thy own be fear'd;
 Through every limb contagions fly,
 Deform'd and choked they burst and die.

From this it is a big step to a later passage on the "Pleasures of the Heart" brought by the evening atmosphere:

'Tis thine with Fancy oft to talk,
 And thine the peaceful evening walk;
 And what to thee the sweetest are—
 The setting sun, the Evening Star—

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- (1) CPW, I, pp. 30-2.
 (2) loc.cit., pp. 72-3.
 (3) BL, I, p. 11.

The tints, which live along the sky,
 And Moon that meets thy raptur'd eye,
 Where oft the tear shall grateful start,
 Dear silent pleasures of the Heart!

With this Mrs. Werkmeister compares Bowles' lines:

....I think of those that have no friend:
 Who now, perhaps, by melancholy led,
 From the broad blaze of day, where pleasure flaunts,
 Retiring, wander 'mid thy lonely haunts
 Unseen; and watch the tints that o'er thy bed
 Hang lovely, to musing fancy's eye
 Presenting fairy vales, where the tir'd mind
 Might rest, beyond the murmurs of mankind,
 Nor hear the hourly moans of misery. (1)

The similarity of mood is there, but, if there is a direct influence, Bowles' lines are to a certain extent re-created; in addition to the difference in form there is a direct observation and a resulting freshness in "The tints, which live along the sky," which produce an absence of a mere escapism into the "fairy vales" of Bowles. Other influences have gone into Coleridge's lines as well. Both form and mood recall Il Penseroso, and, in view of the Augustan affinities earlier on in Happiness, it is tempting to see in "The tints which live along the sky" an echo of Pope's

The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!
 Feels at each thread, and lives along the line: (2)

But the sentimentality and the sententiousness of

Where oft the tear shall grateful start,
 Dear silent pleasures of the Heart!

are utterly unlike either Milton or Pope and vitiate the strength

(1) Bowles, Sonnet VII (Sonnets, p. 17). Lucyle Werkmeister's text reads "their pensive fancy's" for "musing fancy's".

(2) Pope, Essay on Man, Epistle I, 1.217 (Poems, Vol.III,i, p.42)

of the preceding lines. Mrs. Werkmeister aptly compares Bowles' Sonnet V, To the River Wensbeck (1):

Fair scenes, ye lend a pleasure, long unknown,
 To him who passes weary on his way—
 The farewell tear, which now he turns to pay,
 Shall thank you,....

Melancholy, a Fragment, is tentatively dated 1794 by E.H. Coleridge (2), but, as there are no manuscripts extant and as the poem was not published until 1797, there seems little reason for disregarding Coleridge's own testimony in a letter from 1802, in which he quotes the poem and writes; "I wrote the lines at 19"(3). In the same letter he speaks about a "school-boy performance", which would seem to confirm 1791, the year in which he left school for Cambridge, as the most likely date.

This poem is also connected with Bowles, but for different reasons than Happiness. As Coleridge records in the letter already quoted from, the fourth line

Had Melancholy mus'd herself to sleep...

was borrowed by Bowles in his poem Coombe-Ellen and appears there as

Here Melancholy on the pale crags laid,
 Might muse herself to sleep. (4)

Coleridge's own lasting interest in this fragment (the version from the letter differs in a few places from the versions as printed in 1797 and 1817. It also leaves out the conclusion, as does the text of 1828) may be partly due

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- (1) Bowles, Sonnets, p.15.
 (2) CPW, I, pp.73-4. J.Dykes Campbell also dates the poem "? 1794" (Poetical Works, p.34). J.B.Beer, however, follows Coleridge's direction and dates the poem "? 1791" in his selection of Poems (p.11).
 (3) Letter to Sotheby, August 26, 1802 (CL, II, pp.457-8).
 (4) Bowles, Poems, II, p.93.

to Bowles' plagiarism which he accepted as a compliment, partly to qualities inherent in the poem. These qualities are well described by Coleridge himself in the letter quoted from:

I met these Lines yesterday by accident—& ill as they are written, there seem'd to me a force & distinctness of Image in them, that were buds of Promise in a school-boy performance. (1)

The "force" is present in the vocabulary (the monosyllabic strength of "the long lank leaf" and of the verb in "Where ruining ivies propp'd the ruins steep") and in the particularization of "fern" and "Adder's tongue" (which, as a note in Sibylline Leaves shows, was a mistake for "the Hart's tongue"). These qualities are oddly combined with the vocabulary of minor eighteenth century poetry (especially "sea-gale weak") and the shadowy personification Melancholy. There is a singularly inflated conclusion which was omitted in the Poetical Works of 1828 and in later editions:

Strange was the dream that fill'd her soul,
Nor did not whisp'ring spirits roll
A mystic tumult, and a fateful rhyme,
Mix'd with wild shapings of the unborn time!

In its structure A Wish, written in Jesus Wood, Feb. 10, 1792 (2) is a return to the older manner of Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon. The poem is a comparison between two terms, the river and the sorts of life which the speaker wishes to lead. As in Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon and Life, the distinction between the two terms is blurred, since in the last two stanzas "Life" is still presented in terms of a river. The poem has little to recommend itself; the language is conventional and presents the characteristic poetic diction of minor eighteenth century verse ("vale irriguous",

(1) CL, II, p.458.

(2) CPW, I, p.33.

"languid murmur"). The rather lifeless idyllic picture of the river is in sharp contrast with the opening lines of the semi-humorous A Fragment found in a Lecture-room (1):

Where deep in mud Cam rolls his slumbrous stream,
And bog and desolation reign supreme.

The difference, however, is largely due to the fact that in both cases Coleridge is self-consciously writing in a given tradition, that of Gray and Warton in A Wish, that of satirical Augustan verse in A Fragment. Here the indebtedness to Pope becomes very clear in the tenth line, in which Dulness is "dosing on a couch of lead", and in the following lines, ending with Dulness' yawn.

The poetic diction of A Wish is common in Coleridge's poetry of this period. Imitated from Ossian (2) contains numerous poetic clichés not in Macpherson ("languid murmur", "restless gale", "vernal day") and Songs of the Pixies⁽³⁾ is full of echoes of eighteenth century poetry. In Revaluation (4) Dr. F.R. Leavis has given an excellent account of the influences of Gray, Collins and Milton (the Milton of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso), and has shown how the Miltonic influences are often working through Gray and Collins (5).

Two couplets in which Leavis found greater originality call for further comment. The first is:

When fades the moon to shadowy-pale,
And scuds the cloud before the gale,...

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- (1) CPW, I, p.35.
 - (2) CPW, I, p.38.
 - (3) CPW, I, pp.40-44.
 - (4) F.R. Leavis, Coleridge's Beginnings (Revaluation, pp.142-7)
 - (5) Leavis' comparison of "Here the wren of softest note" (1.5) and "Wooes the Queen of Solemn Thought" (1.37) with Shakespeare's The Phoenix and the Turtle is not so well-founded (although the similarity in rhythm is striking) and makes rather too much of "turtle nest" in 1.57.

on which Leavis commented:

The first couplet of the second section, though in an eighteenth-century tradition, is distinctively Coleridge,... (1)

The eighteenth century tradition, which can be traced back to Milton, is present in the form (the rhymed octosyllabics of L'Allegro and of Dyer's Grongar Hill) and the inverted word structure. The lines may be said to be "distinctly Coleridge" in their observation of natural phenomena and in the way they show his interest in the combination of movement (the real movement of the cloud, as here, or the apparent movement of the moon) and stillness (the real stillness of the moon, as here, or the apparent stillness of the clouds). With the lines from Songs of the Pixies one may compare the more exact and more subtle Description in the following Notebook passage, also containing the for Coleridge unusual word "scud" (2):

The thin scattered rain-clouds were scudding along the Sky,
above them with a visible interspace the crescent Moon hung,
and partook not of the motion—her own hazy Light fill'd up
the concave, as if it had been painted & the colors had
run.—Def. 19, 1800. (3)

The other couplet which Leavis found more original is

(1) Leavis, loc.cit., p.143.

(2) Songs of the Pixies is the only poem of his which contains this verb. Cf. the use of the cognate substantive:
Sea-ward, white gleaming thro' the busy scud
With arching Wings, the sea-mew o'er my head
Posts on,...

(CPW, II, p.997)

(3) N, I, 875. Cf. also the various drafts of Lewti (PW, II, pp.1049-52), the use of "sails" for the apparent movement in Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon (PW, I, p.5; cf. above, p.24) and for a figurative use of this apparent movement a Notebook entry written in September or October 1800: "Princes by not moving away appear to advance—as the Moon to the Clouds." (N, I, 817).

of the moon

We sip the furze-flower's radiant dew
Clad in robes of rainbow hues;

On this he commented: "again the young romantic" (1). This comment may have been prompted by the "rainbow hues", but the preceding line is perhaps more interesting. There the concreteness of "furze-flower"⁽²⁾ contrasts sharply with the generalizations and abstractions in the next six lines:

Or sport amid the shooting gleams
To the tune of distant-tinkling teams,
While lusty Labour scouting sorrow
Bids the Dame a glad good-morrow,
Who jogs the accustom'd road along,
And paces cheery to her cheering song.

The second line of this passage is, as Dr. Leavis has shown (3), derived from Gray's Elegy, but the following four lines strongly recall L'Allegro and can be criticized in the same terms as Coleridge's model was criticized by T.S.Eliot:

The imagery in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso is all general:

While the ploughman near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale,
Under the hawthorn in the dale.

It is not a particular ploughman, milkmaid, and shepherd that Milton sees (as Wordsworth might see them); the sensuous effect of these verses is entirely on the ear, and is joined to the concepts of ploughman, milkmaid and shepherd. (4)

As a criticism of Milton's early poems this is not altogether fair. Milton is not concerned with shepherds or ploughmen but

(1) Leavis, loc.cit., p. 143.

(2) for later mentionings of furze in Coleridge's writings, cf. N, I, 222, Fears in Solitude, l.6 (PW, I, p.257) and N, I, 1496.

(3) Leavis, loc.cit., pp.143-4.

(4) T.S.Eliot, Selected Prose, pp.125-6.

with finding verbal equivalents for two states of mind, or, in Dr. Johnson's words, with showing "how, among the successive variety of appearances, every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified" (1). Nevertheless Eliot's account of the difference between the generalized conception of Milton's ploughman and Wordsworth's individualized labourers stands. It is to be noted how Coleridge takes Milton's generalizations one step further. His "Labour" is an abstracted and capitalized combination of ploughman, shepherd and mower in one, and, as for the "Dame", the only particularizing suggestion is "jogs" which provides the possibility that she is a milkmaid carrying her pails.

There is yet another couplet in the poem in which the observation of nature anticipates later developments:

Or where, his silver waters smooth'd to rest,
The tall tree's shadow sleeps upon his breast.

The stillness of the shadow corresponds to the absence of movement in the water. The same point is made in a Notebook fragment which dates from 1796:

Where Cam his stealthy flowings most dissembles
And scarce the Willow's watry shadow trembles. (2)

In the poem The Keepsake (3) (of uncertain date, but probably written in 1800) there is a more subtle description of the contrast between the shadow of the flowers, moved by the breeze, and the almost still water:

.....to the woodbine bower,
Whose rich flowers, swinging in the morning breeze,

(1) Johnson, Lives of the ^{English} Poets (Everyman edition), p.97.
 (2) N, I, 86.
 (3) CPW, I, pp. 345-6.

Over their dim fast-moving shadows hung,
 Making a quiet image of disquiet
 In the smooth, scarcely moving river-pool.

Coleridge's interest in this combination of "quiet" and "disquiet" seems to be analogous to his interest in the apparent movement of the moon or in the contrast between the fixed position of the moon and the moving clouds. The interest in these combinations of movement and stillness suggests the reconciliation of opposites which occurs with such frequency in the Notebooks from 1799 onwards and which is of great importance in his criticism (1).

Taken as a whole, Songs of the Pixies is a very derivative poem and the many different forms employed (octosyllabic and decasyllabic couplets, decasyllabic lines with a more intricate rhyme scheme in Section VI, Pindarics) do not achieve a unity. A letter to Southey, written circa 17 July 1797, implies that Coleridge thought the Songs of the Pixies could be criticized in the same terms as the Monody on the death of Chatterton, but that it did not matter as much, since it is a more trivial poem:

The Pixies is the least disgusting; because the subject leads you to expect nothing—but on a life & death so full of heart-giving realities, as poor Chatterton's to find such shadowy nobodies, as cherub-winged DEATH, Trees of Hope, bare-bosom'd AFFECTION, & simpering PEACE—makes one's blood circulate like ipecacacuanha. (2)

One here thinks especially of "meek-eyed Pity" in Section VIII (a phrase which Leavis has related to the "meek-eyed Peace" of Milton's Nativity Ode (3)). To a certain extent the generalizations of the poem are counteracted by a few faint beginnings of particularizing description. In spite of the strange mixture in forms

(1) Cf. below, Epitaphs, pp. 142-150.

(2) CL, I, p. 333.

(3) cf. Leavis, loc. cit., p. 147.

there is a definite advance in technique compared with Coleridge's earlier poems. This is clearly noticeable when one compares the lilting movement of the octosyllabics in the second stanza with the rigid beat of those in Happiness.

Lines on an Autumnal Evening (1), probably written at the same time as Songs of the Pixies, is given an additional interest through the existence of a first draft, dated August 1792 (2), and a version which was published in the Weekly Entertainer of October 1793 and entitled Absence, a Poem (3). One couplet in particular has interesting variant readings. In the first draft these lines read:

When first the matin Bird with starting Song
Salutes the Sun his veiling Clouds among,...

The most noticeable things about this couplet are the Miltonic inversion "his veiling Clouds among", the conventionally pretty image of the bird saluting the sun and the fact that Coleridge does not name the bird (although it is obvious that "the matin Bird" refers to the lark). The corresponding lines in Absence

(1) CPW, I, pp.51-4. (2) GPW, I, pp.49-50.

(3) Weekly Entertainer, XXII, 28 October 1793, pp.430-2; again published by Robert Mayo in Two Early Coleridge Poems, The Bodleian Library Records, V, 1956, pp.313-6. There is also another draft, unfinished and unpublished, among Cottle's manuscripts in the Library of Rugby School. This draft consists of 26 lines, of which the first 24 are almost identical with those of Lines on an Autumnal Evening. Several phrases, however, are nearer the first draft (l.2, "elfin eye", l. 11, "primrose bowef", l.13, "setting sun", l.14, "the Poet's dream"). The last two lines of the Rugby fragment are also close to the first draft:

Then when glad I caroll'd on the plain,
And Hope itself was all I knew of Pain.

change the image entirely:

When th'orient hour, in robe of roses dight,
Studs the relumin'd east with gems of light,...

"In robe of roses dight" is a piece of eighteenth century Miltonizing reminiscent of Songs of the Pixies, but "studs" is powerful. Its monosyllabic force (akin to that of "scuds" in Songs of the Pixies and "propp'd" in Melancholy (1)) adds substance to the jewel image. The final version takes up the image of the first draft again, but it calls the bird by its name:

When first the lark high-soaring swells his throat,
Mocks the tir'd eye, and scatters the loud note,...

Compared with the monotonous iambics of the corresponding couplet in the first draft, the rhythm is here finely controlled. The extra stress on the first syllable of "high-soaring" gives additional emphasis to the lark's ascent, while the variations of the metre in the second line are increased by a judicious use of the caesura.

The description of the "native brook" is much more expanded in the final text than in the first draft. Although the final text too is written in the poetic diction of the period ("thy current meek") and, although there is little emphasis on the description of the river compared with the feelings with which the speaker's "native brook" are associated, a growing interest in the landscape is evident if one compares

Dear native brook! like Peace, so placidly
Smoothing through fertile fields thy current meek!

with the corresponding lines in the first draft:

(1) cf. above, pp. 40-1 and p. 39, respectively.

Sweet — ! where Pleasure's streamlet glides
Fann'd by soft winds to curl in mimic tides; (1)

In the final version of the poem the whole passage about the river and its associations is a good example of Bowles' combination of landscape description (or merely the invocation of a landscape) and sentiment:

Dear native haunts; where Virtue still is gay,
Where Friendship's fix'd star sheds a mellowed ray,...

In one place at least this aspect is linked with something else, with, in the eighteenth century use of the word, a "metaphysical" attempt to find similarities in things basically unlike, arrived at through an intellectual process, like the similies in To the Autumnal Moon:

Where blameless pleasures dipple Quiet's cheek,
As water-lilies ripple thy slow stream!

Like the section on the brook in Lines on an Autumnal Evening the Sonnet to the River Otter (2) opens with the invocation "Dear native brook". After this, however, the methods of the two poems differ. Instead of through overt metaphysical similes, the Sonnet achieves its effect through what Wimsatt has called "the directness of sensory presentation", in a structure favouring "implication rather than overt statement" (3). There are various metaphorical suggestions. In Wimsatt's words:

(1) Here Absence has:

Dear Tiverton! where pleasure's streamlet glides
Fann'd by soft winds to curl in mimic tides;
Presumably Coleridge thought it appropriate to name the town in a provincial miscellany (the Weekly Entertainer was published at Sherborne, Dorset).

(2) CPW, I, p.48.

(3) Wimsatt, The Verbal Icon, p.116 (speaking about Romantic poetry in general).

As a child, careless and free, wild like the streamlet, the speaker amused himself with one of the most carefree motions of youth—skimming smooth thin stones which leapt lightly on the breast of the water. One might have thought such experiences would sink no deeper in the child's breast than the stones in the water—"yet so deep imprest"—the very antithesis (though it refers overtly only to the many hours which have intervened) defines imaginatively the depth of the impressions. When he closes his eyes, ~~they~~ rise again (the word rise may be taken as a trope which hints the whole unstated similitude); they rise like the tinted waters of the stream; they gleam up through the depths of memory—the "various-fated years"—like the "various dyes" which vein the sand of the river bed. (1)

In this respect the poem is unlike Lines on an Autumnal Evening, but it is also unlike Bowles' To the River Itchin, on which it is obviously based. Bowles' poem associates the speaker's visit to the river Itchin with his youth through a series of rhetorical questions. In Coleridge's sonnet the boy's activities are more vividly captured.

.....since last
I skimm'd the smooth thin stone along thy breast,
has a far greater descriptive accuracy than Bowles' vaguely
metaphorical

Since, in life's morn, I carol'd on thy side....

In addition to this, Coleridge's "crossing plank" suggests the boy in a more subtle way than Bowles' rhetorical questions do. Wimsatt aptly compares the technique by which the atmosphere of the river is invoked through a suggestion of the activities ~~connected~~ with the river, with the technique used by Keats in the second stanza of the Ode to Autumn and with Arnold's "wooden bridge" in the Scholar Gipsy (2). The landscape

(1) Wimsatt, op.cit., pp.108-9.

(2) Wimsatt, op.cit., p.110.

itself is also given a fuller and more concrete description than in Bowles' sonnet. Bowles dismisses the river itself in the first three lines (in which the lifelessness is emphasized by the monotonous rhythm and the mechanical rhyme of the second and third line):

Itchin, when I behold thy banks again,
Thy crumbling margin, and thy silver breast,
On which the self-same tints still seem to rest,... (1)

Not only is Coleridge's description more detailed:

But straight with all their tints thy waters rise,
Thy crossing planks, thy marge with willows grey,
And bedded sand that veined with various dyes
Gleamed through thy bright transparence!

The landscape description is also the centre of the poem. In Bowles a visit to the river only serves to remind the speaker of his youth and of the change which has taken place in his life, and to give him an opportunity to indulge in a pleasing melancholy.

In Coleridge's sonnet the mental re-creation of the landscape is more important than the nostalgia for a lost youth (although this can hardly be said of the last three-and-a-half lines).

Two other differences are noticeable. In the first place, Coleridge states that "many various-fated years have past..... happy and....mournful". Bowles with sentimental nostalgia only records present sorrows and the passing away of "Youth" and "Hope". A second is that Bowles' utterance takes a visit to the scenes with which the speaker's youth is associated, as its starting-point, whereas in Coleridge's sonnet the thought of the river Otter is sufficient to provide an imaginative re-creation of the scenery and of the activities once carried out in the landscape.

(1) Bowles, Sonnet IX, To the River Itchin (Sonnets, p.19),
quoted by Wimsatt, op.cit., p. 106.

Yet in one respect Coleridge's poem hardly differs from Bowles' sonnet. Accurate and evocative though the description of the landscape and of the boy's activities are, the emotional significance is not adequately brought over. In the sixth line "sweet scenes of childhood" is flat and sentimental and in the last three-and-a-half lines the nostalgia and sentimentousness also found in Bowles is brought into the open, culminating in the wistfulness of the last line:

Ah! that once more I were a careless Child!

In spite of this important defect, the Sonnet to the River Otter presents a great advance on all Coleridge's previous poetry. The freedom of the rhythm with its numerous enjambements contrasts with Bowles' plodding rhythm which slows down at every rhyme-word. Thus the sentimentousness of the ending is partially offset by what has gone before.

Sonnet to the River Otter is also the earliest of Coleridge's poems to approach structural unity, although only in its first ten-and-a-half lines. In Bowles' poem there is only a loose connection between the landscape and the feelings associated with it, whereas in Sonnet to the River Otter "the river landscape is both the occasion of reminiscence and the source of metaphor by which reminiscence is described" (1).

Bowles' influence is still noticeable in the poems written in 1794, as is clear from an examination of Lines to a Beautiful Spring in a Village (2). In this poem the first twenty-two lines are partly description, partly invocation. The closing ten lines consist of the by now familiar nostalgic regret for a lost

(1) Wimsatt, op.cit., p.109.

(2) CPW, I, pp.58-9.

youth associated with the stream. The language of the first section strongly echoes Milton. The first two lines

Once more! sweet Stream! with slow foot wandering near,
I bless thy milky waters cold and clear...

are reminiscent of the opening of Lycidas and the resemblance even extends to the rhyme-words. "Sear", "year", "dear", "peer", "bear" (for "bier") and "tear" are among the rhyme-words in the opening fourteen lines of Milton's poem (1).

"Milky waters" is derived from Samson Agonistes:

Where ever fountain or fresh current flowd
Against the Eastern ray, translucent, pure
With touch ætherial of Heav'ns fiery rod
I drank, from the clear milkie juice allaying
Thirst, and refresht; (2)

The use of the adjective "milky" to qualify water, ~~however, had become common property of the Augustans and it~~ ^{also} appears in Windsor Forest:

Cole, whose dark Streams his flowry Islands lave;
And chalky Wey, that rolls a milky Wave: (3)

In Pope's lines the combination with "chalky" seems to indicate a shift in meaning, so that "milky" is no longer a mere synonym for clear. Coleridge adopts the word in the sense used by Milton.

In the eighth line of Lines to a Beautiful Spring in a Village "the sad Wood-nymph Solitude" is a sort of cross between "the Mountain Nymph, sweet Liberty" of L'Allegro and the "pensive Nun" of Il Penseroso (4). The whole first section is a strange combination of descriptions of the landscape and of everyday incidents with descriptions of idyllic rural scenes, ultimately derived from Milton's early poetry, but

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- (1) cf. Milton, Poetical Works, p.445.
 (2) Milton, Poetical Works, p.360 (ll. 547-551).
 (3) Pope, The Poems, I, p.183 (ll. 343-4).
 (4) cf. L'Allegro, l.36, and Il Penseroso, l.31
 (Poetical Works, p.421 and p.425, respectively).

changed in a debased sentimental fashion:

The rustic here at eve with pensive look
Whistling lorn ditties leans upon his crook.

The emphasis on description is much stronger than in Bowles' sonnet To the River Itchin, but the inflated language and ponderous rhythm seem at odd with the everyday scenes described:

The elfin tribe around thy friendly banks
With infant uproar and soul-soothing pranks,
Releas'd from school, their little hearts at rest,
Launch paper navies on thy waveless breast.

In the last section the Bowles-like sententiousness is mixed with a "metaphysical" type of metaphor resembling the similes in Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon and Lines on an Autumnal Evening:

Life's current then ran sparkling to the noon,
Or silvery stole beneath the pensive Moon:
Ah! now it works rude brakes and thorns among,
Or o'er the rough rock bursts and foams along!

The ineptness of the metaphor, which has no basis in observation and is merely intellectually imposed, is clear from the fact that the spectacle of the river forcing its way among rocks is more likely to occur upstream than downstream which would make nonsense of the whole metaphor. The metaphor is also far from Bowles' way of linking a landscape seen with a resulting emotion. Through an intellectual analogy it is possible to see in the river among the rocks an image for conflicts in a man's life, but it seems unlikely that there could be an emotional connection (1).

(1) There is a curious contrast between the waterfall metaphor in this poem and the descriptions of waterfalls in the later Notebook passages, which show that they had a strong fascination for Coleridge, cf. N, I, 793, 825, 1158, 1725.

The preceding account of Coleridge's early poetry shows that it is impossible to find a common denominator for it, except by saying that description of nature is almost always subordinated to other elements. Coleridge in these early years was nothing if not eclectic and made free use of the various influences which came to hand. Several early poems show the influence of Augustan verse. The Augustan influence in Happiness has already been commented on (1), while several poems in a lighter satirical vein, such as Julia (2) and Fragment found in a Lecture-room (3) are very much in the tradition of Pope. Julia is at times very close to The Rape of the Lock:

Tell! ye neglected sylphs! who lap-dogs guard,
 Why snatch'd ye not away your precious ward?
 Why suffer'd ye the lover's weight to fall
 On the ill-fated neck of much-loved Ball?

Other poems are steeped in the phrases of Gray and Collins, especially Songs of the Pixies. The influence of Milton's early poetry is very noticeable, but in the early poems Milton's influence generally works through an eighteenth century filter. From 1791 onwards there is a strong indebtedness to Bowles, but his influence is usually mixed up with that of other eighteenth century poets. Some of the early poems, on the other hand, such as Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon, Life and Lines to a Spring in a Village contain "metaphysical" similes and metaphors utterly unlike the poetry of Bowles.

It is not until the end of the period that a more personal

(1) cf above, p.36.

(2) CPW, I, pp.6-7.

(3) CPW, I, p.35, cf also above, p.40.

~~(4) cf. above, p.39.~~

element appears, although there are what Coleridge called "buds of promise" (1) in Melancholy. This element is intermittently present in Songs of the Pixies and more strongly in Sonnet to the River Otter. It takes the form of a greater concreteness and particularization and, in the case of the latter poem, of a more unified expression.



(1) cf. above, p.39.

Chapter II

The Experience of Nature versus Sara and
"the bloodless fight", 1795-6.

After 1794 Coleridge's writings, both his poems and his letters, show an increasing emphasis on natural description. Less often than before does one find images from nature mainly used for their loose connections with the moral world through similes. The latter use of images does still occur. An example is On Observing a Blossom of the first of February 1796 (1), which opens with the description of an early flower but in which the stress falls on the three things the flower is compared to: a consumptive girl, Chatterton and Poland's hope:

shall I liken thee
To some sweet girl of too too rapid growth
Nipp'd by consumption mid untimely charms?
Or to Bristowa's bard, the wondrous boy!
An amaranth, which earth seem'd to own,
Till disappointment came, and pelting wrong
Beat it to earth? or with indignant grief
Shall I compare thee to poor Poland's hope,
Bright flower of hope killed in the opening bud?

The poem ends with an account of the effect which the early spring weather has on the speaker:

And the warm wooings of this sunny day
Tremble along my frame and harmonize
The attempered organ, that even saddest thoughts
Mix with some sweet sensations, like harsh tunes
Played deftly on a soft-toned instrument.

In many of Coleridge's better-known poems, especially The Eolian Harp,⁽²⁾ in its final version, and This Lime-tree Bower

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(1) CPW, I, pp. 148-9.

(2) CPW, I, pp. 100-102

my Prison (1), this kind of emotional experience is given a central place, based on the preceding account of things perceived (actually perceived in The Eolian Harp, re-created by the imagination in This Lime-tree Bower my Prison) and resulting in a moral or philosophical conclusion. In On Observing a Blossom, however, the five lines quoted are not at all firmly related to what precedes. The emphasis is on the moral similes, as seems implied by the lines which follow these similes:

Dim similitudes

Weaving in moral strains, I've stolen one hour
From anxious Self, Life's cruel taskmaster!

"Dim similitudes" seem to emphasize the tenuous connections between the blossom and the things it is compared to. There is a striking similarity between the term used here and the phrase "dim analogies" in the letter to Sotheby of 10 September, 1802:

.....never to see or describe any interesting appearance in nature, without connecting it by dim analogies with the moral world, proves faintness of Impression. (2)

Some other poems of this period use images from nature as moral similes, but the function of these images is more to illustrate one specific point. Thus in Lines to a Friend in Answer to a Melancholy Letter (3) the "mournful gleam" of a sunset and the bright glory of the rising sun are brought together in one stanza in order to illustrate, not altogether appropriately, how soon fortune may change. In On a Late Connubial Rupture in High Life (4) the last two stanzas contain two images taken from

(1) CPW, I, pp. 178-181.

(2) CL, II, p.864; cf. above, Introduction, p.13.

(3) CPW, I, pp.178-181.

(4) CPW, I, p.152.

nature and used to a moralizing purpose:

Drop the pearly flood
On thy sweet infant, as the full-blown rose,
Surcharg'd with dew, bends o'er its neighbouring bud.
And ah! that Truth some holy spell might lend
To lure thy Wanderer from the Syren's power;
Then bid your souls inseparably blend
Like two bright dew-drops meeting in a flower.

Of these two images the second is taken from a Notebook entry, in which the introductory "as" suggests that the entry was recorded for future reference when a moralizing simile would be needed:

As difficult as to separate two dew-drops blended
together on a bosom of a new-blown Rose. (1)

This kind of image occurs as late as 1797. In On the Christening of a Friend's Child (2) it is used to express the hope that the child will grow up as beautiful as her mother is now, so that a friend will be able to say:

Even thus a lovely rose I've view'd
In summer-swell'g pride;
Nor mark'd the bud, that green and rude
Peep'd at the rose's side.

It chanc'd I pass'd again that way
In Autumn's latest hour,
And wond'ring saw the selfsame spray
Rich with the selfsame flower.

All these examples of incidental moralizing nature imagery, however, are found in occasional poems and their existence does not contradict the later critical statement in the letter to Sotheby:

I do not mean to exclude these formal Similies—there are moods of mind in which they are natural—pleasing moods of mind, & such as a Poet will have, & sometimes express; but they are not

(1) N, I, 142.

(2) CPW, I, p.176.

his highest, & most appropriate moods. They are 'Sermoni propria' which I once translated—'Properer for a sermon'. (1)

But poems with such similes belong to the "Fancy", not to the "Imagination", a distinction used further on in the same letter to contrast Hebrew poetry with that of the Greeks, "as poor in genuine imagination" as it is mean in intellect" (2).

The stronger stress on nature in the poetry of these years is, as H.J.W. Milley has observed (3), partly caused by the fact that Coleridge's marriage meant settling down in Somerset, where he had a better opportunity to observe nature than at any time since he had left his Devonshire village. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the landscape could have influenced Coleridge so powerfully if he had not attached a great importance to nature already. In a letter to George Dyer (4), written in March 1795, more than five months before the "cot" at Clevedon is first mentioned (5), Coleridge stresses the salutary moral effects of nature in a manner which points ahead to Frost at Midnight:

The pleasures, which we receive from rural beauties, are of little Consequence compared with the Moral effect of these pleasures—beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible. In the country, all around us smile Good and Beauty—and the Images of this divine καλονάγαδόν are miniatur'd on the mind of the beholder, as a Landscape on a Convex mirror.

During his honeymoon at Clevedon stressed the connections between the beauty of the surroundings and his poetry in a letter to Thomas Poole of 7 October, 1795:

(1) CL, II, p.864.

(2) CL, II, pp.865-6, quoted more fully above, Introduction, p.13.

(3) Some Notes on Coleridge's "Eolian Harp", Modern Philology, 1939, pp.362-4.

(4) CL, I, p.154.

(5) in the first draft of The Eolian Harp, 20 Aug. 1795, PW, II, p.1021.

The prospect around us is perhaps more various than any in the kingdom—Mine eye gluttonizes—The Sea—the distant Islands!—the opposite Coasts!—I shall assuredly write Rhymes—let the nine Muses prevent it, if they can—/. (1)

How striking the difference in the parts played by nature and images taken from nature is among the poems written in 1795 and 1796 can be shown by a comparison between The Eolian Harp (2) and Religious Musings (3). The latter poem, according to the 1796 edition of Poems on Various Subjects written on Christmas Eve 1794, but probably not finished until 1796, establishes a near-panteistic philosophy not altogether unlike that of The Eolian Harp:

But 'tis God
Diffused through all, that doth make one whole;

In The Eolian Harp, however, the lines

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

are partly based on the observation of natural details with which the poem opens. This is wholly true of the passage beginning "O! the one Life within us and abroad" which was added later.

The religious and philosophical assertions in Religious Musings have no basis in anything in the poem outside themselves, so that the expression of the unifying principle in the lines quoted carries little conviction. The only detailed description of nature occurs in a Miltonic epic simile which functions as an illustration of a religious tenet:

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- (1) CL, I, p.160.
 (2) CPW, I, pp.100-102.
 (3) CPW, I, pp.108-125.
 (4) ll. 130-1 (CPW, I, p.114)

Thus from the Elect, regenerate through faith,
 Pass the dark Passions and what thirsty cares
 Drink up the spirit, and the dim regards
 Self-centre. Lo they vanish! or acquire
 New names, new features—by supernal grace
 Enrobed with Light, and naturalised in Heaven.
 As when a shepherd on a vernal morn
 Through some thick fog creeps timorous slow foot,
 Darkling he fixes on the immediate road
 His downward eye: all else of fairest kind
 Hid or deformed. But lo! the bursting Sun!
 Touched by the enchantment of that sudden beam
 Straight the black vapour melteth, and inglobes
 Of dew glitter gems each plant and tree;
 On every leaf, on every blade it hangs!
 Dance glad the new-born intermingling rays,
 And wide around the landscape streams with glory! (1)

Not only does the second term of the simile take on a life of its own, as happens in many epic similes (whether Homeric or Miltonic). What strikes one also is something similar to what happened in Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon (2): the emphasis is on the splendour of the sudden emergence of the sun, which has been beautifully realized in the poem, not on the power of the imagination for which it is an image and which is given here in rather lame verse.

There is one other passage which stresses the beauty of the natural world:

Fair the vernal mead,
 Fair the high grove, the sea, the sun, the stars;
 True impress each of their creating Sire!
 Yet nor high grove, nor many-colour'd mead,
 Nor the green ocean with his thousand isles,
 Nor the starred azure, nor the sovran sun,

(1) 11.88-103 (CPW, I, pp.112-3).
 (2) cf. above, Chapter I, p.25.

E'er with such majesty of portraiture
 Imaged the supreme beauty uncreate,
 As thou, meek Saviour! (1)

The differences between this and the opening of The Eolian Harp are very great. In the first place, the beauties of nature are here explicitly subordinated to Christ as an image of "the supreme beauty" underneath the world of appearances. Secondly, the descriptions in these lines lack all particularization and instead of being based on observation of nature, they form a fairly close imitation of Eve's speech to Adam in Book IV of Paradise Lost:

Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
 With charms of early Birds; pleasant the Sun
 When first on this delightful Lands he spreads
 His orient Beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flour,
 Glistening with dew; fragrant the fertile earth
 After soft showers; and sweet the coming on
 Of grateful Eevning milde, then silent Night
 With this her solemn Bird and this fair Moon,
 And these the Gemms of Heav'n, her starrie train:
 But neither breath of Morn when she ascends
 With charm of earliest Birds, nor rising Sun
 On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, floure,
 Glistring with dew, nor fragrance after showers,
 Nor grateful Eevning milde, nor silent Night
 With this her solemn Bird, nor walk by Moon,
 Or glittering Starr-light without thee is sweet. (2)

As in the adaptation of lines from Milton's L'Allegro in Songs of the Pixies (3), Coleridge goes one step further in

- (1) These lines were not part of the original version of Religious Musings, but appeared for the first time in manuscript in a copy of the 1796 version of Poems on Various Subjects and must have been written between April 1796 and May 1797, cf. the autograph MS. drafts in the BM copy of Poems on Various Subjects (Ashley 408), reprinted in J. Dykes Campbell (ed.), Poems, A Facsimile Reproduction of the Proofs and MSS. of some of the Poems, p. 8.
- (2) Milton, Poetical Works, pp. 89-90 (ll. 641-656). The similarity is pointed out by H. House, Coleridge, p. 64n.
- (3) cf. above, Chapter I, pp. 42-3.

generalization than his model.

Fair the vernal mead,
Fair the high grove, the sea, the sun, the stars

is both less exact and considerably weaker than

pleasant the Sun
When first on this delightful Land he spreads
His orient Beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flour,
Glistring with dew;

Although, as will be shown below (1), many of the poems written in 1795 and 1796 show a much greater interest in landscape details and sense impressions, the old manner of using images taken from nature for the sake of the moral similes which could be drawn from them still persisted. To a Young Friend on his proposing to domesticate with the Author (2), written in August or September 1796 (3), near the end of the period discussed in this chapter, is an interesting example of the two attitudes to nature existing side by side. In the line

Or colour'd lichens with slow ooziings weep

the use of the verb is inappropriate and sentimental. This line lacks the sharpness of perception and (as is obvious from the flat "colour'd") the interest in form and colour of a Notebook entry which probably dates from the same year:

(1) cf. the accounts given of The Eolian Harp (below, pp. 65-78), Lines Composed while climbing the Left Ascent of Brockley Comb (below, pp. 82) and Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement (below, pp. 84-7).

(2) CPW, I, pp. 155-7.

(3) The "young friend" was Charles Lloyd, whom Coleridge must have met at Moseley, near Birmingham. Coleridge arrived there on August 19th, 1796 (cf. CL, I, p. 232 and p. 235n.). On September 24th Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole: "Last week I received a letter from Lloyd informing me that his parents had given their joyful concurrence to his residence with me." (CL, I, p. 235).

The flat pink-colour'd stone painted over in jagged circles & strange parallelograms with the greenish black-spotted lichens.— (1)

The fifth line

Where cypress and the darker yew start wild
introduces the cypress, not an indigenous tree and an intruder among the yew and the ash. It removes the poem from the actuality of the landscape of the Quantocks which is suggested by the other trees and the lichens. Thus the line can be seen as a first hint of the allegorical meaning which becomes explicit further on in the poem.

The movement of the ash produced by the waterfall is described in a couplet in which the jingling rhyme creates the altogether inappropriate suggestion of a puppet on a string:

And, 'mid the summer torrent's gentle dash
Dance brighten'd the red clusters of the ash.

The scene described is very similar to that in This Lime-tree Bower my Prison, but the advance in rhythm and in exactness of description is very striking:

that branchless ash,
Unsun'd and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,
Fann'd by the water-fall! (2)

The lines which follow the couplet quoted from To a Young Friend establish the eighteenth century connections of the poem:

Calm Pensiveness might muse herself to sleep
recalls

Had Melancholy mus'd herself to sleep
in Melancholy (3). In the following line the use of "fleecy dam" for sheep is a piece of stiffened poetic diction, for there

(1) N, I, 227.

(2) CPW, I, p.179 (ll. 13-16). Cf. below, p. 99 (Chapter III).

(3) CPW, I, p.73 (l.4). Cf. above, Chapter I, pp.38-9.

seems no reason why after the enumeration of particulars (the lichens, cypress, yew, ash) such a generalized term should be used(1).

There is one moment later in the poem at which the observation of landscape details becomes more vivid and more accurate:

O then 'twere loveliest sympathy, to mark
The berries of the half-uprooted ash
Dripping and bright;

This is vitiated, however, by the repetition in

and list the torrent's dash,—
Beneath the cypress, or the yew more dark,

and the sentimentality of

And haply, bason'd in some unsunn'd cleft,
A beauteous spring, the rock's collected tears,
Sleeps sheltered there, scarce wrinkled by the gale!

The picture of the two poets climbing the hill, alternatively engaged in talking, in enjoying the scenery and in composing poetry, does not escape being ludicrous:

arm linked in friendly arm,
Save if the one, his muse's witching charm
Muttering brow-bent, at unwatch'd distance lag;

The poem as a whole gives an impression of trying to find an escape-route from the pressures of life and "the stirring world", as is clearly shown by these two passages:

Ah! dearest youth! it were a lot divine
To cheat our noons in moralising mood,

and

And from the stirring world up-lifted high
(Whose noises, faintly wafted on the wind,
To quiet musings shall attune the mind,
And oft the melancholy theme supply),...

(1) In the poem To a Friend who had declared his intention of writing no more Poetry (CPW, I, pp.158-160) a Spenserian diction is used for satiric purposes, but in To a Young Friend (which dates from the same year) the poetic diction seems altogether straight-faced.

The second of these passages in its deliberate sentimentality even reminds one of Master Stephen's "Have you a stoole there, to be melancholy' upon?" in Ben Jonson's Every Man in his Humour (1).

To a Young Friend, however, does not solely consist of accounts of walks in the country, for in the course of the poem it transpires that the hill is partly there to produce a parallel with "the Hill of Knowledge" which the speaker has tried to ascend:

Thus rudely vers'd in allegoric lore,
The Hill of Knowledge I essayed to trace;

As in To the Autumnal Moon (2) there is an unresolved tension between the literal and the figurative meanings of the central image. The similarity of subjects in To a Young Friend and This Lime-tree Bower my Prison makes comparison inevitable. One of the reasons why This Lime-tree Bower my Prison is a so much better poem is that in this poem the experience described (the imagined and the actual experience of nature and the contact with other people established through it) sufficesⁱⁿ itself and does not need any additional allegorical overtones.

In a discussion of the poems written in 1795 and 1796 The Eolian Harp should occupy a central position, as it is the finest poem of this group and as it is also representative of the way these poems combine (not altogether successfully) various, and to a certain extent mutually contradictory, attitudes and interests. The first draft (3), dated August 20th, 1795, and sixteen-and-a-half lines long, has a simple structure, only one time and one locality.

(1) Jonson, Every Man in his Humour, III, i, ll.88-9 (ed. Simpson, p.46).

(2) CPW, I, p. 5. Cf. above, Chapter I, p.25 and p.27.

(3) in the library of Rugby School. Reprinted in CPW, II, p.1001, with slight inaccuracies in punctuation and its use of capitals. For an account of the Rugby MSS., cf. below, Appendix, pp. 163-6.

It contains three elements: the scene observed together with the emotions experienced, the presence of Sara, and the harp (the exact significance of which is not clear in the unfinished first draft). The first two elements are intimately combined: Sara and the speaker are watching the same scene and, it is suggested at any rate, experiencing the same emotions. Sara is addressed twice and, not unnaturally in a poem which anticipates the marriage soon to come, there is a continuous stress on "we", "us" and "ours". There are moments, however, at which the connection between the landscape and Sara is established with less success. The parenthesis in the fifth line

(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)

which qualifies the jasmine and the myrtle is a strained attempt to establish a link between the scene and the relationship with Sara. Its tone is smug and it reduces the jasmine and the myrtle (and threatens to reduce the whole description of the cottage and its surroundings) to "a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses" (1). Even more strained is the compliment in the eighth line:

.....and mark the Star of eve
Serenely brilliant, like thy polish'd Sense,
Shine opposite!

Here the correspondence between the evening star and Sara's "Sense" is utterly vague. The strained quality of the simile also destroys any emotional associations between the feelings of the speaker for the woman by his side and the experience of looking at the evening star. These associations are present here, as they were

(1) from Coleridge's own definition of allegory as distinguished from symbol in The Statesman's Manual, pp.36-7.

in the early poem To the Evening Star (1), in which the same words "serenely brilliant" were used to describe both star and beloved.

The first draft ends with the description of a harp in the window:

and behold, my love!
In the half-closed window we will place the Harp,
Which by the desultory Breeze caress'd,
Like some coy maid half willing to be woo'd,
Utters such sweet Upbraidings, as perforce,
Tempt to repeat the wrong!

A second draft of the poem (2) exists in which the first sixteen-and-a-half lines are substantially the same as in the first draft. There are some minor alterations, but two changes are more important. The strained compliment

brilliant, like thy polish'd Sense,
is replaced by the less obtrusive, but in its vagueness scarcely more successful

(such should WISDOM be!)

In lines 9 and 10 there is a considerable improvement in the rhythm and diction. The wooden

What snatches of perfume
The noiseless gale from yonder bean-field wafts!

with its hackneyed poetic diction in the second line is changed into

How exquisite the Scents
Snatch'd from yon Bean-field! And the world go hush'd!

Here the verb "snatch'd" beautifully conveys the sharpness with which the smell 'hits' the speaker, and the slowing-down of the rhythm through the broken-up sentence structure gives a perfect

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- (1) CPW, I, p.17. Cf. above, Chapter I, p.29.
(2) also in the library of Rugby College. Printed in CPW, II, pp.1022-3, also with slight inaccuracies in punctuation. For arguments for dating this draft prior to April 1796, cf. below, Appendix, pp.165-b.

sense of the last sounds of the day dying away into silence (1). Thus the following lines, unimpressive in the first draft, have been adequately introduced and form a fitting ending of the first section(2):

The stilly murmur of the far-off Sea
Tells us of Silence!

The sound of the sea is so subdued that, paradoxically, it seems to emphasize the prevailing silence.

The main difference between the first and the second draft, however, is the way in which the original text has been expanded. The account of the scene and experience described in the first draft has been extended considerably and three sections have been added. The first of these describes an experience which is supposed to have taken place before the scene described in the first twenty-five lines. The second consists of a philosophical speculation based on this experience and the third is a moralizing passage criticizing the philosophical and religious position reached in the preceding section.

In the opening scene it is the description of the harp which is elaborated through a rich epic simile:

And now it's strings
Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
Over delicious Surges sink and rise
In airy voyage, Music such as erst
Round rosy bowers (so Legendaries tell)
To sleeping Maids came floating witchingly

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- (1) For a different emphasis, cf. Max F. Schulz, The Poetic Voices of Coleridge, p.77: "the resort to italics tacitly admits failure". In a later passage, however, Schulz notices the improvement brought about by the revision of these lines (cf. op.cit., pp.98-9).
- (2) These sections are not thus differentiated in the draft or in the edition of 1796. The division into sections used here corresponds with a later division into paragraphs which Coleridge introduced in Sibylline Leaves (pp.175 - 7) and which was adopted in all subsequent editions of his poems.

By wand'ring West winds stoln from Faery land,
 Where on some magic Hybla MELODIES
 Round many a newborn honey-dropping Flower
 Footless and wild, like Birds of Paradise,
 Nor pause nor perch, warbling on untir'd wing. (1)

Of the three sections added the first (the account of a previous experience) explains the function of the harp in the poem. The harp played upon by the wind is like the speaker's "indolent and passive ~~brain~~^{Mind}" through which all sorts of thoughts move:

And thus, my Love! as on the midway Slope
 Of yonder Hill I stretch my limbs at noon
 And tranquil muse upon Tranquillity,
 Full many a Thought uncall'd and undetain'd
 And many idle flitting Phantasies
 Traverse my indolent and passive Mind
 As wild, as various, as the random Gales
 That swell or flutter on this subject Lute.

The next section presents a philosophical speculation based on this, although Coleridge is careful not to commit himself to the doctrine expressed. If the mind is like a harp played upon by the wind, everything might be said to be brought into life by a universal burst of energy, i.e. God:

(1) The Gutch Notebook (N, I, 51) contains a loosely constructed earlier version of lines 24-7:

Light cargoes waff waft of modulated Sound
 From viewless Hybla brought, when Melodies
 Like Birds of Paradise on wings, that aye
 Disport in wild variety of hues,
 Murmur around the honey-dropping flowers.

In this entry "viewless Hybla" has a Miltonic stateliness which is unlike the later variants. The improvement in rhythm in
 Footless and wild, like Birds of Paradise,
 Nor pause nor perch, warbling on untir'd wing
 (lines substantially retained in the published version of 1796) is striking. Miss Coburn dates the Notebook entry "probably before 20 August 1795", but it seems more likely that it was written after the first draft, late in 1795 or early 1796.

And what if all of animated Life
 Be but as Instruments diversely fram'd
 That tremble into thought, while thro' them breathes
 One infinite and intellectual Breeze?
 And all in diff'rent Heights so aptly hung,
 That Murmurs indistinct and Bursts sublime,
 Shrill Discords and most soothing Melodies,
 Harmonious from Creation's vast concert?
 Thus God would be the universal Soul,
 Mechaniz'd matter as th'organic harps
 And each one's Tunes be that, which each calls I.

The poem ends with a piece of moralizing. Sara bids the speaker to leave off "these unhallow'd Thoughts" and he gives in:

Thou biddest me walk humbly with my God!
 Meek Daughter in the family of Christ.
 Wisely thou sayest, and holy are thy words!

The version published in 1796 differs from the second draft in several points. The most important of these are the tightening-up of the simile describing the music of the harp (in which the "rosy bowers" and "magic Hybla" are cut out), the addition of two lines to the account given of the experience "on the midway slope of yonder hill",

¶Whilst through my half-clos'd eye-lids I behold
 The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
 and a condensation and a substantial change in the phrasing of the philosophical speculation which becomes

And what if all of animated nature
 Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
 That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
 Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
 At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

The new version is noticeably less materialistic than the second draft and Professor Piper has suggested that the word "plastic"

shows that Coleridge had been reading Cudworth (1), the first part of whose Intellectual System he had borrowed from the Bristol library in May 1795 (2). The difference, however, between the neo-Platonism of

Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
and the refined materialism of

Mechaniz'd matter as th'organic harps
is not necessarily as great as it may at first seem. As Coleridge himself wrote years later in the Biographia Literaria:

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- (1) cf. H.W.Piper, The Active Universe, p.43. Piper's suggestion is qualified by his note on the same page: "Though the word 'plastic' strongly suggests Cudworth's influence, it by no means proves it,....The word 'plastic' was common property, even Darwin*referring to 'Nature's plastic power' (The Botanic Garden, I.iv.59)." A letter to Thelwall (31 December 1796), in which Coleridge toys with various philosophical accounts of the nature of life, suggests a more contemporaneous source. Here the five lines quoted (bottom quotation on p.70) are used to paraphrase the views of Monro, who "believes in a plastic immaterial Nature—all-pervading" (CL, I,p.294), a system which to Coleridge must have seemed to lie half-way between Berkeley's idealism and Priestley's refined materialism. By the time Coleridge delivered the Philosophical Lectures (Dec.1818-March 1819) the same thought was associated with Berkeleian idealism: "...an idealist, would declare the material and the corporeal world to be wholly subjective, that is, to exist only as far as it is perceived. In other words, he, the idealist, concedes an existence to one of the two terms only—to the natura naturans, in Berkeley's language, ~~to God~~, and to the finite minds on which it acts, the NATURA NATURATA, or the bodily world, being the result, even as the tune between the wind and the Aeolian harp. I remember when I was yet young this fancy struck me wonderfully, and here are some verses I wrote on the subject:....." (op. cit., p.371). A quotation of the same five lines follows. The image of the harp, however, may well derive from Akenside's image of Mammon's harp in The Pleasures of the Imagination, I, ll. 109-132 (London, 1744, pp.15-6) (cf. Beer, Coleridge the Visionary, p.317n.)
- (2) cf. George Whalley, The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge, 1793-8, The Library, 1949, p.120. Coleridge borrowed it again in November 1796, cf. Whalley, loc.cit., p.124.

....Forssince impenetrability is intelligible only as a mode of resistance, its admission places the essence of matter in an act of power which it possesses in common with spirit, and body and spirit are therefore no longer absolutely heterogeneous but may, without any absurdity, be supposed to be different modes or degrees in perfection of a common substratum..... Thus as materialism has been generally taught it is utterly unintelligible,....But as soon as it becomes intelligible it ceases to be materialism. In order to explain thinking, as a material phenomenon, it is necessary to refine matter into a mere modification of intelligence, with the twofold function of appearing and perceiving. Even so did Priestley in his controversy with Price. He stript matter of all its material properties; substituted spiritual powers; (1)

The mention of Priestley in this quotation suggests that both ^{ver}versions of The Eolian Harp (but the second draft more obviously so than the 1796 text) postulate a Unitarian philosophy to which Coleridge refuses to commit himself definitively. Professor Piper has related various aspects of Coleridge's early poetry to Unitarian doctrines and his summing-up of Priestley's tenets conforms to the philosophical speculations of both versions of The Eolian Harp:

For Priestley matter was not only endowed with feeling and intellect but merged with the divinity. God, as a spirit was superior to, but not different in kind from matter, that is to say energy, and this natural energy is what we know of God. (2)

The second edition of Poems (1797) reprints the 1796 text of The Eolian Harp, but it is clear from Coleridge's letter to Cottle of July 3, 1797, (3) that Coleridge wanted to make a drastic cut in the description of the harp:

P. 97. Scratch out these three lines

'Where melodies round honey-dropping flowers
'Footless & wild like birds of Paradise
'Nor pause nor perch hovering on untamed wing

(1) BL, I, pp.88, 91.

(2) Piper, The Active Universe, p.35.

(3) CL, I, p.331.

and put a full stop instead of a Comma at 'Fairy-land.'—
The cut was not adopted until the edition of 1803 (1), but the lines were restored in 1817. The edition of 1803 also contains an important addition:

Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a World like this,
Where e'en the Breezes of the simple Air
Possess the power and Spirit of Melody!

These lines were retained, with some alterations, in Sibylline Leaves (1817) and the Errata to that volume (2) contained the important lines:

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where—

This passage was kept in the Poetical Works of 1828, which printed the definitive text of the poem.

In the second draft and in later versions there is a strong tension between the abrupt retraction of the final section and the rest of the poem. The tension becomes a total discrepancy after the addition of the "one Life" passage and the pious ending vitiates the strength of the poem. In the words of Humphry House:

....what is now evident is that the ending as it stands seems to involve a rejection also of the vital personal experience which was added in 1817: it murders the new-born life. (3)

If Sara is antagonistic towards the philosophizing of the speaker, her hostility, by implication, extends to the creation

- (1) doubtless through Lamb, who saw the edition of 1803 through the press, and who, as he did not receive any instructions from Coleridge, had to restrict himself to adopting older revisions. Cf. Letters of Charles Lamb, I, pp. 346-7. Cf. also above, Chapter I, p. 22.
- (2) Sibylline Leaves, inserted between p.X and p.l.
- (3) House, Coleridge, pp. 77-8.

of poetry, for not only is poetry associated with the image of the Aeolian harp on which the philosophizing is based, but there is also a direct parallel, through the figure of the harp, between the effect of sense-impressions on the brain and that of the divine energy in animating nature, as it is precisely these sense-impressions which produce the two experiences used in this poem. In other words, we do not need much biographical evidence to see that there was considerable tension between Coleridge's feelings for Sara and his creation of poetry. We shall see that this tension also produced important conflicts in other poems of the same time(1).

Some of this tension is already present in the ending of the first draft, where there is a parallel between the situations of the harp played upon by the wind and the woman wooed by the speaker, a parallel highlighted by the simile:

Like some coy maid half willing to be woo'd,
Utters such sweet Upbraidings, as perforce,
Tempt to repeat the wrong!

Thus the first draft ends on the word "wrong", which suggests that, if the action of the lover in the simile is reprehensible, there is also something wrong in the activity exercised on the harp, and which it is compared, and in the attitude of the speaker, with which it is such a curious parallel. In the second draft the description of the harp is extended, but the final one-and-a-half lines from the preceding quotation are retained, so that, although the weight of the passage falls on the beauty of the music of the harp, there is still an ambivalence in its nature.

Sara's hostility to the philosophy of the poem seems to be based on a belief that it is sinful to form theories about the nature of God and the universe, and that it is sufficient to

(1) cf. below, pp. 82-3 and p. 92.

believe in God without questioning further. If one accepts Piper's suggestion that the philosophical speculation in The Eolian Harp is basically Unitarian, this could possibly have formed an additional, more specific reason for Sara's antagonism. Unitarianism and its associations of sympathy with revolutionary France was not acceptable to the English establishment or the public at large of the time, as had been shown by the expulsion of Dr. Frennd from Cambridge in 1792 (1) and the unpopularity of Joseph Priestley. On that level Sara's "meek"-ness may have sprung from a wish to choose the way of least resistance and to subdue the more shocking of her husband's revolutionary ideas.

It is difficult to believe, however, that the retraction at the end of the poem was due to Sara's intervention only and to deny that there is something unsatisfactory about the central image, the harp, itself. J.B. Beer has said about this image:

The drawback of the Aeolian Harp was that, if interpreted literally, the divine activity in the universe was made to seem, like the breeze blowing on the harp, a mechanical process. (2)

This not only applies to the "divine activity in the universe" but also, and without the qualification "if interpreted literally", to the movement of sense-impressions through the brain (3) which remains

(1) On Frennd and his influence in Coleridge's life, cf. E.K. Chambers, S.T. Coleridge, pp. 18, 20-1, L. Hanson, The Life of S.T. Coleridge, pp. 30, 33, 41, 64, 300, and H.W. Piper, The Active Universe, p. 29.

(2) J.B. Beer, Coleridge the Visionary, p. 92,

(3) cf. Humphry House, Coleridge, p. 77: "It is possible that the sudden volte face in that version is to be explained less by a wish to repudiate the doctrine than by an anticipation of the later thought about the possible origin of moral evil in the 'streamy nature' of association." (House's quotation refers to a Notebook passage, dated December 28, 1803; N, I, 1779.) Cf. also the later rejection of Hartleian associationism in BL, I, p. 81 and in a marginal note in Kant, quoted below, Chapter III, p. 117. Both passages reject the account of the brain as an Aeolian harp.

"indolent" and "passive". It seems likely that the retraction at the end of the poem is at least partly there, because Coleridge recognized that the absence of the will and of any shaping thought was unsatisfactory. This recognition may explain why the florid description of the harp,^{in one sense} the symbol of thoughts moving at random through the brain, in the second draft was shortened in the edition of 1796 and drastically curtailed in the proposed alterations for that of 1797.

There is, however, also another factor, a distrust of a state in which a man can "tranquil muse upon tranquillity". Coleridge tries to diminish the value of such an experience:

Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,

and launches straightaway into philosophical speculations. This whole passage seems a perfect illustration of Keats's verdict on Coleridge:

.....it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrarium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining Content with half knowledge. (1)

In The Eolian Harp the first twenty-five lines are an account of "tranquil" musing "upon tranquillity". Although the experience related in the poem is diminished through the denigrating qualifications quoted, through the succeeding philosophical speculations and through the pious close at the end, Coleridge made the account of the first

(1) Keats, Letters, I, pp.193-4. For a qualification of Keats's words as a verdict on Coleridge, cf. below, ~~Conclusion~~, p 147, pp.149-150.
Epilogue

experience more substantial through the later additions which in the definitive version read:

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where—
Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a world so fill'd;
Where the breeze slumbers, and the mute still air
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

Although the content of this can be analyzed in relation to Coleridge's later philosophical thought, it comes in the poem as the expression of an emotion, arrived at intuitively and (although added so much later) based on the sense-experience which precedes it in the poem. Here there is no "irritable reaching after fact and reason" and, unlike the passage of philosophical speculation ("And what if all of animated nature,..."), it could be used to illustrate Keats's

What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether
it existed before or not—....O for a Life of Sensations
rather than of Thoughts! (1)

The Eolian Harp is a flawed masterpiece. On the credit side, there is a command of language which goes far beyond that of the earlier poems. The lines

How exquisite the scents
Snatch'd from yon bean-field!

have already been commented upon (2). There is also a striking power and rhythmical subtlety in the description of movement in

Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untam'd wing!

Structurally The Eolian Harp for the first time attempted something which could be used again in what later critics, borrowing

(1) Keats, Letters, I, p.184.

(2) cf. above, pp. 67-8.

Coleridge's own term for The Nightingale, have called the conversation poem (1). The structure of The Eolian Harp, in the words of H.J.W. Milley, "a short poem in blank verse, starting in a conversational manner, rising to a climax of exalted meditation and returning to the quiet conversational tone of the beginning" (2), not only points forward to Coleridge's own later conversation poems but also to some of Wordsworth's works, especially Tintern Abbey.

The climax of the poem (the later addition beginning "O! the one Life within us and abroad,...") is a most successful statement of Coleridge's later belief in the fundamental unity of the universe, in what Humphry House has called "a fundamental undivided attunement, not only to the human mind to external nature but also of elements of external nature to each other" (3), a belief which also produced the theory of the imagination and forms the basis of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

The Eolian Harp, however, is an unsatisfactory poem for several reasons. In the definitive version there is a certain tension between the intuitively held belief in "the one Life" and the speculations about "organic harps diversely fram'd" and a deep-rooted conflict between both these passages (but especially the former) and the pious ending. Even apart from this conflict, it is difficult not to see the tortuous diction and the smugness of the final passage as a serious flaw in the poem:

nor such thoughts
Dim and unhallow'd dost thou not reject,
And biddest me walk humbly with my God,
Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!

- (1) The term was revived by G. McLean Harper, Coleridge's Conversation Poems, Quarterly Review, Vol. 244, pp. 284-298.
 (2) Some Notes on Coleridge's 'Eolian Harp', Modern Philology, 1939, pp. 368-9.
 (3) House, Coleridge, p. 75.

Nowhere in Coleridge's poetry, with the exception of the original version of Dejection (1), is there such an open conflict between Coleridge's feelings and poetic interests on the one hand and Sara's attitude on the other. Several poems contemporary with The Eolian Harp, however, do contain a strong tension between his attitude to nature and his feelings for Sara. To the Nightingale (2) and Lines Composed while climbing the Left Ascent of Brockley Coomb (3) are unlike Coleridge's early poetry in that there are no overt connections between nature and the moral world through similes, but in both poems the pleasure derived from the enjoyment of nature is subordinated to that given by the voice and the company of Sara.

To the Nightingale opens with a rather flat invocation in the eighteenth century Miltonizing style:

Sister of love-lorn Poets, Philomel!

This is followed by a vivid description of the city poet in his garret:

How many Bards in city garret pent,
While at their window they with downward eye
Mark the faint lamp-beam on the kennel'd mud,
And listen to the drowsy cry of Watchmen
(Those hoarse unfeather'd Nightingales of Time!),...

The last of these five lines possesses a precision, an economy and a 'tough reasonableness' which ~~is~~^{are} absent from the rest of the poem and indeed from most of the eighteenth century poems based on Milton's early works. The paradox in the line is expressed with

(1) cf. the lines

I speak not now of those habitual Ills
That wear out Life, when two unequal Minds
Meet in one House and two discordant Wills—

(1) 243-5 in the original version, first published by De Selincourt, Essays and Studies, XXII, 1937, pp.16-25).

(2) PW, I, pp.93-4.

(3) PW, I, p.94.

great force: the watchmen are most unlike nightingales in that their voices are not at all melodious and that they are not birds, but their cries announcing the time are heard at the time of evening when nightingales should sing, so the watchmen form a sort of nightingale-substitute for the city dweller. Remembering the lines

For I was reared
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars...

from Frost at Midnight (1) and the passage

At eve, sky-gazing in 'ecstatic fit'
(Alas! for cloister'd in a city School
The Sky was all, I knew, of Beautiful)
At the barr'd window often did I sit,
And oft upon the leaded School-roof lay,

from the original version of Dejection (2), it seems legitimate to conclude that the strength in the lines from To the Nightingale is there as the result of a felt personal experience.

The subsequent lines, however, appear to be an imitation of an established literary mode. In them Coleridge contrasts his more fortunate position with that of the city poet, but he fails to retain the vividness of the earlier passage and lapses back into eighteenth century Miltonisms:

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- (1) CPW, I, pp.240-2 (the quotation is on p.242, ll.51-3).
(2) ll.62-66 (De Selincourt, Essays and Studies, XXII, 1937, p.17)
Cf. also the following passage from The Prelude, addressed to Coleridge:

Of Rivers, Fields,
And Groves I speak to Thee, my Friend! to Thee,
Who, yet a liveried School-Boy, in the depths
Of the huge City, on the leaded Roof
Of that wide Edifice, thy Home and School,
Wert used to lie and gaze upon the clouds
Moving in Heaven;

(The Prelude, 1805 version, VI, ll.264-270, p.184)

But I do hear thee, and the high bough mark,
 Within whose mild moon-mellow'd foliage hid
 Thou warblest sad thy pity-pleading strains.

Especially the last of these lines leans heavily on Milton,
 recalling the nightingale of Il Penseroso:

'Less Philomel will daign a Song,
 In her sweetest, saddest plight,....(1)

A few lines later the nightingale's literary ancestry is
 acknowledged through direct quotation:

'Most musical, most melancholy' Bird! (2)

This quotation confines the nightingale within a specific literary
 context and thus diminishes its importance. This is not an
unfortunate lapse, but forms part of an ironical use of anti-climax,
 so that the emphasis can be shifted to Sara. The preceding lines
 had moved to something beyond mere writing in a literary mode and
 had become a near-ecstatic account of the nightingale's song:

O! I have listen'd, till my working soul,
 Waked by thos e strains to thousand phantasies,
 Absorb'd hath ceased to listen!

Coleridge goes on as if intending to continue this state of
 ecstasy, but instead of reaching towards a climax he changes his
 attitude and moves from the account of the song of the bird
 through the slight belittlement implied in the quotation from
 Milton to a statement of his preference for Sara's voice:

Therefore oft,
 I hymn thy name: and with a proud delight
 Oft will I tell thee, Minstrel of the Moon!
 'Most musical, most melancholy' Bird!
 That all thy soft diversities of tone,.....
 Are not so sweet as is the voice of her,
 My Sara—best beloved of human kind!
 When breathing the pure soul of tenderness,
 She thrills me with the Husband's promis'd name!

(1) Milton, Il Penseroso, ll. 56-7 (Poetical Works, p.425).

(2) cf. Il Penseroso, line 6 2 (Poetical Works, p.425).

Brockley Coomb shows the same transition from nature to Sara. Far more than in To the Nightingale there is an emphasis on detailed description which forms the substance of the first fourteen lines. Some of it is rather flat and is again based on Milton through minor eighteenth century poetry:

sweet songsters near
Warble in shade their wild-wood melody:

Subsequent lines are more vivid, even though they are laborious in diction:

Up scour the startling stragglers of the flock
That on green plots o'er precipices browse;

Some details are both vivid and expressed in a simple fashion:

From the deep fissures of the naked rock
The Yew-tree bursts!

The last lines of the poem shift the emphasis to Sara: however attractive the landscape is, it only seem to bring out the speaker's loneliness caused by Sara's absence.

Although To the Nightingale and Brockley Coomb end with statements of Sara's superiority over the nightingale and of her supreme importance respectively, the real weight of both poems falls elsewhere: in To the Nightingale on the experience of city life and the near-ecstasy produced by the nightingale's song, in Brockley Coomb on the detailed landscape description. The closing lines of both poems come as rather forced afterthoughts. In To the Nightingale this is partly concealed through the skilful handling of the anti-climax, but in Brockley Coomb the transition is very abrupt. The closing lines are literary in the worst sense of the word and degenerate into Bathos:

Deep sighs my lonely heart: I drop the tear:
Enchanting spot! O were my Sara here! (1)

(1) With "I drop the tear" cf. "Where oft the tear shall grateful start..." (Happiness, quoted above, Chapter I, p.37) and Bowles' "The farewell tear, which now he turns to pay.." (quoted above, Chapter I, p.38).

A tension between the relationship with Sara and the life of the imagination, similar to that in The Eolian Harp, though not as pronounced, is to be found in Lines written at Shurton Bars (1). In this poem it is the sixth stanza which forms an obvious parallel with The Eolian Harp, partly because the phrase "In bold ambitious sweep" seems more appropriate to a harp than to the tides of the sea:

And hark, my Love! The sea-breeze moans
Through yon raft house! O'er rolling stones
In bold ambitious sweep
The onward-surgin' tides supply
The silence of the cloudless sky
With mimic thunders deep.

The poem celebrates the speaker's relationship with Sara and disparages the life he led "Ere Peace with Sara came". It seems ironical therefore that the most imaginative passage in the poem is that which describes the speaker's life before his relationship with Sara began:

Time was, I should have thought it sweet
To count the echoings of my feet,
And watch the storm-vex'd flame.

And there in black soul-jaundic'd fit
A sad gloom-pamper'd Man to sit,
And listen to the roar:
When mountain surges bellowing deep
With an uncouth monster-leap
Plung'd foaming on the shore.

Compared with this, the speaker's anticipation of his next meeting with Sara is another instance of unrelieved bathos:

The tears that tremble down your cheek,
Shall bathe my kisses chaste and meek
In Pity's dew divine;
And from your heart the sighs that steal
Shall make your rising bosom feel
The answering swell of mine!

(1) CPW, I, pp.96-100.

In the final stanza Coleridge tries to combine his interest in science with his feelings for Sara, but he only succeeds in producing a very strained "metaphysical" image, which had to be elucidated by a long pedantic note about flashes of light, possibly due to electricity, which had been observed on flowers in Sweden (1):

'Tis said, in Summer's evening hour
Flashes the golden-colour'd flower
A fair electric flame:
And so shall flash my love-charge'd eye
When all the heart's big ecstasy
Shoots rapid through the frame!

In structure Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement (2) resembles The Eolian Harp. Like The Eolian Harp, it opens with a description of life in the cottage and of the surrounding landscape. It then moves on to an ecstatic account of the experience which looking at and scrambling in the countryside had produced. This passage is followed by an impassioned section on the responsibilities of a poet in the world at large which conflict with a life of pleasant seclusion. The poem ends with an anticipation of future life in the cottage, thus returning to the quiet and restrained tone of the opening. The sense of conflict which is inherent in most of the poems of this period is now brought into the open and has become the main theme of the poem. This time, however, it is not a conflict between Sara and poetry, for Sara is for the time being subsumed in the world of seclusion represented by the cottage and its surroundings, but between life in "the Valley of Seclusion" and a man's responsibilities in the world. This concern with wider responsibilities may well have been partly due to the influence

(1) The note only appeared in the 1796 and 1797 editions of Poems on Various Subjects. It has been reprinted in CPW, I, pp. 99-100 n. As Lowes has shown, it was taken from Darwin (cf. above, Introduction, p.6).

(2) CPW, I, pp.106-8.

of Milton, who, as House points out, was "the great prototype of the poet who had been politician and man of literary action too" (1), but the conflict in the poem is also caused by a distrust of "holy indolence" (2) and of poetic creation based on personal happiness and sense experience.

This distrust is equally fundamental in Coleridge and similar to what we found in The Eolian Harp. Just as in The Eolian Harp Coleridge does not commit himself to the philosophical speculations he embarks on, so in Reflections the idea that the landscape described is so rich and varied that it can be seen as a microcosm of the whole world, is undercut by the use of "methought" and "seem'd":

God, methought,
Had built him there a Temple: the whole World
Seem'd imaged in its vast circumference: (2)

The passage announcing the speaker's farewell to the cottage opens with the lines:

Ah! quiet Dell! dear Cot, and Mount sublime!
I was constrain'd to quit you. Was it right,
While my unnumber'd brethren toil'd and bled,
That I should dream away the entrusted hours
On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart
With feelings all too delicate for use?

Ironically, the preceding passage which describes the existence the speaker is bidding farewell to, creates the impression of a much fuller life than "dream away the entrusted hours/On rose-leaf beds" would suggest. In fact, the finest passages in the poem are formed by the accurate description of the landscape near the

(1) House, Coleridge, p. 63.

(2) The phrase is Wordsworth's, cf. The Prelude, p.548.

(3) It is to be noted that Coleridge is careful to avoid pantheist heresies and that these lines are in accordance with orthodox Christian thinking. Hence it would seem that Coleridge's hesitation and in The Eolian Harp is not solely caused by fear of lapsing into pantheism.

cottage and by the account of the experience which sense impressions and personal happiness had produced, an account which is substantiated by previous observation:

Here the bleak mount,
 The bare bleak mountain speckled thin with sheep;
 Grey clouds, that shadowing spot the sunny fields;
 And river, now with bushy rocks o'er-brow'd,
 Now winding bright and full, with naked banks;
 And seats, and lawns, the Abbey and the wood,
 And cots, and hamlets, and faint city-spire;
 The Channel there, the Islands and white sails,
 Dim coasts, and cloud-like hills, and shoreless Ocean—
 It seem'd like Omnipresence! God, methought,
 Had built him there a Temple: the whole World
 Seem'd imag'd in its vast circumference:
 No wish profan'd my overwhelm'd heart.
 Blest hour! It was a luxury,—to be!

Beside this, the call to duty sounds pathetic:

I therefore go, and join head, heart, and hand,
 Active and firm, to fight the bloodless fight
 Of Science, Freedom and the Truth in Christ.

"Bloodless" is indeed the right epithet for these lines.

The use of empty personifications in

oft as thou scann'st
 The sluggard Pity's vision-weaving tribe!
 Whos sigh for Wretchedness, yet shun the Wretched,...

makes it surprising that Coleridge called the Reflections his best poem in a letter to Southey (written in July 1797 after the composition of a much more mature poem, This Lime-tree Bower my Prison), while criticizing the Monody on the Death of Chatterton severely for its many abstractions, which he called "shadowy nobodies" (1);

The contrast between Reflections and To a Young Friend is striking: in the former poem an experience which produced a rich

(1) CL, I, p.333

passage in the poem is dismissed as dreaming away the time "on rose-leaf beds", in the latter the sentimental escapism which produced an, on the whole, very bad poem is accepted quite uncritically.

In his essay Coleridge's Conversation Poems (1) R.H.Fogle has analyzed the structure of the conversation poems in the word:

They have a centre and a centrality, which generally come from a central philosophical idea used as a counterpoint for the concrete psychological experience which makes the poem's wholeness and life. (2)

This statement, however, is incomplete, for in some of the conversation poems there is more than one central philosophical idea.

The Eolian Harp, in its final version, contains three: the "one Life" passage, the half-Unitarian, half-neo-Platonic speculation, and the orthodox Christian outlook of the end of the poem. Part of the reason why The Eolian Harp fails to achieve any "wholeness" is the fact that the narrow-minded Christianity of the final section clashes with the two other philosophical ideas and also with the central psychological experience. Similarly, in Reflections the idea that sense experience and personal happiness are in themselves valuable is undermined by the other idea that they are no more than dreaming "on rose-leaf beds" compared with one's larger responsibilities. The two ideas clash and do not form a very satisfactory "counterpoint" for the "concrete psychological experience", the speaker's happiness in the cottage and his regrets at having to leave it.

Reflections is given the motto from Horace, "Sermoni propria" (3), which later was also used in an autograph manuscript of Fears in Solitude in the following context:

N.B. The above is perhaps not Poetry,—but rather a sort of middle thing between Poetry and Oratory—sermoni propria.—

(1) Tulane Studies in English, V, 1955, pp. 103-110.

(2) loc. cit., pp. 106-7.

(3) It was first pointed out in an editorial note in Notes and Queries, VI, 1959, p.144n, that this is a misquotation and that Horace's words are "sermoni propiora".

Some parts are, I am conscious, too tame even for animated prose. (1)

The words "Sermoni propria" are also used in a letter to Sotheby of September 10, 1802:

I do not mean to exclude these formal Similies—there are moods of minds in which they are natural—pleasing moods of mind, & such as a Poet will have, & sometimes express; but they are not his highest, & most appropriate moods. They are 'Sermoni propria' which I once translated—'Properer for a Sermon'. (2)

The rather disparaging tone in both passages suggests that the use of the motto was an admission on the part of Coleridge himself of the inadequacy of the style of both Reflections and Fears in Solitude (3). Both poems deal to a large extent with political problems and it seems likely that this inadequacy of style in both cases consisted of an inappropriateness of the inflated diction to the political argument. It was probably intensified by an awareness of a lack of unity between the accounts of sense experience and the political sections. Max F. Schulz has pointed out (4) that, as in the case of Reflections the motto was not prefixed until the 1797 edition of Poems on Various Subjects, Coleridge's sense of this inadequacy must have been precipitated by the more flexible verse of This Lime-tree Bower my Prison, which had already been written, and of Frost at Midnight and The Nightingale, which were soon to come. This suggestion seems plausible, even though it makes the fact that Coleridge could still call Reflections "my best poem" as late as 1797 still more surprising (5).

(1) The note is reprinted in CPW, I, p.257n.

(2) CL, II, p.864.

(3) This admission of inadequacy has been noted by D.G.James, cf. The Romantic Comedy, p. 160.

(4) Notes and Queries, VI, 1959, p.144n.3.

(5) Cf. CL, I, p.333 and above, p.86.

Some mention should be made of an entirely different interpretation of Reflections from the one given here. Max F. Schulz, in his article Coleridge, Milton and lost Paradise (1) has argued that the personal aspects of the poem have been overstated by most critics and that the poem should be seen as a re-enactment of the Fall and the expulsion from Paradise. The "wealthy son of Commerce" from Bristol sauntering past the cottage is equated with Satan visiting Eden. It is true that life in and around the cottage might be compared with life in the Garden of Eden and that the sort of life which one is forced to lead in the world could be said to be a result of the Fall, but Schulz's argument unduly discounts the psychological relevance of the poem and its location in space and time. His account threatens to stiffen the poem with its more than vivid first half into an allegorical picture-frame.

Even apart from this, Schulz's account leaves two unresolved problems. If "Bristowa's citizen" should be seen as Satan, does this imply that he tempts the couple so that they commit a sin? The opposite is implied:

methought, it calm'd
His thirst of idle gold, and made him muse
With wiser feelings:

If the world of the cottage is to be seen as the Garden of Eden, how can the speaker dismiss life there as dreaming "away the entrusted hours/On rose-leaf beds"? The answer implied in Schulz's article is that this is self-delusion on the part of the speaker. He is lured away from Paradise through the intrusion of the "son of Commerce", just as Adam was lured away through Satan's machinations. This interpretation would imply a firm conviction

(1) Notes and Queries, VI, 1959, pp.143-4.

on the part of the speaker that he did the wrong thing in leaving his Eden. It is difficult to find such a conviction in the poem.

Schulz's account has been followed and modified by William H. Marshall (1), who suggests that the speaker is not only implicitly compared with Adam but also with Christ. The speaker is a militant follower of Christ certainly, but Marshall's account has the same drawbacks as that of Schulz, in that it unduly underemphasizes the personal side and the importance of nature in the poem and unnecessarily stiffens the poem into allegory. Marshall refers to Coleridge's own account of his psilanthropy:

...I was a psilanthropist, one of those who believe our Lord to have been the real son of Joseph, and who lay the main stress on the resurrection rather than on the crucifixion. (2)

He then proceeds:

....it is in his psilanthropy, I believe, existing outside of the personal situation and expressed through a simple antithesis between Man fallen and Man redeemed, the framework of the poem, that Coleridge fuses both sensibilities described by Mr. Schulz [(3)], and gives structural unity to the poem. (4)

Even if one accepts Marshall's interpretation, however, it is still difficult to agree with him that the poem achieves "structural unity". One of the most striking features of Reflections is precisely the lack of unity produced by the contemptuous dismissal of the experience which forms the basis of its first half and by the inappropriateness of the bombastic tone of the second half to the argument. The tone of this second half could indeed be said to be "properer for a sermon".

(1) Notes and Queries, VI, 1959, pp.319-321.

(2) BL, I, pp.114-5.

(3) i.e. "those informing the God-dominated seventeenth century and the rationalist-ridden eighteenth century" (Schulz, loc.cit., p.143).

(4) W.H. Marshall, loc.cit., p. 320.

The preceding analysis of Coleridge's poems written in 1795 and 1796 has shown that, although there is an increasing emphasis on description of nature, especially in the opening of The Eolian Harp and in Brockley Coomb, and although nature is less often used as an excuse for moral similes, the description of landscape details can still be inexact and primarily used for an allegorical purpose as in To a Young Friend. Sometimes the descriptions of nature are still generalized and seen through a Miltonic filter as in sections of To the Nightingale. Perhaps more important than this greater stress on details in nature is the fact that sense experience and the feeling it creates are now stressed as important elements of poetic creation in The Eolian Harp and Reflections. If one excepts the much later addition to The Eolian Harp, one finds that the poems of these two years contain one instance of an ecstatic expression of the beauty of the natural world based on previous observation:

God, methought,
 Had built him there a Temple: the whole World
 Seem'd imag'd in its vast circumference:
 No wish profan'd my overwhelm'd heart.
 Blest hour! It was a luxury,—to be! (1)

Although this personal experience now occupies a more important part in Coleridge's poetry, he does not have sufficient confidence in it to accept the resulting contact with nature, either in itself, or because of its use in poetry, without reservations. Hence many of the poems of 1795 and 1796 move away from personal experience to something else: To the Nightingale moves from an account of the beauty of the nightingale's song to a slightly forced compliment to Sara, whose voice is really much more beautiful, Reflections from an account of personal

(1) Reflections, ll.38-42 (PW, I, p.107).

happiness and enjoyment of nature to a statement that these things are no more than day-dreaming and that a man should play his part in solving the problems of the world, The Eolian Harp from accounts of sensory experience via a philosophical speculation to the pious retraction at the end.

The poems dating from this period fail to reconcile their "opposite or discordant qualities"⁽¹⁾. In all of them Coleridge's interest in nature clashes with other elements, with his feelings for Sara in To the Nightingale, Brockley Coomb, Shurton Bars and The Eolian Harp, with his philosophical speculations and his (or Sara's) religious scruples in The Eolian Harp, with his desire to take an active part in politics and the propagation of religion in Reflections.

The passage beginning

And what if all of animated nature....

in The Eolian Harp shows that sense experience could play a part in forming a theory about the universe, but at the same time this passage represents a movement away from the preceding account of sensory experience. As yet there are no implications that contact with nature may in itself lead to a deeper understanding of the universe and a direct contact with the divine. This idea finds full expression in:

So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence. (2)

(1) cf. BL, II, p.12.

(2) This Lime-tree Bower my Prison, ll.37-43 (CPW, I,p.180),
cf. below, Chapter III, pp. 102-3.

Chapter III
The Experience of Unity.
1797-1798.

Coleridge's early poems have little sense of unity. Of all the poems discussed in the first Chapter only the Sonnet to the River Otter approaches a unified expression, but there unity is destroyed by the sentimentality of the three-and-a-half lines. The poems written in 1795 and 1796 grope towards something more unified, but in none of them is structural unity established owing to the clashes between the various elements of the poems. It has been argued in the previous Chapter that the main reason for this is a lack of confidence in the personal experience which begins to emerge in these poems.

In the best poems dating from 1797 and 1798 there is a greater confidence in this personal experience and the experience is expressed in a unified way. The two things are closely related: the experience is based on a gradually emerging belief in "the one Life within us and abroad"(1) and the unified expression is the result of an attempt to reproduce this sense of unity in a poem. In Coleridge's later critical thought both the experience and the expression become the activities of the imagination:

It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. (2)

The use of the word "dissolves" does not imply that the imagination dissolves objects, for that would deprive the

(1) The Eolian Harp, p. 1.26 (CPW, I, p.101).

(2) BL, I, p.202.

world of its solidity (1), but that in the workings of the secondary imagination a thing perceived by the primary imagination must be related to everything in the "one Life" in Nature, in which Life the self is included. A similar idea about the formation of thoughts is expressed in a Notebook entry of 1803:

Nothing affects me much at the moment it happens.....For a Thing at the moment is but a Thing of the moment/it must be taken up into the mind, diffuse itself thro' the whole multitude of Shapes & Thoughts, not one of which it leaves untinged. (2)

In a letter to Poole, written as late as October 1797 but describing his own thoughts as a child, Coleridge wrote:

For from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c—my mind had been habituated to the Vast—& I never regarded my sensed in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my sight—even at that age. Should children be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii?—I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative.—I know no other way of giving the mind a love of 'the Great', & 'the Whole'.—Those who have been led to the same truths step by step thro' the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess—They contemplate nothing but parts—and all parts are necessarily little—and the Universe to them is but a mass of little things. (3)

There is no reason to assume that the account of his reading as a child and of his early habits of thinking is a falsification, although it is undoubtedly influenced by his later ideas, especially by the Berkeleian position which he held in 1797 (4). Humphry House has argued that the importance of this passage has been

(1) cf. BL, I, p.179: "It is the table itself, which the man of common sense believes himself to see, not the phantom of a table, from which he may argumentatively deduce the reality of a table, which he does not see."

(2) N, I, 1597.

(3) CL, I, p.354.

(4) cf. the discussion of This Lime-tree Bower my Prison, below, pp.102-3.

overstressed and that not enough account has been taken of the precise description of detail which one finds in the Notebooks (1). The growing attention to details is, as has been suggested in the previous Chapters, the most conspicuous development in Coleridge's early nature poetry, so House's argument forms a valid corrective to a conception of Coleridge as a starry-eyed visionary. On the other hand, the combination of Coleridge's belief in "the Great" and of his attention to small details suggests a conviction that sense experience is questionable if there is no strong sense of "the Whole" of which the details should form part and of the deeper reality of which external nature provides the images. This combination is exemplified by Coleridge's conversation poems and it is shown to be an aspect of the imagination in the Biographia Literaria (2).

From Coleridge's own testimony in the Biographia we know that in 1797 he was engaged on a poem to be called The Brook:

I had considered it as a defect in the admirable poem of the Task that the subject which gives the title to the work was not, and indeed could not be, carried on beyond the three or four first pages, and that throughout the poem the connections are frequently awkward, and the transitions abrupt and arbitrary. I sought for a subject that should give equal room and freedom for description, incident and impassioned reflections on men, nature and society, yet

(1) cf. House, Coleridge, p.47.

(2) cf. the comment on Paradise Lost, IX, ll. 1101-10: "This is creation rather than painting, or if painting, yet such, and with such co-presence of the whole picture flash'd at once upon the eye, as the sun paints in a camera obscura." (BL, II, pp.102-3) The Milton passage is contrasted with The Excursion, III, ll. 50-73, with its "minute accuracy in the painting of local imagery". Cf. with this and with the letter passage quoted on p. 94, this early Notebook entry: "Dr. Darwin's poetry, ~~akes~~ a succession of Landscapes or Paintings—it arrests the attention too often, and so prevents the rapidity necessary to pathos.—it ~~eeem~~ makes the great little.—seems to have wrätten his poem as Painters who of beautiful objects—take—Studies." (N, I, 132)

supply in itself a natural connection to the part, and unity to the whole. Such a subject I conceived myself to have found in a stream, traced from its source in the hills among the yellow-red moss and conical glass-shaped tufts of bent, to the first break or fall, where its drops became audible, and it begins to form a channel; thence to the peat and turf barn, itself built of the same dark squares as it sheltered; to the sheepfold; to the first cultivated plot of ground; to the lonely cottage and its bleak garden won from the heath; to the hamlet, the villages, the market-town, the manufactories and the sea-port. My walks, therefore, were almost daily on the top of Quantock and among its sloping coombs. With my pencil and memorandum-book in my hand I was making studies, as the artists call them, and often moulding my thoughts into verse, with the objects and imagery immediately before my senses. (1)

The Brook was never to be written, although its material may have been transmuted into a beautiful simile in The Ancient Mariner:

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like that of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune. (2)

On these lines and their relation to The Brook J.Livingstone Lowes comments:

And for myself, I do most potently and powerfully believe that these flawless stanzas.....far outweigh the loss of the "Hymns to the Sun, Moon and the Elements" and of "The Brook" itself. (3)

No one will deny the beauty of the stanza from The Ancient Mariner and its perfect fusion with the so different image of the journey of the ship accompanied by the angelic spirits, but Lowes' dismissal of an unwritten poem seems slightly presumptuous and this impression is increased by the condescension in the reference to

(1) BL, I, pp.128-9.

(2) The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, ll.367-372 (CPW, I,p.201).

(3) J.Livingstone Lowes, The Road to Xanadu,p.208.

"impassioned reflections on men, nature, and society" interspersing the long-drawn itinerary of The Brook,... (1)

"Long-drawn itinerary" suggests boredom and little appreciation of the attention given to natural details in the passage from the Biographia Literaria. Humphry House has stressed the influence of Cowper's style on the conversation poems, notably Frost at Midnight, and the advance on Cowper which this poem shows in, among other things, its closer relation of descriptive passages to their psychological effects and in its greater verbal concentration (2). In this connection the plan for a poem like The Task but with greater unity may be seen as an important step towards the mature conversation poems.

The Gutch Notebook contains a series of entries (3) which, as was first suggested by E.H.Coleridge (4), were almost certainly intended as studies for this poem. All these entries are interesting, but two in particular show a remarkable sensitivity for visual and auditory details and a remarkable evocative power:

The swallows interweaving there mid the paired
Sea-mews, at distance wildly-wailing.—

Sabbath day—from the
Miller's mossy wheel
the waterdrops dripp'd
leisurely—

It cannot be a coincidence that at the same time when The Brook was being planned and these notes made, detailed descriptions of nature in the Notebooks became more frequent. Some were later used in poems:

Behind the thin ~~grey~~
Grey cloud that cover'd but not hid the sky
The round full moon look'd small.— (5)

(1) J.Livingstone Lowes, The Road to Xanadu, p.208.

(2) cf. House, Coleridge, pp.71-3 and pp.78-83.

(3) the series is brought together as N, I, 213. Cf. also CPW, II, p.992.

(4) CPW, II, p.992.

(5) N, I, 216 (CPW, II, p.992)

became

The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.
The moon is behind, and at the full;
And yet she looks both small and dull. (1)

Others do not seem to have been thus used, but form a descriptive achievement in themselves, like the following prose statement:

The subtle snow in every breeze rose curling from the Grove,
like pillars of cottage smoke. (2)

Whether or not Coleridge would have been successful in giving "unity to the whole" in this unwritten poem, would, of course, be fruitless to speculate. The description in the Biographia Literaria represents Coleridge looking back over the years with his critical theory already fully formed, but even making allowances for this, it should be noted that the "unity to the parts" is not just a feat of construction but reflects the organic unity of the brook itself(3).

The first of Coleridge's poems to contain a sense of the totality of experience is This Lime-tree Bower my Prison (4). The poem was composed when Coleridge was visited by some friends (the Wordsworths and Charles Lamb), but was prevented from going out on a long walk with them, because, as Coleridge so charmingly puts it

(1) CPW, I, p.216 (Christabel, ll. #16-19).

(2) N, I, 217(CPW, II, p.993).

(3) cf.R.H.Fogle, The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism: "The brook is a living organism, which possesses on the one hand a perceptible beginning, a middle, and an end; and on the other a vital continuity and an inseparability of parts. It is a growing thing: it is born and proceeds from its source in the hills, and little by little increases, passing through a variety of scenes at once distinct and imperceptibly blended by the gradual movement of the stream."

(4) CPW, I, pp.178-181.

~~(5) DL, I, p.334.~~

in one of his letters:

dear Sara accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk
on my foot. (1)

The poem opens with an account of almost jealous regret, both at having to miss the experience which his friends are able to enjoy and at not being able to be with his friends. This is followed by a beautifully exact and detailed description of the landscape in which his friends are walking:

The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,
And only speckled by the mid-day sun;

Not only are the descriptions exact and detailed; the landscape is given life through images of motion and energy:

Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
Flings arching like a bridge.

The description of the narrow sunless dell is succeeded by an account of the wide landscape which the speaker's friends will see, when they "emerge". The spaciousness of the view is enhanced by the implied contrast .

The descriptions are arrived at through memories of previous visits, but the experience is re-created with a difference, for the speaker's friends are placed within the landscape:

and there my friends
Behold the dark green file of long lank weeds,...
.....Now, my friends emerge
Beneath the wide wide Heaven....

This description of an imagined hill walk is momentarily interrupted by an invocation of Charles Lamb, whom Coleridge, no doubt remembering his own youth inside and on the roof of Christ's Hospital, envisages as a frustrated city-dweller, hungry for nature:

(1) CL, I, p.334.

Yes! they wander on
 In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,
 My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
 And hunger'd after Nature, many a year,
 In the great City pent, winning thy way
 With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
 And strange calamity.

Lamb did not take very kindly to this:

For God's sake (I never was more serious), don't make me ridiculous any more by terming me gentle-hearted in print, or do it in better verses. It did well enough five years ago when I came to see you, and was moral coxcomb enough at the time you wrote the lines, to feed upon such epithets; but, besides that, the meaning of gentle is equivocal, and almost always means poor-spirited; the very quality of gentleness is abhorrent to such vile trumpeting. My sentiment is long since vanished. I hope my virtues have done sucking. I can scarce think but you meant it in joke. I hope you did, for I should be ashamed to think that you would think to gratify me by such praise, fit only to be a cordial to some green-sick sonneteer. (1)

Lamb's anger, one feels, is very understandable and his criticism of the poem, though expressed in a rather violent way, is to a certain extent justified. There is a slightly pathetic condescension in "gentle-hearted Charles" (repeated twice near the end of the poem) and in "sad yet patient soul" which impairs the poem.

The description of the sunset which follows

Ah! slowly sink
 Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!
 Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
 Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
 Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
 And kindle, thou blue Ocean!

draws from its material and for the phrases used on a Notebook entry:

(1) The Letters of Charles Lamb, I, p.198. The letter was written on August 6, 1800, after the publication of the poem in the Annual Anthology. As E.V.Lucas notes (Op.cit., p.199) Lamb's "five years ago" is a mistake for "three years ago".

The Sun (for now his Orb
 Can slowly sink) behind the Western Hill
 Shot half his rays aslant the heath, whose flowers
 Purpled the mountain's broad & level top,
 Rich was his bed of Clouds: & wide beneath
 Expecting ocean smiled with dimpled face. (1)

The relation between the two passages shows, as does the relation between the various drafts of The Eolian Harp, that the conversation poems are, in Professor Fogle's words, "carefully wrought artifacts", and that they "imitate naturalness and spontaneity without being literally spontaneous and natural" (2). It also shows an interesting process of revision: one difference between the poem and the Notebook passage is that in the latter the rays of the sun and the colour of the heath are very loosely connected. In the poem the cumbersome relative clause is dropped, and "shine" is closely related to "purple": the rays of the sinking sun make the purple seem brighter. A more important difference is the radical change made in the last one-and-a-half lines. Anticipating Coleridge's later critical thought one can see in the elimination of the smile and the dimples a recognition that these images were merely fanciful, based on a yoking together of two entirely different things through stressing one similarity. "Nature has her proper interest" (3), Coleridge was to write five years later, and this type of humanized nature imagery goes against that belief.

The description of the imagined sunset is followed by the first expression in Coleridge's poetry of the idea that close contact with nature through the senses may lead to an apprehension of the deeper reality underlying the appearances of nature, to a sense of "something far more deeply interfused"⁽⁴⁾ than the pleasure

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- (1) Notebooks, I, 157 (also printed in CPW, II, p.990).
 (2) Coleridge's Conversation Poems (Tulane Studies in English, V, 1955),
 (3) Quoted more fully above, Introduction, p. 13. p. 106.
 (4) Cf. Tintern Abbey, l.96 (Wordsworth, Poetical Works, II, p.262)

of mere observation:

So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.

These lines are quoted variatim by Coleridge in a letter to Thelwall of October 14, 1797 (1), and the preceding passage makes it quite clear that Coleridge's idea of "the Vast" as stated in the letter to Poole (2) is not just empty talk but forms an important element in the movement in his thought towards the conception of the "one Life":

I can at times feel strongly the beauties, you describe, in themselves, & for themselves—but more frequently all things appear little—all the knowledge, that can be acquired, child's play—the universè itself—what but an immense heap of little things?—I can contemplate nothing but parts, & parts are all little—!—My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great—something one & indivisible—and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty!—but in this faith all things counterfeit infinity!

In another quotation of an early version of the poem in a letter to Southey, circa July 17, 1797, (3) the lines quoted above receive the note:

You remember, I am a Berkleian.

This suggests that Coleridge accepted both Berkeley's own denial of an objective world which can be perceived, and his interpretation of neo-Platonic thought that

(1) CL, I, pp. 349-350.

(2) cf. above, p. 94.

(3) CL, I, p. 335. The note is also printed in CPW, I, p. 180n.

there is diffused throughout the universe, a pellucid and shining nature pure and impassive, the act of a pure intelligence. (1)

In the Siris Berkeley himself seems to adopt a Platonic theory of Ideas:

The most refined human intellect exerted to its utmost reach can only seize some imperfect glimpses of the Divine Ideas, abstracted from all things corporeal, sensible, and imaginable. (2)

The letter to Thelwall, however, suggests that this passage in the poem can be interpreted in a wider sense than that indicated by the context of neo-Platonism transmitted through Berkeley: it is only "in the faith of" infinity and of the indivisibility of the universe that "gazing round on the wide landscape" becomes something more than the simple enjoyment of natural phenomena which Coleridge was later to call "nature in the grove" (3).

Thus love of nature and sympathy with his friends have led the speaker to an imaginative re-creation of the walk which these friends are making. They also lead to a realization that one does not have to go on long walks to see the beauty of nature. The bower, in the second line dismissed as a prison and then no more mentioned for forty lines, is seen to have a beauty of its own:

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- (1) Berkeley, Works (1784), II, p.556 (Section 206). This was the edition Coleridge borrowed from the Bristol Library, cf. Whalley, The Bristol Library Borrowings, The Library, 1949, p.122. For the influence of Berkeley's Siris on Coleridge, cf. also J.B.Beer, Coleridge the Visionary, especially pp.106-8 and 143-5.
- (2) Works, II, p.615 (section 337). It has been argued by G.J.Warnock that, compared with Berkeley's earlier works, Siris shows a change "in attitude of mind, not in doctrine" and that a passage like the second passage quoted above does not really mean that Berkeley "reverted to some belief in abstract ideas, or even to some sort of Platonic Theory of Forms" (Berkeley, pp.232-4). It is undeniable, however, that anyone imperfectly acquainted with Berkeley's earlier work would interpret Siris as a piece of neo-Platonic philosophizing. It may be noted that Siris is the only important philosophical work in the second volume of Works (1784).
- (3) The Nightingale, l.73 (CPW, I, p.266).

Pale beneath the blaze
 Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd
 Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see
 The shadow of the leaf and stem above
 Dappling its sunshine!

Though unable to look at the splendour of the clouds in the evening sun and the purple glow of the heather, the speaker can see the walnut-tree, "richly ting'd", and the "deep radiance....on the ancient ivy". The bower may be said to combine the qualities of the dell and the wide landscape earlier on in the poem, but its beauty goes beyond theirs (1). The very limitations of the speaker's predicament enable him to perceive the more subtle nuances of light and darkness and to point out how the darkness of the ivy growing on the elm-tree makes the branches of the elm seem lighter:

and a deep radiance lay
 Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps
 Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass
 Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
 Through the late twilight:

These lines form the beginning of an assertion of the beauties of nature through an enumeration of small things: the silent bat, the swallows, also silent, and the humming of the humble-bee, the one sound in the silent evening. One thinks of a similar atmosphere recorded in the opening of The Eolian Harp, where

The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
 Tells us of silence. (2)

(1) cf. R.H.Fogle, The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism, p.33: "the two earlier scenes are interfused in the imagery of the bower, which, relatively speaking, possesses the straitness and the pallor, the general privation imputed to the dell, but is also endowed with the rich light and variety of the landscape, with an added complexity in the subtle interplay of light and shadow, the mingled harmony and distinctness of object and hue,.... "

(2) CPW, I, p.100 (ll. 11-12).

The ability to find beauty in the small, unvoluptuous sounds and sights in nature also calls to mind Keats's description of the autumn landscape in a letter of September 21, 1819:

How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies—I never lik'd stubble-fields so much as now—Aye better than the chilly green of the Spring. Somehow a stubble-plain looks warm—This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it. (1)

This and the close of This Lime-tree Bower also remind one of the series of thinsounds with which the Ode To Autumn (which is related to the letter passage) ends:

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies. (2)

The sounds of the "music" of nature moves from pianissimo ("the small gnats") to mezzo-forte ("full-grown lambs loud bleat") and diminishes in a gradual decrescendo from "sing" via "with treble soft....whistles" to "twitter". To Autumn finishes with this account of its music; Coleridge once again shows his lack of negative capability. He finds it necessary to sum up the experience gained in an aphoristic form (3) and proceeds to moralize on it:

Henceforth I shall know
 That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;
 No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
 No waste so vacant, but may well employ
 Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
 Awake to Love and Beauty! and sometimes
 'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good,
 That we may lift the soul, and contemplate
 With lively joy the joy we cannot share.

(1) Keats, Letters, II, p.167.

(2) Keats, Poetical Works, p.274.

(3) a violation of negative capability which Keats himself committed in the closing lines of the Ode on a Grecian Urn (Poetical Works, p.262).

As a summing-up of the poem these lines are no more adequate than the passage beginning

He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and baird and beast.... (1)

is adequate as a summary of the moral of The Ancient Mariner. There is also an unpleasant arrogance and condescension in "Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure"; the tone and feelings of This Lime-tree Bower point very much forward to Wordsworth's Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey (2), also in its less impressive aspects. The patronizing references to Dorothy in the latter poem ("and in thy voice I catch/The language of my former heart,...") remind one that, in spite of its stress on personal relations, the conversation poem tended to become a creation of the egotistical sublime; the conversation poem becomes monologue. This is on the whole more true of Wordsworth than of Coleridge and it is manifestly untrue of Frost at Midnight (3), which is bound together by the affection for the "Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side".

The poem is brought back to Charles Lamb through the first repetition of "My gentle-hearted Charles!", which is thus turned into a refrain. In spite of the condescension of its tone, it is well used in the structure of the poem. The speaker, seeing a rook flying over its head and hearing the "creeking" of its wings, imagines that Charles Lamb has heard it too and has been pleasantly struck by the sound:

My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homewards, I blest it! deeming its black wing

(1) CPW, I, p.209.

(2) Wordsworth, Poetical Works, II, pp. 259-263.

(3) CPW, I, pp.240-2; cf. below, pp.111-9.

(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
 Had cross'd the mighty Orb's dilated glory,
 While thou stood'st gazing; or, when all was still,
 Flew creaking o'er thy head, and had a charm
 For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
 No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

In a sense, this transposes the speaker's experience in the bower to Lamb. Having been deprived of seeing the beauties of the hills, the heather, the sea and the sunset, the speaker has found pleasure in less spectacular things, the sun playing on the leaves of the trees, even the sound of the humble-bee, and now expects the same attitude from Lamb, so that the sound of the rook denoted by "creaking", a word with decidedly unpleasant connotations, is seen as something which gives pleasure. But, more fundamentally, the last lines also gives expression, for the first time in Coleridge's poetry, to what would later become the thought of the "one Life" in the later addition to The Eolian Harp and the letter to Sotheby (1). To a man like Coleridge (and, he imagines, by implication to Lamb) there are no dissonances in nature, since everything is part of the "one Life".

Five years later, shortly before Coleridge's statement in the letter to Sotheby, Wordsworth in his letter to John Wilson of June 1802 made a similar point. After making the celebrated statement that "a great Poet ought...to rectify men's feelings, to render their feelings...more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things" and citing Coleridge's The Nightingale as a healthy corrective to the falsifications of generations, he proceeds:

You will recollect a passage in Cowper, where, speaking of rural sounds, he says,

(1) cf. above, Chapter II, p.77, and Introduction, p.13.

And even the boding owl

That hails the rising moon has charms for me.

Cowper was passionately fond of natural objects, yet you see he mentions it as a marvellous thing that he could connect pleasure with the cry of the owl. In the same poem he speaks in the same manner of that beautiful plant, the gorse^{making} in some degree an amiable boast of his loving it, unsightly and unsmooth as it is. (1)

The similarity in attitude of This Lime-tree Bower and its difference from Wordsworth's interpretation of Cowper's feelings is clear. Even though the poem opens with an account of being deprived of the more obvious beauties of the Quantock Hills, there is, as it proceeds, no sense that the less spectacular attractions of the bower or the "creeking" of the rock are in any way less beautiful.

Some of the defects of the poem, the condescension of "gentle-hearted", the priggishness of "wise and pure" and the sententious moralizing of the passage near the end, have already been mentioned. There is also a laborious and tortuous poetic diction in:

Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark'd
Much that has sooth'd me.

These defects, however, are small in comparison with the gains of the poem over Coleridge's earlier poetry: there are brilliant descriptions of nature, both in the walk (half-recollected, half-imagined) and in the bower, and the moral importance of nature is shown, not through "dim connections" or unsubstantiated statements, but through a presentation of how the speaker's regret at not being able to go out is changed through his ability to imagine the walk in detail and his growing awareness of the less obvious beauties of nature. It is here that the idea of the "one Life", on which so

(1) Wordsworth, Early Letters, p.296.

much of Coleridge's later thought is based, makes its first appearance.

Instead of the retraction of the personal experience at the end of The Eolian Harp we here find an assertion. The poem shows a marked increased confidence in personal sense experience and none of the disunity produced by conflicting interests which marks the poems of 1795 and 1796. This Lime-tree Bower is the first of Coleridge's poems to stress the contribution to moral health which the experience of nature can make, although a similar idea is implied in the reactions of the "son of Commerce" to Coleridge's poems to stress the contribution to moral health which the experience of nature can make, although a similar idea is implied in the reactions of the "son of Commerce" to Coleridge's "pretty Cot" in Reflections:

methought, it calm'd
His thirst of idle gold, and made him muse
With wiser feelings:.... (1)

One of the most impassioned statements of the connection between love of nature and the moral life occurs in a letter to George Coleridge of March 1798(2) :

(1) CPW, I, p.106.

(2) CL, I, p.397. This passage precedes a quotation from the original conclusion to Wordsworth's The Ruined Cottage (cf. Wordsworth, Poetical Works, V, pp.400-1). For earlier statements of the same thought, cf. Coleridge's letter to George Dyer of March 1795 (CL, I, p.154; quoted above, Chapter II, p.58), the corrections which Wordsworth made to An Evening Walk in 1794 (Poetical Works, I, p.10n) and the conclusion to his Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree (Poetical Works, I, pp.93-4). The thought, however, was common towards the end of the eighteenth century, cf. the quotation from James Beattie, above, Introduction, p.9; cf. also Robert Mayo, The Contemporaneity of the 'Lyrical Ballads', PMLA, 1954, p.496n: "Underneath many of the 'nature' poems of the magazines is the familiar conviction that nature is beautiful and full of joy; that man is corrupted by civilization; that God may be found in nature; and that the study of nature not only brings pleasure, therefore, but generates moral goodness."

I love fields & woods & mountains with almost a visionary fondness—and because I have found benevolence & quietness growing within me as that fondness has increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others—and to destroy the bad passions not by combating them, but by keeping them in inaction.

In the poems of 1797 and 1798, particularly in The Ancient Mariner, Frost at Midnight and The Nightingale, this connection is of central importance.

In Frost at Midnight (1), written in February 1798, the belief in the unity of nature, which in This Lime-tree Bower was given in terms of Berkeley's Christian near-neo-Platonism, is presented in terms of near-Pantheist Christianity:

...that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.

But, as in the case of This Lime-tree Bower, the belief itself is much more important in the poem than the religion or philosophy in terms of which it is expressed. The central idea of the poem and the closeness of its attitude to nature to Wordsworth's, in spite of Coleridge's theist emphasis, have been well summed up by Harold Bloom:

Memory, moving by its overtly arbitrary but deeply designed associations, creates an identity between the mature poet and the child who is his ancestor, as well as with his own child. In this identity the poem comes into full being, with its own receiving and reflecting surfaces that mold the poet's and (he hopes) his son's spirits, and, by giving, make them ask who is the author of the gift. Wordsworth, in his prime years, would have given a phenomenological answer, and have been content to say Nature herself. In the more traditionally balanced Frost at Midnight, the answer is ontological, but the eternal language the Great Being is compelled to use is that of Nature, with her "lovely shapes and sounds intelligible". (2)

(1) CPW, I, pp.240-2.

(2) The Visionary Company, p.199.

Frost at Midnight has a much greater concentration than This Lime-tree Bower: the assertion near the end lacks the sententiousness of the comparable passage in the earlier poem, and the way the ending of Frost at Midnight recalls the beginning, while the statement of the opening is modified by what has been stated in between, establishes a much more successful unifying structure than does the repetition of "gentle-hearted Charles" in This Lime-tree Bower.

Instead of using the technique of description through accumulation of details which Coleridge was to comment adversely upon in Biographia Literaria, the opening of the poem shows the "co-presence of the whole picture" of the man and his surroundings, "flashed at once upon the mind". The opening gives a picture of the man in his cottage at night and of the workings of his mind. His thoughts move out to the weather and the sounds outside, from there to the village further away and its surroundings, and inward again, back to the fire:

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
 Unhelped by any wind. The owl's cry
 Came loud—and hark again! loud as before
 The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
 Have left me to that solitude, which suits
 Abstruser musings: save that at my side
 My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
 'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
 And vexes meditation with its strange
 And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
 This populous village! Sea, ^{and} hill, and wood,
 With all the numberless goings-on of life,
 Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
 Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;

In these lines the knowledge of the cold outside (the combination of the frost and the cry of the owl producing an atmosphere of wintry bleakness) is combined with a picture of the

extreme quiet, both inside the cottage and outside. The quiet is given in "secret", "unhelped by any wind", "solitude", "peacefully", "calm" and "extreme silentness". It is this silence which makes the cry of the owl stand out so much. The silence is also intensified by the knowledge of the fact that the village is "populous" and that there are "numberless goings-on of life" which one cannot hear now. The lines

save that at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully...

also produce an image of the father watching over his child, and this affection for the baby child is to become the main thought of the poem.

The thoughts of the I-figure revert to the fire, its flame unmoving as the rest of what surrounds him, and seize upon the film on the grate, the only moving and, as it were, the only living thing besides the "idling Spirit":

Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,...

Although this partial identification is to generate an important train of thought, it is at this point no more than a fanciful comparison (also in terms of Coleridge's later critical terminology) and is recognized by "Methinks" and by

a companionable form
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.

The film is only made "a companionable form" with the Spirit, because they are linked by one common factor, that of rapid movement in "flaps" and "freaks". The film is popularly called "stranger" and is "supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend" (1).

(1) from Coleridge's own note in the two earliest editions, reprinted in CPW, I, p.240n.

This association brings to mind the occasion on which, as a child, the speaker used to gaze at the "stranger" in the classroom and it re-creates what he then re-created in his own mind: the thought of his birthplace.

The evocative line

From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
possibly contains an echo of Milton's

from Morn
To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,
A Summers day; (1)

If so, Milton's influence is used in an entirely fresh way, quite unlike the borrowings in Coleridge's earlier poetry, which were transmitted through an eighteenth century filter.

The thoughts of the speaker's birthplace are contrasted with the uncongenial atmosphere of the schoolroom. There is also an implied contrast with that part of his youth which was spent in London, a contrast which is to become explicit in:

For I was reared
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.

The fanciful semi-identification between the "stranger" and the speaker's mind has become an imaginative re-creation through the memory of the re-creation of what he perceived in his birthplace.

The memory of his own childhood brings the I-figure back to thoughts of his baby and to how he wants him to grow up, not shut in a city as he himself was, but in the midst of nature. In this way the child will best be able to participate in the "one Life" of nature, and be nearest to God the Creator, Who is present in all nature and in Whom all nature is present,

(1) Poetical Works, p.24 (Paradise Lost, I, ll. 742-4).

so shalt thou see and hear
 The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
 Of that eternal language, which thy God
 Utters, who from eternity doth teach
 Himself in all, and all things in himself.

The child will then be able to enjoy all seasons,

Whether the summer clothe the general earth
 With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
 Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
 Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
 Smokes in the sun-thaw;

Of the last line a sketch exists in the Notebooks:

The reed-roof'd Village, still bepatch'd with snow
 Smok'd in the sun-thaw. (1)

The entry again reminds one of the careful study and revision which underlies the apparent spontaneity of the conversation poem. The description of the redbreast on the snow-covered branches once again introduces winter and brings the poem back where it started, to the frost and the silence:

Or if the secret ministry of frost
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
 Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

The first edition of the poem contained six extra lines, in which the child is imagined to stretch out its hands towards the icicles, a little scene which reminds one of the child "hushed" by the moonshine in The Nightingale and the Notebook entry which formed the basis of these lines (2).

In spite of the vividness of the picture, the revised ending is a great improvement, as the poem's unity is enhanced by the cyclical form. The marginal annotations, in a volume of poems by Coleridge, published by Joseph Johnson in 1798 (3), discovered by

(1) N, I, 329.

(2) Cf. The Nightingale, ll. 98,ff. (CPW, I, pp.266-7) and N, I, 219. Cf. also below, p. 130.

(3) Fears in Solitude, written in 1798, during the alarm of an invasion. To which are added, France, an ode; and Frost at Midnight.

Mrs. Renée Bell at Coleorton Hall and subsequently published by Sir Ifor Evans (1), make it clear that this was in fact Coleridge's intention in revising the poem. The end of the poem has the annotations:

omitted S.T.C.

and

The six last lines I omit because they destroy the rondo, and return upon itself of the Poem. Poems of this kind of length ought to be coiled with its' tail round its' head.

Thus the cyclical form was for Coleridge one way of achieving unity in multiteity. The second of these notes clearly links up with some other of Coleridge's comments through the implied image of the serpent. In December 1799 Coleridge wrote in his Notebook:

The Serpent by which the ancients emblem'd the Inventive faculty appears to me, in its mode of motion most exactly to emblem a writer of Genius. He varies his course yet still glides onwards—all lines of motion are his—all beautiful, & all propulsive—.....yet still he proceeds & is proceeding. (2)

The image becomes a familiar one in Coleridge's later criticism:

The common end of all narrative, nay, of all, Poems is to convert a series into a Whole: to make these events, which in real or imagined History move on in a strait Line, assume to our Understandings a circular motion—the snake with its Tail in its Mouth. (3)

Professor Fogle compares the final form of Frost at Midnight with the structure of The Eolian Harp, of which poem he says:

Coleridge retires from his advanced position to the point, from which he reached it, back to the innocence of feeling alone. (4)

There is, however, an important difference between the two poems here. Although the ending of The Eolian Harp does present a retreat

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- (1) B. Ifor Evans, Times Literary Supplement, April 18, 1935, p.255. The marginal notes date from 1807 or 1808.
- (2) N, I, 609. As an illustration Coleridge quotes Milton's description of the serpent in Paradise Lost (IX, ll.498-503 and 516-7, variatim, cf. Milton, Poetical Works, p.195).
- (3) Letter to Cottle, March 7, 1815, CL, IV, p.545.
- (4) Tulane Studies in English, V, p.109 (the comparison with Frost at Midnight is on p.110).

from philosophical speculations, its smug and safe religious tone precludes any real return to what Fogle has termed "the innocence of receptivity" (1), a state perhaps not as passive as he suggests(2). In contrast, Frost at Midnight does present feeling and receptivity springing from a condition of "negative capability". Humphry House has compared a passage from Book IV of Cowper's The Task (3), which also describes the associations produced by looking at the "stranger" and which must almost certainly have been Coleridge's model, and has pointed out how, in contrast to Coleridge's poem, the passage from Cowper "emphasises the utter indolence, the insignificance of his mood and the quite false appearance of "deep deliberation" which he gives to others" (4):

'Tis thus the understanding takes repose
In indolent vacuity of thought,
And sleeps and is refresh'd. (5)

In a sense, the poem presents the associations of the speaker's mind, re-created through careful revision. Coleridge, at least in his later years, would probably have quarrelled with this description. A Notebook entry of 1803, already referred to in the discussion of The Eolian Harp (6), shows Coleridge's distrust of association:

I will at least make the attempt to explain to myself the Origin of moral Evil from the streamy Nature of Associations, which Thinking—Reason, curbs & rudders/ (7)

Coleridge's later dislike of associationism as a system is clearly shown in the Biographia Literaria (8) and even more clearly in a

(1) Fogle, loc.cit., p.109.

(2) cf. the Notebook passage, quoted below, Epilogue, p

(3) Cowper, Poetical Works, pp.188-9 (ll. 286-310). The passage is quoted by House, Coleridge, pp.78-9.

(4) House, op.cit., p. 79.

(5) Cowper, loc.cit., ll.296-8.

(6) cf. above, Chapter II, p.75, n3.

(7) N, I, 1770.

(8) cf. especially BL, I, pp.81-2.

marginal note in a copy of Kant's Critik der reinen Vernunft:

The mind does not resemble an Eolian harp, nor even a barrel-organ turned by a stream of water, conceive as many tunes mechanized in it as you like—but rather, as far as Objects are concerned, a violin, or other instrument of few strings yet vast compass, played on by a musician of Genius. (1)

A Notebook entry, probably written in or about the year 1810, suggests a recognition that association does not necessarily mean the absence of the will or of the rudder of thought. The entry found its origin in a discussion which Coleridge had entered into with "an Idolater of Hume & Hartley":

And yet to shew him that I was neither ignorant, nor idle in observing, the vast extent and multifold activity of the Associative Force/ I entered into a curious and the fanciful yet strictly true and actual exemplification. (2)

Although the examples are of a considerable diversity, they have one thing in common: they are all focused on Sara Hutchinson, who governs the whole train of association:

....I inevitably by some link or other return to you, or (say rather) bring some fuel of thought to the ceaseless yearning for you at my Inmost, which like a steady fire attracts constantly the air which constantly feeds it/ (2)

A comparison between Frost at Midnight and this Notebook entry makes it possible to interpret the poem in a similar way, as a carefully shaped artifact, re-creating an ~~entire~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~association~~ governed by the love for the infant which binds it together (3)

(1) British Museum copy, C 126.i.9, quoted, with slight inaccuracies, by Wellek, Immanuel Kant in England, p.82, and House, Coleridge, p.144.

(2) quoted by Bald, Coleridge and 'the Ancient Mariner', pp.23-4, House, op.cit., pp.146-7, and George Whalley, Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson, p.111.

(3) This account leans heavily on House, op.cit., especially pp.142-151. Cf. also op.cit., p.148: "Thus either "bodily feeling" or "emotion" (of which affection is the type) act as a determining principle by which certain images or other material from memory are brought to the consciousness rather than others, and "feelings" in principle

An earlier letter to Southey (August 7, 1803) states an as yet tentative belief in association centred round and governed by feeling, which is similar to that of the Notebook entry referred to:

I hold that association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of states of feeling than on trains of ideas..... Believe me, I almost think that ideas never recall ideas, as far as they are ideas, more than leaves in a forest create each other's motion. The breeze it is that runs through them—it is the soul, the state of feeling. (1)

Looking at the Notebook entry and the passage from the letter to Southey in conjunction with the marginal comment on Kant also suggests a reconsideration of the image of the harp in The Eolian Harp, which is an inadequate image for a mind in the state of feeling with which the poem opens. The Eolian Harp showed not only a distrust of "the streamy nature of association" but also of the receptivity of personal feeling(2). In Frost at Midnight there is not only complete confidence in the personal feelings created by the speaker's sensitivity to the silence round him and by the love for his infant child, but they also form the poem's starting-point and its organizing principle. Frost at Midnight could be analyzed in the same terms which Professor Fogle uses to describe This Lime-tree Bower:

The poem is a vital movement of the poet's mind, an inner experience, its parts and relationships the living growths of the thought and the feeling which are its seed. Feeling is the prime impulse and mover: feeling not as the negation of intellect but

(1) CL, II, p.961.

(2) cf. above, Chapter II, p.76.

form affinities with "words and ideas". In some recent uses or adaptations of parts of Coleridge's theory, I think this emotional element has been given inadequate weight: "the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" has, in particular, been overworked in the interest of such effects as irony and paradox, and "the more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order" has received less than its due share of attention."

as that which sets intellect in motion. Nor does the primacy of the feeling imply incoherence, the absence of intelligible parts to the poem. Its effect is rather to subtilize their interrelationship, to disguise variety in unity. (1)

Fears in Solitude (2), the second of the conversation poems written in 1798, does not continue the development in Coleridge's poetry which can be seen in This Lime-tree Bower and Frost at Midnight. It is in many ways more like Reflections, with which it is linked by a note in an autograph manuscript copy:

N.B. The above is perhaps not Poetry,—but rather a sort of middle thing between Poetry and Oratory—sermoni propria.—Some parts are, I am conscious, too tame even for animated prose. (3)

The poem opens with a very fine description of a "small and silent dell", not the dark dell of This Lime-tree Bower but a much more gentle spot,

fresh and delicate
As vernal corn-field, or the unripe flax,
When, through its half-transparent stalks, at eve,
The level sunshine glimmers with green light.

It is surrounded by the slopes of the hills covered with heath, or with furze, which is just out in great profusion. The descriptions of the landscape give way to an impassioned outburst at the thought of how the beauty of "these silent hills" could be ruined by an impending invasion. Although there is little of the bathos and the empty personifications which mark "the bloodless fight" in the Reflections (4), most of this very long middle section is little more than versified political journalism:

(1) The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism, p.28.

(2) CPW, I, pp.256-263.

(3) quoted in CPW, I, p.257n. Cf. above, Chapter II, pp.87-8. A still stronger self-criticism appears in Coleridge's marginal notes to the volume at Coleorton, which have been published by Sir Ifor Evans (TLS, 1935, p.255). There the passage from line 159 to 175 is dismissed as "neither poetry, nor anything else....."

(4) cf. above, Chapter II, p.86.

Meanwhile, at home,
 All individual dignity and power
 Engulfed in Courts, Committees, Institutions,
 Associations and Societies,
 A vain, speech-mouthing, speech-reporting Guild,
 One Benefit-Club for mutual flattery,
 We have drunk up, demure as at a grace,
 Pollutions from the brimming cup of wealth;

These criticisms of English society are followed by an impassioned patriotic exhortation to everyone who wants to preserve the existing family life and religion, to "repel an impious foe". The political section closes with an apostrophe to Britain which also forms a transition to the final paragraph:

O divine
 And beauteous island! thou hast been my sole
 And most magnificent temple, in the which
 I walk with awe, and sing my stately songs,
 Loving the God that made me!—

The temple image recalls a passage from Reflections:

God, methought,
 Had built him there a Temple: the whole World
 Seem'd imag'd in its vast circumference: (1)

There is, however, an important difference between the two passages. In Reflections the assertion follows the description of a particularized view, which is so rich and varied that it seems a microcosm of the whole world. The passage in Fears in Solitude lacks this particularization and the temple image is correspondingly less meaningful.

The final paragraph returns to the quieter appreciation of the beautiful landscape and to the mood of the opening. The first two lines are particularly rich in their evocation of scents and colours and in their suggestion of fertility ("fruit-like"):

But now the gentle dew-fall sends abroad
 The fruit-like perfume of the golden furze:

(1) CPW, I, p.107 (ll. 38-40).

Coming as these lines do after a long political plea, there is a suggestion that it is precisely this richness and natural fertility which is being threatened by a possible invasion.

A beautiful description of the evening light is followed by an account of the speaker's walk from the dell to the top of the hill with its unexpected wide view. The walk is expressed in a clumsy way and adds nothing to the far superior comparable passages in This Lime-tree Bower (1) and Reflections (2):

On the green sheep-track, up the heathy hill,
Homeward I wind my way; and lo! recalled
From boding that have well-nigh wearied me,
I find myself upon the brow, and pause
Startled!

The phrase "homeward I wind my way", strongly reminiscent of Gray's "The Plow-man homeward plods his weary Way" (3), constitutes a return to eighteenth century diction, even to the extent of taking over Gray's heavy alliteration coupled with a suggestion of weariness.

The account of the view itself is impressive:

the mighty majesty
Of that huge amphitheatre of rich
And elmy fields,

recalls

The many-steeped tract magnificent
Of hilly fields and meadows,

in This Lime-tree Bower (4). The lines which immediately follow, however, are very different from the comparable passage in This Lime-tree Bower. In the earlier poem the speaker imagined that his friends,

(1) cf. This Lime-tree Bower, ll. 20, ff. (CPW, I, p.179).

(2) cf. Reflections, ll.26ff. (CPW, I p.107).

(3) Gray, Elegy written in a Country Church Yard, l.3 (The Poems of Gray and Collins, p.91).

(4) This Lime-tree Bower, ll.22-3 (CPW, I, p.179).

gazing round
 On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
 Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
 As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
 Spirits perceive his presence. (1)

In Fears in Solitude the view

seems like society—
 Conversing with the mind, and giving it
 A livelier impulse and a dance of thought!

This is a much more modest claim for the powers of nature. The lines which follow make clear why the view "seems like society" (at first sight a slightly inept simile): the speaker is able to compare the view with society, since he can see "belovéd Stowey", "the mansion of my friend" and

my own lowly cottage, where my babe
 And my babe's mother dwell in peace!

The main point of the poem as a whole is the contrast between the peace and quiet of the dell and

What uproar and what strife may now be stirring
 This way or that way o'er these silent hills—
 Invasion, and the thunder and the shout,
 And all the crash of onset;

Thus it is emphasized that all the "green and silent spot" stands for is worth preserving. The closing lines of the poem, however, show that the emphasis has shifted. Nature's main function now lies in fostering feelings of love and friendship:

And grateful, that by nature's quietness
 And solitary musings, all my heart
 Is softened, and made worthy to indulge
 Love, and the thoughts that yearn for human kind.

The ending disappoints and, in a sense, falls between two stools: on the one hand, it deprives the experience of nature of the ecstatic intensity which it has in This Lime-tree Bower, and, on the other,

(1) This Lime-tree Bower, ll. 39-43 (PW, I, p.180).

the feelings for other people are not given the same force which informs the love for the baby child in Frost at Midnight. The ending seems to imply that an important part of the reason why one loves nature, is formed by the company of people whom one likes. One year later, the Lines written at Elbingerode (1) and the letters and Notebook entries written in Germany would extend this to its logical conclusion and show that Coleridge found it impossible to love nature, if it could not be associated with his friendship for other people or his feelings for his own country.

Although it contains a few very fine passages, Fears in Solitude is not a very great poem and a great deal of it is only "a sort of middle thing between Poetry and Oratory", but it occupies an interesting position in Coleridge's development. It looks back to Reflections, for both poems combine an account of the beauties of nature with an account of political (or, in the case of Reflections, socio-political or socio-religious) considerations. In Reflections the two things conflict; Fears in Solitude shows how Coleridge's confidence in the personal appreciation of nature has increased, for the main purpose of the poem is to stress that this is something essential and that it is necessary to preserve the peaceful quiet which makes it possible. The length of the political reflections, however, gives the poem a great lack of balance, while the ending, with its half-hearted praise of nature, points forward to Coleridge's writings in Germany, especially to the Lines written at Elbingerode.

The Nightingale (2), written in the same month as Fears in Solitude, forms a more obvious development of the increasing confidence

(1) CPW, I, pp.315-6 (cf. below, pp. 133-6).

(2) CPW, I, pp.264-7.

in personal feelings and sense experience which has been noted in This Lime-tree Bower and Frost at Midnight. Although it lacks the superb concentration of the latter poem, there is a still stronger faith in the power of nature and the value of experiencing it.

The Nightingale is the only one of the group of "conversation poems which was given this name by the poet (1). The opening of the poem is more in a conversational mode than any of the other conversation poems, with the exception of The Eolian Harp. The other poems provide spoken meditation, a re-creation of the movement of a mind in which people who play an important part in the poet's thought are apostrophized (Charles Lamb, the young Hartley). Here the opening imagines a walk, in which the people addressed, who later in the poem are shown to be Dorothy and William Wordsworth ("My Friend and thou, our Sister!"), are the poet's companions. The line

Come, we will rest on this mossy bridge!

increases this sense of a particular conversation being held on a particular walk and reproduced as a dramatic monologue, but after this stage direction the action is suspended, the speaker and his companions may be imagined to sit down and the poem proceeds as spoken meditation.

In contrast with the imagined evening scene in This Lime-tree Bower with the bright splendour of the sunset, the evening described in the opening of The Nightingale is dark. This is not seen as a drawback; the light is even made to seem unwelcome (no long thin slip/

(1) The subtitle was included in the first edition of the Lyrical Ballads, but the word "conversation" was dropped in the second edition of 1800, to be restored again in Sibylline Leaves. The omission in 1800 may show that Coleridge felt that it was superfluous, cf. Max F. Schulz, The Poetic Voices of Coleridge, p.157: "It is indicative of his growing dissatisfaction with external devices. If the poem suggests conversation in its syntax, rhythm, and diction, no tag is necessary; if not, no tag is an adequate substitute."

Of sullen light"). It is not even a clear night but

though the stars be dim,
Yet let us think upon the vernal showers
That gladden the green earth, and we shall find
A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.

This attitude of finding "pleasure in the dimness of the stars", a reversal of what one might expect, is carried through in the speaker's reactions to the song of the nightingale, traditionally, especially since Milton's Il Penseroso, associated with sorrow and melancholy. The bird of the poem To the Nightingale (1), written two years earlier, was so treated ("Thou warblest sad thy pity-pleading strains") and Milton's "Most musical, most melancholy" was quoted as an endorsement of this view. Now Milton's phrase is quoted again but this time as a starting-point for a dissenting opinion. A footnote makes it clear that this does not constitute an attack on Milton:

This passage in Milton possesses an excellence far superior to that of mere description; it is spoken in the character of the melancholy Man, and has therefore a dramatic propriety. (2)

But it does form an attack on those poets who have never looked at or listened to nature for themselves and who slavishly imitate Milton's dramatization of a state of mind:

And many a poet echoes the conceit;
Poet who hath been building up the rhyme
When he had better far have stretched his limbs
Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell,
By sun or moon-light, to the influxes
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
And of his fame forgetful!

"Building up the rhyme" also comes very near one of Milton's

(1) CPW, I, pp. 93-4 (cf. above, Chapter II, pp. 79-81).

(2) The whole note is quoted in CPW, I, p.264, n2.

phrases, for it was said of Lycidas that

....he well knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme. (1)

The use of the phrase may imply that these poetasters are not only uncritically accepting Milton's descriptions but also his diction which becomes fossilized in their hands. The alternative to "building up the rhyme" is also a variation on Milton's theme. In Milton the alternative was

To sport with Amaryllis in the shade
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair? (2)

Coleridge suggests that there is a better alternative to "building up the rhyme", a phrase used pejoratively in the sense of laborious versifying. "Of his fame forgetful" also echoes Milton:

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise....
To scorn delights, and live laborious days; (3)

Here Coleridge comes close to criticizing Milton's persona and seems to be saying that the poetic experience is in no way incompatible with "delights" (if taken to mean something higher than "to sport with Amaryllis") and that the poetic experience, a full enjoyment of nature, is impossible if it is only impelled by a desire to attain fame.

The false poets of The Nightingale, instead of surrendering themselves to the spirit of nature, write their nature poetry without any experience to base it on:

But 'twill not be so;
And youths and maidens most poetical,
Who lose the deepening twilight of the spring
In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still
Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs
O'er Philomela's pity-pleading strains.

(1) Milton, Poetical Works, p.447 (ll. 10-11).

(2) loc.cit., pp. 448-9 (ll. 68-9).

(3) loc.cit., p. 449 (ll.72, 74).

Although this would be applicable to many minor poets of the time and points at a whole mode of writing which the Lyrical Ballads were reacting against, the echoes of "Thou warblest sad thy pity-pleading strains" and "Sister of love-lorn Poets, Philomel!", both phrases from To the Nightingale, suggest that it is equally intended as a criticism of his own early poetry (1).

The speaker and his friends have listened to the nightingale and they know better:

'Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music! (2)

A description of a neglected garden near a castle follows. The garden is full of nightingales, singing and playfully answering each other,

With skirmish and capricious passagings,
And murmurs musical and swift jug jug,

but the song of the nightingale at its most ravishing and its most intense is associated with the moon-light:

And one low piping sound more sweet than all—
Stirring the air with such a harmony,
That should you close your eyes, you might almost
Forget it was not day! On moonlight bushes,
Whose dewy leaflets are but half-disclosed,
You may perchance behold them on the twigs,

-
- (1) Coleridge must have soon felt that he had outgrown To the Nightingale, since he mentioned in a letter to Thomas Poole, written on November 1, 1796, only about a year and a half after the composition of the poem that he wanted to class it among the Juvenilia in the second edition of Poems on Various Subjects (CL, I, p. 243).
- (2) Of these lines a sketch exists in the Notebooks. The text is exactly the same, except that the Notebook entry starts with "The merry Nightingale" (N, I, 231).

Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,
Glistening, while many a glow-worm in the shade
Lights up her love-torch.

Earlier on in the poem the poetic experience had been associated with the light of the sun or the moon ("When he had better far have stretched his limbs/Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell,/By sun or moon-light...."). Here the moon is given a far greater importance in the poetic experience than the sun, and, since the ending of the poem emphasizes the powerful effect which looking at the moon has on the little Hartley (1), the poem shows clearly what significance the moon assumes in Coleridge's experience and his poetry around the year 1798 (2).

(1) cf. below, p. 130.

(2) As Dr. Suther has shown, it is possible to trace the symbols of the moonlight and other half-lights in Coleridge's poetry from the Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon onwards (cf. The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, pp.67-118). But, as Dr. Suther also points out (op.cit., pp.778), in some of the earlier poems like Lines to a Beautiful Spring (CPW, I, pp.58-9) and Pantisocracy (CPW, I, pp.68-9) sun and moon are used in equally favourable ways. In the latter poem the moon is associated with a Gothic passion which it is difficult to take altogether seriously ("And dancing to the moonlight roundelay,/The wizard passions weave an holy spell"). Some of this Gothic quality is still present in Kubla Khan ("A savage place! as holy and enchanted/As e'ef beneath a waning moon was haunted/By woman wailing for her demon-lover!", CPW, I, p.297). It is not until 1797 and 1798 that the symbol of the moon reaches the centrality which it has in The Nightingale. A similar centrality is given to the moon in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, where "the blessing under moon-light is the critical turning-point of the poem" (House, Coleridge, p.102; cf. CPW, I, p.197). The importance of the moon is still increased in the Gloss which was added in the 1817 edition. Cf. with the association between the moon and the poetic experience in The Nightingale also a Notebook entry written on April 14, 1805: "In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolical language for something within me that already exists, than observing any thing new" (N, II, 2546).

An account of how "a most gentle Maid", living near the castle, experiences the songs of the nightingales follows (1). Significantly it is said of her evening visits to the neglected garden that she "glides through the pathways",

(Even like a Lady vowed and dedicate
To something more than Nature in the grove)...

A full experience of nature is something deeper than observing nature's outward forms, "Nature in the grove", which is only a first step towards this more profound experience. The lines form a parallel to Coleridge's later assertion in On Poesy or Art:

If the artist copies the mere nature, the natura naturata, what idle rivalry!....Believe me, you must master the essence, the natura naturans, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man.....The artist must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure, and discourse to us by symbols—the Natur-geist, or spirit of nature, as we unconsciously imitate those whom we love; (2)

Just as the artist should not be content with making a lifeless copy of the objects which he is trying to reproduce, so imaginative perception involves more than making a mental picture of a bird singing in a tree.

The speaker decides it is time to say farewell, both to the nightingale and to his friends, but he is tempted to stay and listen to the "Warbler":

That Strain again!
Full fain it would delay me!

The first half of the quotation recalls Twelfth Night (3). Whether or not the quotation was made consciously would be difficult to decide,

(1) Professor Whalley seems to imply that the "gentle Maid" is Dorothy (cf. Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson, p.114), but, since Dorothy is also addressed as "thou, our Sister", her presence in both the second and the third persons seems slightly dubious.

(2) BL, II, pp.257, 259.

(3) George Whalley notes the resemblance (independently and in a different context), cf. op.cit., pp.114-5, and Twelfth Night, 1.4 (Complete Works, ed. Alexander, p.349)

but, as in the case with the Miltonic echoes earlier on in the poem, the words are quoted with an important difference. In Twelfth Night the words are spoken in character, for Orsino (although not quite "night-wandering") is wounded by "neglected love" (rather in the way Coleridge imagines Milton's persona to be in Il Penseroso) and is indulging in the sadness of his predicament. In The Nightingale "that strain again" expresses a desire to retain the sense of joy produced by the nightingale's song.

A touching account of how the speaker's "babe" once stopped sobbing, when he saw the moon, follows:

And he beheld the moon, and, hushed at once,
Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,
While his fair eyes, that swam with undropped tears,
Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam!

The passage, which relates the speaker's reactions to the song of the nightingale to his child's emotions when beholding the moon, is based on an incident given in one of the Notebooks; the entry has a freshness and spontaneity which the re-creation in the poem does not quite recapture:

—Hartley fell down & hurt himself—I caught him up crying & screaming—& ran out of doors with him.—The Moon caught his eye—he ceased crying immediately—& his eyes & the tears in them, how they glittered in the Moonlight! (1)

As in Frost at Midnight, the speaker expresses his determination that his son will grow up in the midst of nature, which, in the context of the poem, will involve finding "a pleasure in the dimness of the stars",

But if that Heaven
Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up
Familiar with these songs, that with the night
He may associate joy.

(1) N, I, 219.

And with another farewell to the nightingale and to the speaker's friends the poem closes.

The Nightingale poses the question to what extent an account of reality can be objective and to what extent it is necessarily coloured by the subjective outlook of the person who gives the account. Coleridge raises this question himself by emphasizing that the melancholy character of the nightingale in Il Penseroso is only a quality which an unhappy man has read into nature, filling "all things with himself". But, in that case, is not the nightingale of Coleridge's poem a reflection of the joy of the "annus mirabilis" with its creative productivity and the enriching friendship with the Wordsworths?

The nightingale, as one would expect, has meant different things to different writers. In Keats's great ode the song of the bird at first seems to offer an escape route from "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" into the world of the imagination, but, when escape is seen to be futile, it is used to contrast the eternal imaginative vision with the transitoriness of the life of the individual. The happy melody of the opening ("light-winged Dryad") becomes a "plaintive anthem" (1).

D.H. Lawrence once wrote an essay called The Nightingale, which is partly a critique of Keats's poem, partly a subjective account of Lawrence's own feelings on hearing the nightingale. Like Coleridge, Lawrence asserts the essential joy of the nightingale and, like Coleridge, criticizes those who consider its song melancholy as perpetrators of a pathetic fallacy:

The nightingale, let us repeat, is the most unsad thing in the world; even more unsad than the peacock full of gleam. He has nothing to be sad about. He feels perfect with life. It isn't

(1) Cf. Keats, Ode to a Nightingale (Poetical Works, pp.257-260).

conceit. He just feels life-perfect, and he trills it out—shouts, jugs, gurgles, trills, gives long, mock-plaintiff calls, makes declarations, assertions, and triumphs; but he never reflects..... There are no words to tell what one really feels, hearing the nightingale:....Yet we can say, it is some sort of feeling of triumph in one's own life-perfection. (1)

This seems very much like Coleridge's account but there are significant differences. The "feeling of triumph in one's own life-perfection" strikes a typical Lawrencean note and it is difficult to imagine Lawrence associating the nightingale with "moonlight bushes,/Whose dewy leaflets are but half-disclosed". (The moon is important in Lawrence's writings too and can be associated with sexual love as in the courtship scene between Anna and Will Brangwen in Chapter IV of The Rainbow (2), but the atmosphere is altogether different and it is the power and the clarity of the moonlight which are strongly emphasized.)

Sometimes the nightingale has sad associations for Coleridge himself too. In the original version of Dejection the section on his domestic unhappiness concludes with the lines

And like the Poet's Philomel, I sing
My Love-song, with my breast against a Thorn. (3)

It is to be noted that Coleridge here still makes a clear distinction between the real nightingale with its happy music and the melancholy symbol into which the bird is transformed by the poets. But there is a difference between this and The Nightingale. "The Poet's Philomel" is no longer dismissed as a sentimental affectation of people who "heave their sighs/O'er Philomela's pity-pleading strains".

The ~~conversations~~ ^{confidence} poems written in 1797 and 1798 show an increasing confidence in the power of nature, culminating in The

(1) Selected Literary Criticism, p.98.

(2) Lawrence, The Rainbow, pp. 116-121.

(3) ll. 284-5 (House, Coleridge, p.164)

Nightingale with its belief that

In Nature there is nothing melancholy.

At the same time The Nightingale presents a turning-point in Coleridge's attitude, for none of his later works possess the same confidence. Coleridge's visit to Germany forcibly brought home to him how dependent one's experience of joy and beauty is on one's own mental state and on the emotional climate of one's surroundings.

When in Germany, in January 1799, Coleridge was still capable of experiencing the beauty of the sunlight falling on the ice and sending a magnificent description home to his wife:

But when first the Ice fell on the Lake, & the whole Lake was frozen, one huge piece of thick transparent Glass, O my God! what sublime scenery I have beheld.—Of a morning I have seen the little [lake] covered with Mist; when the Sun peeped over the Hill, the Mist broke in the middle; and at last stood as the waters of the red Sea are said to have done when the Israelites passed—& between these two walls of Mist the Sunlight burnt upon the Ice in a strait road of golden Fire, all across the lake—intolerably bright, & the walls of Mist partaking of the light in a multitude of colours. (1)

Two months later, however, Coleridge felt little beyond homesickness, anxiety about his wife and children, and, above all, a sense of loneliness and of isolation from the Germans he met:

I am deeply convinced that if I were to remain a few years among objects for whom I had no affection, I should wholly lose the powers of Intellect—Love is the vital air of my Genius, & I have not seen one human Being in Germany, whom I can conceive it possible for me to love—no, not one. To my mind, they are an unlovely Race, these Germans! (2)

The last sentence quoted seems unpleasantly insular but is made understandable by Coleridge's acute sense of non-communication.

A similar attitude is presented by the poem Lines written in

(1) CL, I, pp.461-2.

(2) CL, I, p.471.

the Album at Elbingerode, in the Hartz Forest (1), written two months after the second letter and included in a letter to Mrs. Coleridge dated May 17, 1799 (2). After a description of the view from the top of the Brocken and of the speaker's descent, the poem continues:

I mov'd on
 With low & languid thought: for I had found
 That grandest Scenes have but imperfect Charms,
 Where the sight vainly wanders nor beholds
 One spot, with which the Heart associates
 Holy Remembrances of Child or Friend,
 Or gentle Maid, our first & early Love,
 Or Father, or the venerable Name
 Of our adored Country. O thou Queen,
 Thou delegated Deity of Earth,
 O 'dear dear' England, how my longing Eye
 Turn'd Westward, shaping in the steady Clouds
 Thy sands & high white Cliffs! (3)

Though the lines describing England are pompous and though their attitude is again unpleasantly insular (4), the preceding lines give a moving account of what in the absence of personal associations can only be called a state of emotional blankness.

The poem closes with the lines:

Stranger! these Impulses
 Blame thou not lightly; nor will I profane
 With hasty Judgement or injurious Doubt
 That man's sublimer Spirit, who can feel

(1) CPW, I, pp. 315-6.

(2) CL, I, pp. 504-5.

(3) quoted from the version in CL.

(4) It should be noted, however, that the quotation marks in "O'dear dear' England", only in the letter version of the poem and not mentioned by E.H. Coleridge in his list of variant readings (CPW, I, p. 316, notes), add an additional weight to the trite phrase. They seem to imply a recognition on Coleridge's part that the phrase is a cliché but that one's experience in travelling abroad give it new life and a more substantial meaning.

That God is every where! the God who fram[^{'d}]
 Mankind to be one mighty Brotherhood,
 Himself our Father & the World our Ho[^{me!}] (1)

Since the feeling "that God is everywhere" in nature was one of the main points to emerge from This Lime-tree Bower and Frost at Midnight, it is clear that these lines constitute an admission of defeat.

Dr.Suther is right in saying that

"That man's sublimer spirit" had been Coleridge's own spirit only recently, and he had obviously not reconciled himself to to the loss of it. (2)

The early printed versions of Lines written at Elbingerode print the text of the letter with some minor variations, but in Sibylline Leaves (1817) there is an interesting revision. There the first of the two passages quoted begins:

I moved on
 In low and languid mood: for I had found
 That outward forms, the loftiest, still receive
 Their finer influence from the Life within;—
 Fair cyphers of vague import, where the Eye
 Traces no spot, in which the Heart may read
 History or Prophecy of friend, or child,
 Or gentle maid, our first and early love,
 Or father, or the venerable name
 Of our adoréd country! (3)

These lines strongly recall Dejection:

I may not hope from outward forms to win,
 The passion and the life, whose fountains are within. (4)

The Sibylline Leaves version of Lines written at Elbingerode makes the sense of the poem and of the passage quoted from Dejection clearer, but there is also a shift of emphasis from personal

(1) quoted from CL, I, p.505.

(2) The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p.108.

(3) Sibylline Leaves, pp. 17-18. Cf. CPW, I, p.316, note to ll. 19-21.

(4) Dejection, ll.45-6 (CPW, I, p.365).

associations to "the Life within", the "Joy" of Dejection.⁽¹⁾ The final version of the poem first printed in the Poetical Works of 1829 and reproduced in the edition of E.H. Coleridge, makes it still clearer that the inability to respond to nature ~~to nature~~ is due to a failure of "the Life within". Nature is still beautiful but without this force inside us it lacks all relevance to our ability to experience it:

Fair cyphers else: fair, but of import vague
Or unconcerning, where the heart not finds.... (2)

Although the optimism of The Nightingale was lost to Coleridge in his later years, it is a mistake to suppose that the consequences were only feelings of despondency. One of Coleridge's main concerns in his later years was the problem to what extent one's observations and one's experiences depend on oneself or on the things observed and experienced. This problem is highly relevant to much of his later poetry, especially Dejection, and to his criticism, since it is a different way of putting what I.A. Richards has called the "opposition which haunts the whole subject" of the concept of the imagination,

that between a projective outlook, which treats imagination's products as figments, and a realist outlook, which takes the imagination to be a means of apprehending reality. (3)

Coleridge's descriptions of nature in the Notebooks also show a preoccupation with this problem. On August 26, 1800, he added

(1) Dr. Suther's perceptive account of the Elbingerode poem is marred by the lack of attention given to the difference between the various readings. Thus his statement

The low and languid mood is very close to the "wan and heartless mood" of Dejection; and his explanation of it.....employs the very terms later to be used in Dejection (op.cit., p.107) does not really apply to the poem as it stood in 1799. This point has been noted by W.J.B. Owen in his review of Suther's book (Review of English Studies, XIII, 1962, pp.313-5): "the early versions.....state.....a recognition that grand natural scenery is meaningless when it carries no emotional overtones" (loc.cit., p.315).

(2) CPW, I, p.316.

(3) Coleridge on Imagination, p.26.

to a description of the early morning scene around Derwentwater the note:

N.B. What is it that makes the silent bright of the morning vale so different from that other silence & bright gleams of late evening? Is it in the mind or ~~is~~ is there any physical cause? (1)

A similar comment was made in October 1803 on a revised description of the river Greta near Barnard Castle, first jotted down on October 28, 1799:

The white rose of Eddy-foam, where the stream ran into a scooped hollow of the Rock in its channel—this shape, an exact white rose, was for ever overpowered by the Stream rushing down in upon it, and still obstinate in resurrection it spread up into the Scollop, by fits and starts, blossoming in a moment into a full Flower.—Hung over the Bridge, & musing considering how much of this Scene of endless variety in Identity was Nature's—how much the living organ's!—What would it be if I had the eyes of a fly!—what if the blunt eyes of a Brobdignag!— (2)

To these questions there is no simple answer. An easy way out would be to say that our perception of objects depends partly on ourselves, partly on the objects observed, but this does not bring us much further. Coleridge finally found a resolution in the theory of the imagination in the Biographia Literaria, depending on the coalescence of subject and object:

...the 'infinite I AM' is the formula this system yields for God: He created objects, which do exist; our 'perception' (a repetition in the finite mind) also, specifically, 'creates' them, as they are, but known as vital because the act of knowledge is itself vital. The essential paradox is that objects do exist; but that we have to create them. There is, for Coleridge, no other forms of knowledge than the creative. (3)

It is only through a theory of perception like this that a resolution could be found between the seemingly inconsistent views

(1) N, I, 789.

(2) N, I, 1589 (based on I, 495).

(3) Nicholas Brooke, Coleridge's 'true and original Realism', The Durham University Journal, LIII, No.2, March 1961, p.59.

expressed in

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live: (1)

and

For of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and
must be in ourselves; and therefore there is no alternative in
reason between the dreary (and thank heaven! almost impossible)
belief that every thing around us is but a phantom, or that the
life which is in us is in them likewise;..... (2)

(1) Dejection, ll. 47-8 (CPW, I, p.365).

(2) On Poesy or Art (BL, II, p.259).

Epilogue
Unity in Multeity.

The preceding Chapters have described how the unrestrained eclecticism of Coleridge's early poems gave way to a more personal kind of poetry. The philosophical assertions of Religious Musings and the use of images taken from nature for moralizing similes in many of the early poems are replaced by statements of an intimate contact with nature based on perception and, especially from This Lime-tree Bower onwards, of the totality of experience. At first the movement towards this new kind of poetry is still very tentative and there is little confidence in the personal experience which occupies a central position from The Eolian Harp onwards. In The Eolian Harp both this personal experience and the philosophical speculations it engenders are defeated by the narrow piety of the closing paragraph, while in Reflections the experience is dismissed as day-dreaming, but in the conversation poems written in 1797 and 1798 no such retraction takes place. The Nightingale presents the affirmation of the power of nature and the poet's confidence in sense experience at their most exultant, but disillusion was soon to follow and can be seen in the Lines written at Elbingerode and still more strongly and more poignantly in Dejection.

After 1798 Coleridge wrote only one great poem, Dejection (1). In view of this it is tempting to regard Coleridge's work after the 'annus mirabilis' at Nether Stowey as severely declining, but this

(1) Although many other poems are of more than biographical interest, particularly those which have been discussed by George Whalley under the heading The Asra Poems (cf. Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson, pp.97-141).

view is to a large extent a result of a tendency to parcel off Coleridge's output into the works of Coleridge the poet, Coleridge the critic, Coleridge the philosopher and Coleridge the theologian. The publication of the first two volumes of the Notebooks should have helped to make it possible to regard Coleridge's works as the creation of a single mind, and, although my concern in this essay is with the early poetry, it may be relevant to indicate some of the continuity between the early and the later work.

As long ago as 1940 Professor Bald pointed out how Coleridge's experience of his voyage to Malta as recorded in the then largely unpublished Notebook entries played an important part in the revisions of The Ancient Mariner (1). The "O! the one Life within us and abroad" passage in The Eolian Harp did not appear in the printed versions until 1817 and the revised cyclical ending of Frost at Midnight was first published in 1812(2). Even more important for an understanding of the continuity in Coleridge's writings is the genesis of the concepts of "the balance or reconciliation of opposite and discordant qualities" and of "Multäity in Unity" (3).

The young Coleridge was strongly attracted and at the same time troubled by pantheist and near-pantheist theories. The passage beginning "And what of animated nature...." in The Eolian Harp is a speculation on either Berkeleian or Unitarian lines and the ending of the poem shows Coleridge's guilt-feelings about, among other things, this divergence from accepted theology (4). Religious Musings asserts

But 'tis God
Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole; (5)

(1) cf. Bald, Coleridge and 'the Ancient Mariner': Addenda to 'the Road to Kanadu, especially pp.5-15.

(2) cf. above, Chapter II, p.73, and Chapter III, p.114, respectively.

(3) cf. BL, II, p.12 and II, p.232.

(4) cf. above, Chapter II, pp. 69-76.

(5) CPW, I, p.107 (cf. above, Chapter II, p.59).

This conception of God is slightly ambiguous, but Coleridge would probably have maintained that God is transcendent as well as immanent; God is in all, but also has an existence outside His creation.

Reflections comes nearer to establishing the kind of unity which would later be associated with the product of the secondary imagination, although the concept of the reconciliation of opposites is still far-off. The variety of the view from the summit of the hill is so immense that

the whole World
Seem'd imag'd in its vast circumference; (1)

Coleridge's passionate concern with "oneness" is reflected in a Notebook quotation from Jeremy Taylor (December 1800):

He to whom all things are one, who draw~~ing~~eth all things to one, and seeeth all things in one, may enjoy true peace & rest of spirit. Jerome Taylor's Via Pacis. (2)

This preoccupation and the near-pantheism of the early conversation poems must have interested Coleridge in the philosophy of Spinoza, whose conception of "oneness" puzzled him. He recorded his bewilderment in a slightly cryptic Notebook entry:

If I begin a poem of Spinoza, thus it should begin/I would make a pilgrimage to the Deserts of Arabia to find the man who could explain to me there can be oneness, there being infinite Perceptions—yet there must be a oneness, not an intense Union but an Absolute Unity, for &c (3)

This entry, written in November 1799, was revised and amplified in October 1803. It then had the form:

Poem on Spirit—or on Spinoza—I would make a pilgrimage to the Deserts of Arabia to find the man who could make understand how the one can be many! Eternal universal mystery! It seems as if it were impossible; yet it is—& it is every where!—It is indeed

(1) CPW, I, p.107 (cf. above, Chapter II, p. 85 and p. 91).

(2) N, I, 876.

(3) N, I, 556.

a contradiction in Terms: and only in Terms!—It is the co presence of Feeling & Life, limitless by their very essence, with Form, by its very essence limited—determinate—definite— (1)

It was during the interval between these two dates that Coleridge must have begun to regard "oneness" in terms of a resolution between contraries. The neo-classical "discordia concors" (2), a definition of wit, the Platonic "principle of unity in the many" (3) and the Scholastic "principle of unity in multeity" (4), had been rediscovered as the basis of a transcendental philosophy. The resolution of contraries was given its widest application in the Hints towards the Formation of a more comprehensive Theory of Life. Here every form of life is seen as having something in common with every other form of life, but the more highly developed a particular species is in Coleridge's organic version of the Chain of Being, the more individualized it is shown to be:

.....Life, as Life supposes a positive or universal principle in Nature, with a negative principle in every particular animal, the latter, or limitative power, constantly acting to individualize, and, as it were, figure the former. (5)

A note made in Germany during Coleridge's "Harzreise" in May 1799 contains the sentence:

Now on all sides Firs, nothing but Firs, <Violet tone> below, above, around us— (6)

In a letter to Mrs. Coleridge of May 17, 1799, this was amplified and the unifying principle emphasized:

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- (1) N, I, 1561.
 (2) cf. Johnson, Lives of the English Poets (Everyman ed.), I, p.11.
 (3) Hints towards the Formation of a more comprehensive Theory of Life, p.40.
 (4) ibidem; Coleridge used the term both in this and its reversed form, "Multeity in Unity".
 (5) ibidem, p. 93.
 (6) N, I, 412.

Now again is nothing but Pines & Firs, above, below, around us!—
How awful is [the] deep Unison of their undividable Murmur—What
a one thing it is [—it is a sound] that [im]presses the dim notion
of the Omnipresent! (1)

Although this passage stresses the "oneness" of the scene, it is clearly not based on any reconciliation of opposites, but in fact on its opposite, on the absence of anything which might clash with the "undividable Murmur" of the trees. Slightly different but equally based on the absence of conflicting elements is the description of the view from the lower slopes of Saddleback, noted down in August 1800:
endless squares of Land, whose multiplicity by multitude
acquires unity— (2)

But in an entry written two months later the superiority of Rydale over Grasmere under particular circumstances was ascribed to a combination of "sameness with difference" (3):

Sat. Nov. 29—Rydale looked more lovely than Grasmere, its fantastic variety being counteracted & counterpoised by the uniformity of the Snow every where—The sameness of Grasmere Sombrous— (4)

There is a similar contrast between the regularity of the gardens and the combination of formality and variety of the houses in the view from Egremont Castle, described in a Notebook entry dated August 3, 1802:

.....the Buildings, Wall, Garden with its various beds—so slovenly in its tyrannically strait parallelogram inclosures, the Marygolds, yellow Lillies, loftiest Peas in Blossom, Beans, Onions, Cabbages—then the Houses—in such various outlines, all formal, yet the formality neutralized by the variety of the formal

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- (1) CL, I, p.502. There is a similar addition in the MS Journal of the German tour, now in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library (cf. N, I, Notes, p.XXV and note to 412).
(2) N, I, 784 ff.12.
(3) cf. BL, II, p.12.
(4) N, I, 849.

& their incursions on each other/some thatched, some slated, some meeting the eye with their broad fronts, some with their corner Gavels—some spank newy some in ruins— (1)

An entry dating from the end of September or the beginning of October 1802 describes the contrast between the "hail-mist" and the rainbow within it in terms anticipating the reconciliation of opposites:

The stedfast rainbow in the fast-moving, hurrying, hail-mist!
What a congregation of Images & Feelings, of fantastic Permanence
amidst the rapid Change of Tempest—quietness the Daughter
of Storm.— (2)

At the end of October 1802 the union of what, according to Coleridge, were generally supposed to be incompatible qualities is applied to criticism:

Great Injury that has resulted from the supposed Incompatibility of one talent with another/Judgment with Imagination, & Taste— Good sense with strong feelings &c—~~an~~ if it be false, as assuredly it is, the opinion has deprived us of a test which every man might apply—Locke's opinions of Blackmore, Hume of Milton & Shakespere/&c (3)

Here the theory of the Imagination is clearly not far off.

These Notebook entries are connected with many of Coleridge's poems in which the reconciliation of opposites forms an important part. In This Lime-tree Bower the dell is both "still" and "roaring" and the leaves

Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,
Fann'd by the waterfall !

But the whole poem is held together by a major reconciliation of opposites: the lime-tree bower combines the dim light of the dell and the splendour of the wide landscape(4). In Kubla Khan the miracle of Kubla's paradise consists of the reconciliation of opposites:

(1) N, I, 1211.f7v.

(2) N, I, 1246.

(3) N, I, 1255.

(4) This Lime-tree Bower my Prison, CPW, I, pp.178-181 (cf. especially 1.9 and ll. 15-6). Cf. also The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism by R.H.Fogle, pp. 31-3.

It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome, with caves of ice! (1)

The description of the bower in The Keepsake (2) reflects a similar combination of near-extremes. The flowers are swinging in the breeze and hanging "over their dim-fast-moving shadows" in the pool which itself is "scarcely moving", so that the flowers are said to make a "quiet image of disquiet"(3).

In the Notebook entries dating from 1803 unity or its absence is sometimes still asserted in terms of "multiplicity by multitude". The fir-trees seen and described on the Scottish Tour in August 1803 do not form a real "union", because there are too few of them and because they are planted too far apart. The presence of things with which one can compare the trees hinders the creation of such a union:

Larches & Firs a Repetition of units in time rather than an Assemblage in Space/units without union consequently without Greatness no character of relationship, no neighbourhood which Fir trees would gain, no motion/nor all this still tamed down down by exceeding number & the exclusion of all things to be compared with. (4)

But it is the reconciliation of opposites to which more and more attention is given in the Notebooks. An entry from December 1803 opens with one of Coleridge's resolutions:

I have repeatedly said, that I could have made a Volume, if only I had noted down, as they occurred to my Recollection or Observations, the instances of the Proverb, Extremes meet/~~e~~-This Night, Sunday Dec. 11, 1803, $\frac{1}{2}$ past 11, I have determined to

(1) CPW, I, p.298 (cf. House, Coleridge, p.121).

(2) CPW, I, p.346.

(3) It has been suggested (above, Chapter I, p.41 and pp.43-4) that in Coleridge's early poems this interest in combinations of stillness and movement is anticipated in his descriptions of the apparent movement of the moon in the sky and of the contrast between the fixed moon and the moving clouds.

(4) N, I, 1452 f9.

devote the last 9 pages of my Pocket[book] to the collection of the same. (1)

One of the examples given is that of the combination of movement and stillness in a waterfall:

Sameness in a Waterfall, in the foam Islands of a fiercely boiling Pool at the bottom of the Waterfall, from infinite Change. (2)

A similar description of a waterfall had occurred in a letter to Sara Hutchinson, dating from the previous year:

the continual change of the Matter, the perpetual Sameness of the Form—it is an awful image & Shadow of God & the World. (3)

The entry following the one just quoted but still under the "EXTREMES MEET"-heading declares:

The dim Intellect sees an absolute Oneness, the perfectly clear Intellect knowingly perceives it. Distinction & Plurality lie in the Betwixt. (4)

The "Oneness" which the "perfectly clear intellect knowingly perceives" is based on the reconciliation of opposites.

Of slightly later date is a description of a waterfall, a "oneness" of silence and sound:

The waterfall at the head of the vale (the circular mountain walled vale) white, steadfast, silent from Distance/—the River belonging to it, smooth, full, silent—the Lake into which it empties also silent/yet the noise of waters every where/Something distant/something near, Tis far off, & yet every where/—and the pillar of smoke/the smooth winter fields—the indistinct Shadows in the Lake are all eloquent of Silence— (5)

As Professor Coburn remarks:

Extremes meeting and opposites reconciled—not here a theory but something perceived through the senses. (6)

(1) N, I, 1725 f 120.

(2) ibidem.

(3) CI, II, pp.853-4.

(4) N, I, 1725 f 120v.

(5) N, I, 1784.

(6) N, I, 1784n.

In fact, the evidence of the Notebooks is that the idea of extremes meeting and of opposites being reconciled was something which originated in descriptions of sense experience and which was not until later formulated as a theory or applied to criticism.

A description of a group of hills seen from Easedale, dated January 5, 1804, combines "number with unity", akin to the "multiplicity by multitude" of the earlier entry, with unity achieved through the presence of contrasting elements or, as Coleridge here puts it, "Intricacy with Unity". The stress here is clearly on the latter quality:

these Hills all distinguishable indeed from the Summit downward, but none seen all the way down—so as to make give the strongest sense of number with unity/& these Hills so variously situated to each other, & to the view in general, so variously powdered, some only enough to give the Herbage a rich brown Tint, one intensely white, & lighting up the whole of the others, & yet so placed as in the most inobtrusive manner to harmonize by Contrast with a perfect naked, snowless bleak summit in the far distance on the Left—/from this variety of Site, of colour, of woodiness, of the situation of the woods, etc etc made it not merely number with unity, but Intricacy with Unity/— (1)

A Notebook entry dating from the same month shows a confidence in "deep tranquil Emotion" which the early conversation poems so notably lack and manifests the negative capability which Keats found missing in Coleridge:

The dignity of passiveness to worthy Activity when men shall be as proud within themselves of having remained an hour in a state of deep tranquil Emotion, whether in feading or in hearing or in looking, as they now are in having figured away one hour/
O how few can transmute activity of mind into emotion/yet there are who active as the stirring Tempest & playful as a May blossom in a breeze of May, can yet for hours together remain with hearts broad awake, & the Understanding asleep in all but its retentiveness and receptivity/yea, & the Latter evinces as great Genius as the Former/ (2)

(1) N, I, 1812, f 56-56v. (2) N, I, 1834. This passage has been quoted (variatim) by Barbara Hardy (Keats, Coleridge and Negative Capability, July 5, 1952, pp.299-300), who notes the fundamental agreement between Keats and Coleridge.

Plotinus is a writer who is repeatedly quoted in the Biographia Literaria and in the shorter critical essays (1). One wonders to what extent this insistence on "deep tranquil emotion" was influenced by his reading of Plotinus, particularly when one compares it with the passage from Plotinus on the mystical knowledge of the divine, noted down in November 1803:

In Plotinus the system of the Quakers is most beautifully expressed, in the 5th Book of the fifth Ennead: speaking of "the inward Light." It is not lawful to enquire from whence it originated, for it neither approached hither, nor again departs from hence to some other place, but it either appears to us, or it does not appear. So that we ought not to pursue it, as if with a view of discovering its latent ~~Abode~~ Original, but to abide in Quiet, till it suddenly shines upon us; preparing ourselves for the blessed Spectacle, like the eye waiting patiently for the rising Sun. (2)

Coleridge, however, was no Quaker and the quotation does not necessarily imply unqualified assent. The passage from Plotinus clearly lacks the stress on the essential activity which, paradoxically, is present in the "passiveness" of the Notebook entry.

The idea of the resolution of contraries may also owe something to Plotinus. In the sixth Book of the first Ennead he asserts that to an architect the house he has built appears to be "correspondent with his inner idea of a house". He continues:

Is it not that the house before him, if you put aside the mere stones, is that inner idea communicated to the mass of exterior matter, the essentially undivided made manifest in a diversity?

So, the perceptive faculty: discerning in certain bodies the Idea which has welded and dominated shapeless nature, its contrary—observing, further, impressed upon the common shapes

(1) cf. e.g. BL, I, p.166 and II, p.240.

(2) N, I, 1678. This passage was later again quoted in the Biographia, where it is said to refer to "the highest and intuitive knowledge" and is applied to the "philosophical imagination" (cf. BL, I, pp. 166-7).

a shape excellent above the common—it has brought to a unity what was still only a thing of fragments, and caught it up and borne it within, to the essentially indivisible, presenting it before the inner Idea as something concordant and congenial, a natural friend; (1)

There is a feeling very similar to that in the passage on "deep tranquil Emotion" in an entry recorded near Gibraltar on the voyage to Malta:

What a multitude & <almost> discordant complexity of associations—the Pillars of Hercules, Calpe, Abbila, the Realms of Massinissa, Jugurtha, Syphax—Spain, Gibraltar, the Dey of Algiers, dusky Moor & black African/and O! how quiet it is to the Eye, & to the Heart when it will entrance itself in the present vision, & know nothing, feel nothing, but the Abiding Things of Nature, gréat, calm, majestic, and one. (2)

The reference to "the Abiding Things of Nature" strikes a very strong Wordsworthian note (3), but there are other interesting things in this entry, especially the fact that the feeling of oneness is here not based on the meeting of extremes but rather on the intuitive experience of beauty. The historical associations of Gibraltar and the African coast were things which Coleridge would naturally tend to be interested in. Keats might have criticized such interests as lack of negative capability and it is significant that Coleridge himself here seems to prefer to let his heart "entrance itself in the present vision", rather in the way in which the would-be poet in The Nightingale was advised to give himself

Platons on the Beauty (1)

- (1) Enneads, I, VI, iii (translation McKenna, ^{p. 12}). The second half of this passage is quoted by Coleridge in Greek in On the Principles of Genial Criticism (BL, II, p.240) and is applied to Dejection, cf. below, p. 152.
- (2) N, II, 2045, fl5.
- (3) The Wordsworthian influence is noted by J.B.Beer in his review of the second volume of the Notebooks (Critical Quarterly, IV 1962, p.369). Dr.Beer describes this as being written "after landing for a few hours on the coast of Africa", but it is clear from the entry that it was written near Gibraltar looking over towards Africa.

up to "the influxes/Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements" (1). But the later addition of the word "almost" is also significant: Coleridge has begun to doubt whether it is not possible to reconcile the apparently discordant associations which Gibraltar and Africa conjure up. The addition opens up the possibilities of uniting the "almost discordant complexity of associations" with the "Abiding Things of Nature, great, calm, majestic and one".

In the field of critical theory the concept of the imagination would go far towards reconciling intellect and feeling, since it includes both the intellectual act of "the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" and the presence of "a more than usual state of emotion" (2). The stress on the will and on "judgment ever awake and steady self-possession" makes it clear that the "more than usual state of emotion" is no self-surrender (3).

This emphasis produces an important modification of the role of nature in the early poetry but perhaps not quite such a volte-face as some critics have suggested. Thus Richards bases his interpretation of the primary imagination on Dæjection:

The Primary Imagination is normal perception that produces the usual world of the senses,

That inanimate world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd..... (4)

(1) cf. CPW, I, p.265.

(2) cf. BL, II, p.12; cf. also, above, Chapter III, p.117 n3.

(3) Coleridge remained acutely aware of a tension between intellect and emotion and Plotinus' insistence on the necessity "to abide in Quiet", patiently waiting for the communion with the divine, may have uncomfortably reminded him of the surrender to nature in The Nightingale or even the image of the passive instrument being swept into motion in The Eolian Harp. However that may be, the references to Plotinus in the Philosophical Lectures are by no means without reservations (cf. especially the lecture delivered on February 8, 1819, op.cit., pp.240-1).

(4) Coleridge on Imagination, p.58.

This "inanimate cold world", according to Richards' reading, is then re-formed and given greater significance by the secondary imagination. A discussion of the primary and secondary imagination would be quite beyond the scope of this essay (1), but some mention of a few aspects of Dejection will be relevant to this account of the development of Coleridge's nature poetry.

Although the poem presents a movement away from the optimism of The Nightingale, I believe that it is wrong to take the lines

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live: (2)

and the lines quoted by Richards from their context (which, even in Coleridge's final version, is highly personal) and to use them to illustrate Coleridge's philosophical position in 1802 or after. Taken thus, this would argue for an incredible inconsistency, even for Coleridge. Dejection was composed on April 4, 1802; five months afterwards Coleridge was to write to Sotheby:

Nature has her proper interest, and he will know what it is
who believes that everything has a life of its own, and that
we are all One Life. (3)

Dejection opens as a moving statement of a terrible mental depression; it does not possess the logic of a philosophical argument. As Newton Stallknecht has observed:

From the premise that a given state of mind is required
for the awakening of a sense of personal unity with Nature
it is hardly legitimate to conclude that this sense of communion
is nothing more than this very state of mind itself.....To
some extent, Dejection rationalizes Coleridge's despair. It
produces a philosophy which denies the possibility of the very
mysticism whose passing it laments. (4)

(1) For a view opposed to Richards', cf. N.S. Brooke, Coleridge's 'true
(2) CPW, I, p.365. and original Realism', DUJ, LIII, 1961, pp.58-69.
(3) CL, II, p.864.
(4) Strange Seas of Thought, p.167.

A.O.Lovejoy has offered a similar approach:

Coleridge is not expressing the thesis of 'transcendental' idealism that the mind gives form to the world of objects that it perceives; he is expressing, out of a painful experience, the psychological fact that the power of natural beauty to give us pleasure is conditioned by our subjective states. (1)

Lovejoy's interpretation is to a great extent borne out by Coleridge's own comments on the poem in On the Principles of Genial Criticism. Here the line, "I see, not feel, how beautiful they are", coming at the end of a long quotation from the poem (with some textual divergence from other published versions) is italicized. Coleridge then proceeds to distinguish between "the beautiful" and "the agreeable":

We have sufficiently distinguished the beautiful from the agreeable, by the sure criterion, that, when we find an object agreeable, the sensation of pleasure always precedes the judgment, and is its determining cause. We find it agreeable. But when we declare an object beautiful, the contemplation or intuition of its beauty precedes the feeling of complacency, in order of nature at least: nay, in great depression of spirits may even exist without sensibly producing it. (2)

In On the Principles of Genial Criticism the meaning of the poem seems for Coleridge to have moved away from the sense yielded by

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:

In the essay the quotation from the poem beginning with these lines is made to illustrate a passage from Plotinus (3), which expresses a sense of fundamental attunement between the perceiving mind and the thing perceived, since both are governed by "the Idea which has welded and dominated shapeless nature". This is altogether remote

(1) A.O.Lovejoy, Coleridge and Kant's Two Worlds, ELH, 1940, pp.341-362.

(2) BL, II, p.241.

(3) BL, II, pp.240-1. The Plotinus passage is quoted, in translation, above, pp.148-9.

from the sense of the Dejection quotation with its emphasis on the necessity of "Joy".

Dejection, however, is not only a record of an acute state of neurosis; there is also another side to the poem which Lovejoy hinted at by saying that it "achieves beauty by the description of the loss of the feeling for beauty" (1). This is further developed in an essay by R.H.Fogle, who emphasizes the movement away from the self in the final stanza which constitutes the "rebirth" of Coleridge's imagination, "the faculty which enables us to escape the prison of self and participate in other modes of being" (2).

Although Dejection does not offer an answer to the question whether Coleridge in his later years believed in the life of external nature or whether he considered this an illusion of the mind, there is no doubt that the question concerned and worried him profoundly. The essay On Poesy or Art asserts that the life of man is also the life of nature, but the tone of the assertion reflects Coleridge's uneasiness:

For of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves; and therefore there is no alternative in reason between the dreary (and thank heaven! almost impossible) belief that every thing around us is but a phantom, or that the life which is in us is in them likewise; (3)

Wordsworth does not seem to have felt this as a problem and remained content with a vague compromise:

all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; (4)

There is a similar ambiguity in The Prelude, in

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- (1) Lovejoy, loc.cit., p. 350.
 (2) R.H.Fogle, The Dejection of Coleridge's Ode, ELH, 1950, p. 77.
 (3) BL, II, p.259.
 (4) Lines composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey (Wordsworth, Poetical Works, II, p.262). Here Wordsworth himself in a

To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower,
 Even the loose stones that cover the high way,
 I gave a moral life, I saw them feel,
 Or linked them to some feeling: (1)

and in

the forms

Of Nature have a passion in themselves,
 That intermingles with those works of man
 To which she summons him, although the works
 Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own. (2)

Sometimes Coleridge finds no difficulty in accepting what seems to be a projective account of reality. On March 10, 1798, one month before the composition of The Nightingale, at the height of Coleridge's creative power and of his belief in the omnipotence of Nature, he, wrote to his brother George:

I devote myself to such works as encroach not on the antisocial passions—in poetry, to elevate the imagination & set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of Life— (3)

This presents us with a distinction between the animate and the inanimate which is quite alien to the belief in the "one Life", to a poem like The Nightingale and also to the underlying thesis of the much later Hints towards the Formation of a more comprehensive Theory of Life (4).

(1) Prelude, p.76 (1805 version, III, ll. 124-7).

(2) Prelude, p.462 (1805 version, XII, ll.290-4).

(3) CL, I, p.397.

(4) cf. especially Theory of Life, p. 21.

footnote points out that these lines "have a close resemblance to an admirable line of Young's". The reference is to the lines: "Our Senses, as our Reason, are Divine/And half create the wonderous World, they see." (Young, Night VI, 1744, ll. 427-8, p.22; the two lines are printed the wrong way round in this edition). Abrams convincingly argues that Young's lines are based on Locke's concept of the secondary qualities which the mind adds to what it perceives (The Mirror and the Lamp, p.62). Coleridge's strong abhorrence of Locke's philosophy (cf. Philosophical Lectures, pp.375-384, and CL, II, pp.677-703) may be a reason why such a compromise solution between a "realist" and a "projective" view of perception was unacceptable to him.

In the letter passage life is seen as coming from the poet, not from nature.

A passage in the Biographia Literaria seems to reduce the poetic description of nature as something alive to the effects of the pathetic fallacy. One of the ways in which images "become proofs of original genius" is said to be

when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit,

"Which shoots its being through earth, sea, and air."

In the two following lines for instance, there is nothing objectionable, nothing which would preclude them from forming in their proper place, part of a descriptive poem:

"Behold yon rows of pines, that shorn and bow'd
Bend from the sea-blast, seen at twilight eve."

But with a small alteration of rhythm, the same words would be equally in their place in a book of topography, or in a descriptive tour. The same image will rise into a semblance of poetry if thus conveyed:

"Yon row of bleak and visionary pines,
By twilight glimpse discerned, mark! how they flee
From the fierce sea-blast, all their tresses wild
Streaming before them." (1)

Here the words "semblance of poetry" and the words which follow the second fragment of verse, "an illustration, by no means an instance", make one wonder how much weight should be attached to this passage.

But at other times this projective outlook seems to have had depressing implications for Coleridge. In the poem To William Wordsworth (2) ^{of 1807} the main emphasis falls on Coleridge's sense of inadequacy to create a great philosophical poem like The Prelude. This feeling makes the poem not unlike Dejection, but without the imaginative triumph of the earlier work. Describing the theme of The Prelude, Coleridge wrote:

(1) BL, II, pp.16-17.

(2) CPW, I, pp.403-8.

of moments awful,
 Now in thy inner life, and now abroad,
 When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received
 The light reflected, as a light bestowed—

Although Coleridge praises Wordsworth's artistry, this is fundamentally a new formulation of "We receive but what we give". Again the context is very personal which should make us pause before accepting the sense of this passage as reflecting Coleridge's philosophical convictions, but the implications of the lines are that Wordsworth is wrong in looking upon the "light" as something produced by nature (1).

Richards has argued convincingly that, philosophically, a choice between the "realist" and the "projective" view does not exist. After having classified the various meanings of the word nature, he declares:

The Imagination projects the life of the mind not upon Nature in Sense I, the field of the influences from without to which we are subject, but upon a Nature that is already a projection of our sensibility. The deadest Nature that we can conceive is already a Nature of our making. It is a Nature shaped by certain of our needs, and when we 'lend to it a life drawn from the human spirit' it is reshaped in accordance with our other needs. But our needs do not originate in us. They come from our relations to Nature in Sense I. We do not create the food that we eat, or the air that we breathe, or the other people we talk to; we do create, from our relations to them, every image we have 'of' them. (2)

This, perhaps, is Wordsworth's attitude in The Prelude, although he never states it so clearly. Biographia Literaria also approaches a resolution on these lines combined with a belief in the "correspondences" between mind and nature, which at least partly derives from Plotinus and which anticipates the development of symbolist thought in the later part of the nineteenth century:

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- (1) cf. Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company, p.223; for a slightly different emphasis, cf. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, pp. 153-4.
 (2) Richards, op.cit., p. 164.

all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit: though the latter organs are not developed in all alike. (1)

In a later passage in the same chapter the concept of the coalescence of subject and object does not assert, as does Dejection (if one insists on abstracting a philosophy from the poem), that the so-called life of nature is merely a reflection of a subjective state, but implies that we can only know and experience nature as being alive through an activity of the mind (2).

In his study The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge Marshall Suther gives an excellent account of the pessimistic side of Dejection. He sees the poem as the inevitable consequence of the earlier optimism in Coleridge's poetry and as an example of that sense of failure, of an échec, that overtook all the Romantic poets. After noting that The Nightingale shows a danger that the poetic experience might begin to replace the artistic elaboration of an experience, he proceeds:

Once detached and exalted as the romantics exalted it, once made an end in itself, the poetic experience is easily confused with the properly mystical experience, and is expected to produce a comparable fulfillment. The inevitable resulting disappointment issues in the silence of Rimbaud, or Coleridge's dejection. (3)

The meaning of "properly mystical" is elucidated in a later passage:

It is surely true that in a sense the poet must be forgetful of his song, that he must allow the experience of nature to have its way with him, that a kind of genuine cognition must precede the work of the artist. It is of this experience that the Romantics achieved a fresh awareness. Their danger was of forgetting that the experience, this reverberation in the receptive soul, was by its nature ordered to artistic creation, to expression in a work,

(1) BL, I, p.167.

(2) BL, I, pp. 173-9.

(3) Suther, op.cit., p.101.

and was not, like the mystical experience properly so called an experience in itself. The danger was intensified by their tendency towards pantheism—if God is completely immanent in nature, then the poetic experience is identical with the mystical experience, and poems would result from it only per accidens, by a kind of super-abundance, as in the case of the mystics, for whom the artistic recreation of their experience in which they sometimes indulge is by no means necessary to the completion thereof. (1)

Although Suther underemphasizes the importance of Coleridge's biography, the breakdown of his marriage and the absence of fulfilment of his love for Sara Hutchinson, what he says about the danger of the "tendency towards pantheism" of the Romantics is very relevant to Coleridge, who was acutely aware of the tension between his Christian faith and pantheistic inclinations. This is clearly reflected in a marginal note in a copy of Boehme's Aurora:

intoxicated with the vernal fragrance & effluvia from the flowers and first-fruits of Pantheism, unaware of it's bitter root. (2)

As a criticism of the Romantics in general, however, Suther's statement is rather more questionable. It may be true that later in the nineteenth century more and more emphasis was placed on the experience and less on the form which the experience should take in the resulting artistic creation (although it is more true of poetic theory and of criticism than of the actual poems), but there is no reason why the sense of communion with nature, based on a pantheist faith, should be less valid than a "properly mystical experience" based on a theist religion, and why it should be incapable of producing a comparable fulfilment. Suther's sympathies in his book are clearly with the neo-Thomist philosophy of the Maritains and part of his study is a restatement of Hulme's indictment

(1) Suther, op.cit., p.147

(2) marginal note in Jacob Boehme, Works, Vol.I, p. 127 (BM copy C.126.k.1.), quoted by J.B.Beer, Coleridge the Visionary, p.91.

of Romantic poetry as "spilt religion" (1).

This is indicative of a lack of sympathy for the Romantic poets which one often finds in modern critics. John Heath-Stubbs, in the introduction to his study of later Romantic poetry The Darkling Plain, makes a distinction between Classical and Romantic poetry:

The Classical vision is the most complete, rounded, and perfected of which the limited human mind is capable; it is life, as Matthew Arnold said of Sophocles (who is perhaps the nearest to being a purely Classical poet that we know), seen steadily, and seen whole. In a sense, we must all ultimately attempt to be Classicists, but we have to be Romantics first of all, before we can achieve this; and few of us, in this life, can hope to pass that stage. For Romanticism is dynamic, the movement towards the clear integrated whole; it belongs to the world of Becoming, rather than of Being. (2)

Mr. Heath-Stubbs proceeds to describe Romanticism as either a reaction to an old Classicism gone dead or a preparation for a new Classicism. As broad generalization of literary history in terms of action and reaction this is valid, but as a value judgment the passage quoted seems to me misguided. The reference to Arnold makes one pause, for it was Arnold, who highly praised Wordsworth (though dismissing Wordsworth's philosophy):

Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy and renders it so as to make us share it. (3)

This is a variant on the critical praise of Sophocles for seeing life steadily and seeing it whole, since the context of the essay ("Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life.....the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to

(1) cf. T.E.Hulme, Speculations, p.118.

(2) J.Heath-Stubbs, The Darkling Plain, p.X.

(3) Matthew Arnold, Wordsworth, in Essays in Criticism, Second Series (1888), p. 153.

life—to the question: How to live." (1)) makes it clear that what Arnold has in mind is not simple cheerfulness.

If Arnold's "joy" is taken in the wider context of his essay, it must be admitted that Romantic poetry at its best can offer what Arnold found in Sophocles, the ability to see life steadily and see it whole. It could be said about one of Wordsworth's finest poems, Resolution and Independence (2); as Professor Kermode has insisted:

What saves the poet here is the symbol-making power; it is not what the Leech Gatherer says, but the fact that Wordsworth could invent him, that saves his joy and his sanity, gives him his victory. (3)

A similar claim might be made for Coleridge, whom Arnold too hastily dismissed as "poet and philosopher wrecked in a mist of opium" (4). Dejection too opens with an account of despondency and madness. Its opening stanzas record the speaker's inability to respond to nature, but the poet's victory is in the image of the eddy in the final stanza:

To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of her living soul!

These lines, which imply "a ceaseless and circular interchange of life between soul and nature in which it is impossible to distinguish what is given from what is received" (5), form another way of stressing that possible attunement between the mind and the universe which, in Plotinus' terms, forms the basis of much of On the Principles of Genial Criticism (6).

Another possible reason for a lack of sympathy with Coleridge's

(1) Arnold, loc.cit., pp.143-4.

(2) Wordsworth, Poetical Works, II, pp. 235-240.

(3) Frank Kermode, Romantic Image, p.11.

(4) Arnold, Byron (Essays in Criticism, Second Series, p.203).

(5) Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 68.

(6) cf. above, pp.148-9 and p.152.

poetry, especially his nature poetry, are the aesthetics implied by The Nightingale. Even though some modern poetry tends to be rather over-allusive, modern poets and critics are right in considering literature as fit a subject for poetry as nature. On this point, however, it may first of all be said that The Nightingale itself is more than a transcript of experience. A great deal of the argument of the poem derives from Milton's early poetry (and possibly Twelfth Night). Although Milton is quoted to enable Coleridge to dissent from a Milton-derived idea of nature, the point could not have been made as well without the quotation and allusions.⁽¹⁾ But even apart from this, a conviction that poetry can be more than a transcript of experience should not blind one to the success with which the experience is expressed.

This essay has attempted to demonstrate the development of Coleridge's attitude to nature, as expressed in his poetry from 1788 to 1798. We have seen that the early poems contain many half-digested literary influences and that in these poems the role of nature is mainly confined to providing a starting-point for moralizing similes. Observation of nature is central to the poetry of 1795 and 1796, but there is little confidence in this personal experience and it conflicts with other interests. During the 'annus mirabilis' there is this confidence in the experience of nature and in the artistic creation based on it. Among the mature conversation poems Frost at Midnight is the finest; here there is a perfect fusion between its themes: the memories and observations of the mind, the strong faith in the power of nature and the affection for the baby child.

No one would want to reduce the best in Coleridge's poetry to a few touchstones, but it may be fitting to close this essay

(1) cf. above, Chapter III, pp.125-6 and pp.129-130.

by citing once again The Nightingale and Dejection as instances of Coleridge's poetry at its best: the rendering of the life and the "joyance" of nature in The Nightingale and the movement from despondency to an assertion of the necessity of "Joy" (an inner quality, not the "joyance" of The Nightingale, which one can find in nature without any effort) in Dejection, and from that assertion to the final stanza in which the image of the eddy makes the life of all things into both a "light reflected" and a "light bestowed".

Appendix.

A Note on the Rugby Manuscripts.

There is a large collection of Autograph Manuscripts by Coleridge (formerly belonging to Joseph Cottle) in the Library of Rugby School. Of these E. H. Coleridge only published two drafts of The Eolian Harp and the poem To John Thelwall (1). Of the latter poem there is also a draft which has a different text for ll. 8, ff.:

Nor thou this brief prelusive strain refuse
From Him, whose youth thy fair example
From ill-adventur'd Passion's feverish dream—
And stretch'd at length by Cam's slow willow stream
Pin'd for a woman's love in slothful woe
~~Blest be that~~ hour, when first
Starting I ^{to}re indignant from my brows
The myrtle [^]~~wreath~~ [^]inwove with cypress boughs. (2)

Nos. 11 and 12 are versions of [^]the longer text of the Monody on the Death of Chatterton (3). Here there are ~~three~~ passages which are not in the 'textus receptus' or differ substantially. No. 11 has after l. 135 the passage:

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- (1) cf. CPW, II, pp. 1001, 1002-3 and 1090. The drafts of The Eolian Harp in this edition contain slight inaccuracies in punctuation and in the use of capitals which have been corrected in the quotations in Chapter II. The inaccuracies in the transcript of To John Thelwall are more substantial. The MS. reads "her Mural wreath" in l. 7; l. 14 reads "The Myrtle crown inwove with cypress boughs" and l. 16 has "song" (not "Song"). There is a cancelled version of l. 14: "Blest if in the future life to me belong".
- (2) Both versions are numbered "15" in the Rugby MSS collection. The draft has "her mural wreath" in l. 7 with a cancelled version "the mural wreath".
- (3) CPW, I, pp. 125-131.

What hour, with sick'ning soul, at close of day
 I lay me down, and think of happier years;
 Of Joys that glimmer'd in Hope's twilight ray,
 Then left me darkling in a vale of tears.

These lines also occur, *variatiim*, in The Gentle Look, which dates from 1793 or 1794 (1). It would be difficult to decide whether Coleridge used a bit from a discarded draft of the Monody in a Sonnet or drew upon older poems to piece the Monody together. Instead of ll. 154-165 of the published version the draft has:

Eyes, that did ~~see~~^{ake} with anguish! ye had wept
 Tears of doubt-mingled Joy: as one, who leapt
 From Precipices of distemper'd Sleep,
 On which the fierce-eyed Friends their revel keep
 And saw the rising Sun, and felt him dart
 New rays of Pleasance, trembling to the heart.
 <Vain Thought!> Yet there, where Susquehanna wide
 In calmer murmurs rolls his mighty Tide,
 A rustic cenotaph I'll raise to thee,
 A-~~see~~
 Sweet Harper of time-honor'd Minstrelsy!
 And there, sooth'd sadly by the moaning wind,
 Muse on the sore Ills, I have left behind. (")

The other draft has after ll. 155 in the published version the passage:

Eyes, that did ake with anguish! ye had wept
 Tears of doubt-mingled Joy: as one, who leapt
 From precipices of distemper'd sleep
 In which the fierce-eyed Friends their revels keep,
 And saw the rising sun, and felt him dart
 New rays of pleasance to the heart! (")

This draft is dated "Oct. 1794" in pencil, probably not in Coleridge's hand. Other variations from the published texts are less substantial.

An account of the Rugby draft for Lines on an Autumnal Evening, here entitled "Effusion (Written in early youth)" (No.29), has already been given (2).

(1) cf. CPW, I, pp.47-8.

(2) cf. above, Chapter I, p.45 n3.

(") cf. with both passages, Pantisocracy, ll.9-14 (CPW, I, p.69).

E.H.Coleridge has dated the second draft of The Eolian Harp 1797, which would mean that it was written after the text of the 1796 edition of Poems on Various Subjects (1). This dating was probably made, because E.H.Coleridge thought that the Rugby Manuscripts were sent to Cottle as the basis for the 1797 edition. The Rugby MSS., however, are a very heterogeneous collection, of which only part can have been used for this edition, e.g. No.10, a note to Ode to the Departing Year (2) together with a note to Cottle: "The gourds—alluding to Jonah—do not let it be printed gaurds". Other items cannot have been thus used: No. 14 gives the text of Absence (3), which was included in the 1796 but not in the 1797 edition, while the two versions of ll.130-165 are almost certainly prior to the 1796 text. Moreover, the text of Religious Musings (Nos. 42-58) does not contain the passage beginning "Fair the vernal mead"⁽⁴⁾, so that this text too must be prior to April 1796.

Considering these facts, it seems safe to assume that E.H.Coleridge's dating was wrong and that the second Rugby draft of The Eolian Harp was also written before the edition of 1796. E.H.Coleridge's dating would involve the awkward assumption that Coleridge wrote the beginning in August 1795, extended it for the edition of 1796, radically changed it some time after April 1796 but before the edition of 1797, and then scrapped the revised version again in favour of the earlier text. The extensive amount of revision in the second draft also speaks in favour of a date before April 1796: the text contains a heavily worked-over and then cancelled

(1) CPW, II, p.1002. This dating was accepted by Humphry House, cf. House, Coleridge, p.74 n2.

(2) printed in CPW, I, p.167 nl.

(3) CPW, I, pp.29-30.

(4) ll. 14-22, CPW, I, pp. 109-110; for a dating of these lines, cf. above, Chapter II, p.61 nl.

draft of ll. 40-46:

And ~~all~~ In diff'rent ^{Heights so} ~~stations-~~ aptly ^{hung} ~~placed~~ that All
~~Or~~ In half-heard
 SO that the low Murmurs and loud Bursts sublime,
 Shrill Discords and most soothing Melodies
 Raise one ^{Concert}
~~Creation's~~ great ^{harmonic} Concert form
 Thus God, the only universal Soul,
 Mechaniz'd Matter ^{Organic}
 Organiz'd ~~Body~~ as the ~~instrument~~ Harps,
 And each one's Tunes are that, which ~~each-calls-I~~.

From a critical point of view it seems more plausible that

Mechaniz'd matter as th'organic harps
 And each one's Tunes be that, which each calls I

is an earlier version of the passage beginning "And what if all of animated nature..." than that the chronological order is the other way round.

E.H.Coleridge gives the second draft the heading "EFFUSION, p.96. (1797.)". It may be added that the date is his own addition and that "p.96" is a later pencil addition to the MS, not in Coleridge's hand.

The Rugby MSS. also contain a third text of The Eolian Harp (No.30), which is identical with the text of Poems on Various Subjects, apart from small divergencies in punctuation.

Besides the texts of various poems and notes to poems the Rugby collection also contains the Manuscript of a letter sent to Joseph Cottle. This reads:

—I shall be in Bristol by eleven o'clock to morrow with the remaining Copy—this I have sent as the man will be with you before I.—What a dreadful night! God bless you, my dear Sir! and believe sincerely.

Your Friend

S.T.Coleridge

Mrs.Coleridge desires her Love to you as to her brother.

The parcel is to be left saved for Mr.Gilbert. (1)

(1) Dr.R.S.Woof of the University of Newcastle informs me that this letter is to be published by E.L.Griggs in the final volume of CL.

A List of Abbreviations.

The following abbreviations have been used:

- BL Biographia Literaria, ed. Shawcross.
CL Collected Letters, ed. Griggs.
CPW Complete Poetical Works, ed. E.H.Coleridge.
N Notebooks, ed. Coburn.

For fuller titles of these works, cf. Bibliography, Section I B,
below p.169.

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