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Coleridge's Later Poetry

Morton D. Paley

The common view of Coleridge's later poetry is probably that expressed by Walter Jackson Bate:

The relatively few poems that he wrote in his later years are intensely personal. They are what a poet may write when he no longer thinks of himself as a poet at all but is still tempted to write an occasional poem for whatever reason. In other words, these poems are written for no public, poems making no claim, composed to no form or standard, with no reference to any tradition, no interest in any tradition, other than what is engrained in the writer. They consist on the whole of jottings in notebooks and albums, with no thought of publication.¹

Aside from the facts that some of these poems are indeed intensely personal and that they were first written in notebooks, albums, and other forms of manuscript material in use in the early nineteenth century, these statements are almost entirely untrue. What is true is that even lovers of Coleridge's greatest poems are likely to be unfamiliar with his later work, with the exception of the occasional anthology piece like "Work without Hope." It is my view that the later poems offer the reader gratifications of their own, and that both the texts themselves and the circumstances in which they were produced and disseminated deserve more attention than they have generally been given.

Most of the poems by Coleridge that we read, either in university courses or for our own pleasure, were composed over a relatively short period of time – from 1797 to 1802. Perhaps the rule-proving exception is "To William Wordsworth," which dates from the end of 1806 or the beginning of 1807. "Rule-proving" because in this poem Coleridge images himself as dead and in his coffin, with the very flowers that his "Commune with thee had opened out" strewn on his corpse. "To William Wordsworth" may be a

¹ Coleridge (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969 [1968]), 175-76.

major poem, but it is also Coleridge's farewell to the writing of major poetry. Yet Coleridge, *pace* Bate, remained a poet all his life.

Whether consciously or intuitively, Coleridge developed a "later" mode of poetry comparatively early in his career. He himself was seemingly ambivalent about the quality of much of this "later" work; his own statements about it are full of mixed messages, colored, I think, by the fear that it might be compared with his greatest achievements. In the *Poetical Works* of 1828 and 1829 he placed almost all the poems written since *Sibylline Leaves* in a section called "Prose in Rhyme or, Epigrams, Moralities, and Things Without a Name." In referring to such poems he sometimes used the seemingly self-deprecating expression "copy of verses," as in writing of "The Garden of Boccaccio" to Alaric Watts: "If you should say they are a vigorous *Copy of Verses*, you would confer all the commendation, I should be willing to receive from your Judgement" (CL 6: 779). "Copy of verses" according to *OED* means "a set of verses, a short composition in verse: now chiefly applied to such a composition (esp Greek or Latin verses) as a school or college exercise."² Yet Coleridge also wrote to the editor Frederic Reynolds on 6 August 1829, that "the poems I had offered and read to you" [at Highgate in 1828] were "in point of composition ... equal to anything, I have yet been able to produce" (CL 6: 805); and his Notebooks and other manuscripts bear ample witness that he considered the later poems worth the trouble of extensive revision, sometimes over a period of years.

As a point of entry into the world of Coleridge's later poetry, I have chosen, for reasons that I hope will become apparent in the course of exposition, a poem, or, rather part of a poem that was written as early as 1807 and not published during the poet's lifetime. It is the last part of a Notebook passage of 41 lines (not counting those scored out) (CN 2: 3107), a passage beginning as prose or very free verse and culminating in eleven lines of blank verse. At the end he wrote, "(I wrote these Lines, as an imitation of Du Bartas, as translated by our Sylvester.)" Perhaps on the supposition that the passage was merely an imitation, none of it was published by the family editors until 1912, when E. H. Coleridge printed the last eleven lines under the bracketed heading "Coeli Enarrant ('The heavens declare')," a portentous Latin title very much in the spirit of the title *Henry*

² *SOED* III.7. I thank Professor Paul Magnusson for calling this entry to my attention. It should perhaps be noted that Alaric Watts himself uses "copy of verses" very positively in referring to a poem by Thomas Campbell that Watts had published as an editor: *Alaric Watts: A Narrative of His Life* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1884).

Nelson Coleridge gave to another “dark” Notebook poem in 1834: “Ne Plus Ultra.” E. H. Coleridge evidently did not have access to the Notebook passage but instead printed the text “from an MS of uncertain date,” which he conjectured to be 1830.³ His error is, I think, very understandable, for “Coeli Enarrant” – there is no use calling it anything else – adumbrates the universe of Coleridge’s later poetry in a number of ways that I hope to show in using it as an introduction.

It is instructive to compare “Coeli Enarrant” with the Du Bartas / Sylvester text, not in the sense that the latter offers a source but in that it provides a counter-text in its presentation of generally accepted Renaissance ideas about the universe that are explicitly rejected in Coleridge’s poem. The imagery of stars in the night sky with which Coleridge begins may be contrasted with *Divine Weeks* 1: 42: “By th’ordered Daunce unto the Starres assign’d”⁴ – which turns out to be the opposite in “Coeli Enarrant” – and to 592 “those bright Spangles that the Heav’ns adorne” – which is hardly like Coleridge’s sinister “conven’d conspiracy of spies.” The traditional idea of the world as a book written by God for us to read appears in Du Bartas / Sylvester, lines 174-76:

The World’s a Booke in *Folio*, printed all
With God’s great Workes in Letters Capitall:
Each Creature, is a Page, and each effect,
A fair Character, void of all defect.

This idea is, again, countered by Coleridge:

... all is blank on high,
No constellations alphabet the sky –
The Heavens one large black letter only shews. (5-7)

Imagery of Night and darkness appears in both texts, but once more to opposite ends. In *Divine Weeks* 1: 406-8:

... groapingly yee seek
In nights blacke darknes for the secret things
Seal’d in the Casket of the King of Kings

³ See *PW* 486 and n. The variants between the two texts are relatively insignificant.

⁴ Quotations from the *Divine Weeks* refer to *The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume De Saluste Sieur Du Bartas*, translated by Josuah Sylvester, ed. Susan Snyder (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). Vol. 1, “The First Day of the First Weeke,” 111-34.

There follows the analogy of the

final *Calendar*,
 Where, in *Red letters* (not with us frequented)
 The certain Date of that *Great Day* is printed. (412-14)

Coleridge's opposite point is that the universe, as manifested by the black sky, is unreadable, indecipherable. Although *Divine Weeks* does describe chaos, it is only as a prelude to the Creation:

The dreadful Darknes of the *Memphytistes*.
 The sad blacke horror of *Cimerian* mistes,
 The sable fumes of Hells infernal vault

(Or if ought darker in the World be thought)
 Muffled the face of that profound Abisse.⁵

In contrast Coleridge's poem proceeds *towards* nothingness in its surprising climactic trope of the world as a schoolboy being beaten for not getting his reading lesson right.

In printing "Coeli Enarrant," E. H. Coleridge astutely noted an anecdote of Christ's Hospital in Leigh Hunt's autobiography, in which a child is slapped by James Boyer during a reading lesson. Boyer was in fact a notorious flogging master.⁶ Although Coleridge claimed to have been beaten by him only once and to have had one other narrow escape (TT 1: 327, 144), he must have witnessed other beatings: he remembered this aspect of Boyer well, and referred to it a number of times in later years. In his Marginalia to Richard Baxter's *Religiae Baxterianae* (copy B), Coleridge notes: "'Nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu,' my old Master, Rd J. Boyer, the Hercules Furens of the phlogistic Sect, but else an incomparable Teacher, used to translate – first reciting the Latin words & observing that they were the fundamental article of the Peripatetic School – 'You must flog a boy before you can make him understand' – or 'You must lay it in at the Tail before you get it into the Head'" (CM 1: 354). So one can well imagine that the beaten schoolboy in the poem is based on a childhood recollection of Christ's Hospital. The black-letter text that the boy is given to read may, as

⁵ ll. 301-5. Snyder notes that 301 refers to the ninth plague of Egypt, palpable darkness, in Ex. 10. 21-3 and that in the *Odyssey* 9. 13-15, the sun never since shone in the land of the Cimerii, far to the west (*Divine Weeks*, Vol. 2, 770).

⁶ PW 486n. See *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, ed. J. E. Morpurgo (London: Cresset Press, 1948), 74.

Kathleen Coburn suggests (CN 2: 3107), reflect some lines in Richard Crashaw's "In the Glorious Epiphany of Our Lord," but, if so, once more as a counter-text. "And as a large black letter," Crashaw wrote, "/ Use to spell thy beauties better, / And make the night itself their torch to thee." Here, however, the poor student of the simile finds an indecipherable text whose only letter signifies both a cry of pain and absolute nullity – "O!" "The groaning world," the tenor of this vehicle, is that of Rom. 8.22 "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain until now" – except that the fulfillment of the last two words of Paul's text is absent here.

In presenting Nature as an unreadable text, Coleridge is surely conscious of nullifying one of his most central earlier doctrines. Tim Fulford contrasts "the beneficent teaching of nature's 'eternal language' in 'Frost at Midnight,'"⁷ and we may also think of the readable universe of *The Destiny of Nations*:

For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
For infant minds. (ll. 18-20, PW 132).

The unreadable world of "Coeli Enarrant," in contrast, has no place in it for the oracular poet, bearer of the incarnate Word. In the poetry of such a world the appropriate tropes are the most conscious ones, simile rather than metaphor, personification rather than synecdoche; the mode of signification is typically allegory rather than symbolism; and the most characteristic strategy is calling attention to its own fictiveness lest the reader take it for what it is not: an attempt to re-create the "high" Romantic mode. This is the world of Coleridge's later poetry.

As an example of this later mode, I should now like to discuss three poems in an ascending order of complexity and, I think, of quality. The first is admittedly slight: "The Two Founts," which Coleridge addressed to his friend Eliza Aders in 1826. Mrs. Aders, wife of the banker and art collector Charles Aders and daughter of the well known engraver Raphael Smith, was a cultivated and beautiful woman whose gatherings on Euston Square attracted some of the best known cultural figures of the age.⁸ If the story of a

⁷ Tim Fulford, *Coleridge's Figurative Landscape* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 82.

⁸ According to Ruthven Todd, Mrs. Aders was "sufficiently mistress of painting to execute clever copies after the old masters, and original pictures which extorted the praise of Blake," and was "a beautiful and accomplished lady, of much conversational power, able to hold her own with the gifted men who were in the habit of frequenting her house." Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, ed. Ruthven Todd (London: J. M. Dent, rev. ed. 1945), 331-32.

meeting between Coleridge and William Blake is true, one of the Aders' evenings would be the most likely place, as visits by each are documented. The germ of the poem is in a Notebook entry of May 1826 (CN 4: 5368), in four of eight lines of verse headed "A.G." If the poem was originally meant for Anne Gillman, this would be another instance of substituting one idealized woman for another. However, it may well be that the heading "A.G." refers to Mrs. Gillman's remark concerning Mrs. Aders's bearing her "intense Suffering," as Coleridge mentioned in the letter that he sent to Mrs. Aders on 3 June 1826 (CL 6: 581-3; see also 662-5) with the poem, here called "To Eliza in Pain." I shall, however, refer to it by the title Coleridge used in his *Poetical Works* of 1828.

The central conceit of "The Two Founts" is that the poet is visited by a Dwarf from Dreamland who informs him that in every heart "Two Founts there are, of Suffering and Cheer!" This idea of a double source was deeply ingrained in Coleridge's mind, going back at least to the "twy-streaming fount" of Property in *Religious Musings* (line 204). Eliza alone has been allowed to unlock only one of the two, and "Of Pleasure only will to all dispense." The "stern / and torturing Genius of the bitter spring" is compelled "To shrink aback, and cower upon his urn." However, there is an equal and opposite reaction as "The Fount of Pain / O'erflowing beats against its lovely mound," causing "wild flashes" (presumably migraines) to shoot from heart to brain. Therefore the poet urges Eliza to be "less good, less sweet, less wise!" Whatever the psychological wisdom of such advice may be, there seems little hope that Eliza can take it, as she has been presented as a *schöne Seele* who can do no other. As for the Dwarf, he seems, with "his raised lip, that aped a critic smile" more of an emissary from the *Edinburgh Review* than from Dreamland. At the same time, there is a powerful erotic undercurrent that has little to do with the poem's ostensible subject. Eliza is compared to a rainbow, which in turn is troped to "a bridge to tempt the angels down." In the subtitle the reader is informed that the Lady has recovered "with unblemished looks" (emphasis mine). One manuscript stanza may have been cancelled because it went too far in praising the appearance of another man's wife:

Was ne'er on earth seen beauty like to this,
A concentrated satisfying sight!
In its deep quiet, ask no further bliss –
At once the form and substance of delight.⁹

⁹ PW 454n. These lines are not included in the holograph MS in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

“The Two Founts,” though an occasional poem, exhibits some of the characteristics of Coleridge’s more ambitious later poetry. It is personal in subject, intimate in tone, and suffused with thinly disguised eroticism. It employs allegory as a central device, “faery” subject matter, and personification. And one further feature is of some importance: it was widely disseminated. Before appearing in the *Poetical Works* of 1828 and the subsequent two lifetime collections, it was published in *The Bijou* for 1828 (which, like other Annuals, appeared in the autumn of the year preceding its cover date) and was reprinted in *The Annual Register* for 1827 and in the *Monthly Repository* for 1827. Far from having no audience, the Coleridge of the 1820s could reach a considerable number of readers even with a relatively slight occasional poem.

“Constancy to an Ideal Object” displays some of the features of “The Two Founts” but on a deeper and more probing level. The date of this poem is uncertain. E. H. Coleridge conjecturally dated it “?1826” (*PW* 456), but James Dyke Campbell believed that, because of line 18 – “To have a home, an English home, and thee!” – it must have been written at Malta c. 1805.¹⁰ It should also be mentioned that on 11 June 1825 Coleridge wrote to J. H. Green: “Could you procure me a Copy of those Lines which a long time ago I sent to Mrs. Green by you, on constancy to the *Idea* of a beloved Object – ending, I remember, with the Simile of a Woodman following his own projected Shadow?” (*CL* 5: 467). (This, however, can prove little about the date of composition, since Coleridge became acquainted with Green only in 1817.) Coleridge, not for the first time at a loss for a manuscript of one of his own poems, wanted it for a note to his *Aids to Reflection*. The matter of dating is not of primary importance here, but it is interesting that no stylistic indicators identify this poem as belonging either to 1825 or to a time twenty years before. As I have said, Coleridge’s later poetry begins early.

The poem begins with the poet’s direct address to the internalized image, or *imago*, of his beloved.

Since all that beat about in Nature’s range,
Or veer or vanish; why should’st thou remain
The only constant in a world of change,
O yearning thought! that liv’st but in the brain?

The peculiar words “beat about” suggest birds flying in the field of vision that is “Nature’s range,” only to move out of sight. The opposition between

¹⁰ *Poetical Works*, ed. J. D. Campbell (London: Macmillan, 1893), 635.

these mere phenomena and “Thought” is something like that between “Fish, flesh and fowl” and “Monuments of unaging intellect” in Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium” but more tentative, as the poet questions whether the world of thought may be mutable too.

Call to the Hours, that in the distance play,
The faery people of the future day –
Fond thought! not one of all that shining swarm
Will breathe on thee with life-enkindling breath,
Till when, like strangers shelt’ring from a storm,
Hope and Despair meet in the porch of Death!

Bringing in “faery” puts a special spin on what I. A. Richards accurately glossed as “these anticipations – these endless dreams of future fulfillment.”¹¹ Time not-yet-existing seems magical, but it cannot bring Thought to life in our physical existence. The personifications of Hope and Despair occur, as James Dyke Campbell first pointed out, in a similar context in the third paragraph of Coleridge’s “Allegoric Vision”¹² (first published with the *Lay Sermon* of 1817): “Like two strangers that have fled to the same shelter from the same storm, not seldom do Despair and Hope meet for the first time in the porch of Death!”¹³

This desperate thought leads to a further address to the imago:

Yet still thou haunt’st me; and though well I see,
She is not thou, and only thou art she ...

This is very much in the vein of a poem Coleridge certainly knew, Donne’s Elegy X, “The Dream,” which begins with a similar paradox expressed in direct address:

*Image of her whom I love, more than she,
Whose fair impression in my faithful heart ...*¹⁴

¹¹ I. A. Richards, *Coleridge’s Minor Poems* (N.p. The Folcroft Press, 1970 [1960]), 22-23.

¹² *Poetical Works*, ed. Sir Herbert Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1968 [1933]), 84-85.

¹³ *Poetical Works* 635; *Lay Sermons* (CC) 133. An early version of “Allegoric Vision” is part of *Lectures 1795*, and an intermediate version was published in *The Courier* for 31 August 1811, but neither of these has the opening passage which first appears in 1817. Presumably it, including the line quoted, was first written after August 1811.

¹⁴ George Ridenour, “Source and Allusion in Some Poems of Coleridge,” *SP* 60 (1963): 76-7.

As in Donne's poem, Coleridge recognizes that the image has become an eidolon, contemplated

Still, still as though some dear embodied Good,
Some living love before my eyes there stood [...]

Coleridge's attitude also has much in common with the love-psychology encountered in early Italian poetry among the poets of the *dolce stil novo*. For evidence of Coleridge's knowledge of this subject, we may turn for a moment to the beautiful little poem called "First Advent of Love," which begins "O fair is Love's first hope to gentle mind" (PW 443). It has been pointed out that this line is virtually a translation of the first line of Guido Guinicelli's canzone "Al cor gentil ripara sempre Amore."¹⁵ This being so, we may assume that Coleridge knew the love-psychology of this and other stilnovistic poems in which an image of the beloved woman crystallizes in the lover's heart and is worshipped there as in a shrine.

Despite these striking similarities, the solutions adopted by Guinicelli and his circle and by Donne are not embraced in "Constancy to an Ideal Object." The secularization of the sacred, the worship of the *imago* as a saint that forms part of the ethos of the *dolce stil novo*, is too rooted in the conventions and typologies of late medieval culture to be available to Coleridge. Donne is closer in presenting the love of the eidolon as a problem rather than an ethos, yet Donne's jaunty paradox in which he blithely casts aside the knowability or unknowability of the love object – "So, if I dreame I have you, I have you, / For all our joys are but fantastical" – and abandons himself to being "mad with much *heart*," is not a Coleridgean solution. For Coleridge such ambiguity is a source of anguish. At first he indulges in a fantasy of domesticity deeply rooted in his earlier poetry and embodied in the image of the "cot," as at the end of "The Eolian Harp," where the poet possesses "PEACE, and this COT, and THEE, heart-honor'd Maid!"¹⁶ In Coleridge's poetry of the 1790s, the Cot represents the domestic microcosm

¹⁵ E. H. Coleridge (PW 443n.) points out that although Coleridge referred to "First Advent of Love" as composed before his fifteenth year, it appears to originate in a Notebook entry of 1824.

¹⁶ In the view of James T. Boulger these elements underscore the inability of the poet to achieve the wholeness of being that is expressed in the early poems. "... The possibility of reuniting thought with its object, man with Nature, Coleridge with Sara Hutchinson, is expressed in terms of the natural imagery of the early poems, 'The Eolian Harp,' 'This Lime-Tree Bower'; the old symbols of interpenetration and unity of being recur in a backward glance ..." *Coleridge As a Religious Thinker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961). 209-10.

of a millenial society.¹⁷ In "Constancy to an Ideal Object" it is recognized as a wish-fulfillment fantasy that gives way, as has often been noted, to another sort of image from Coleridge's poetry of the 1790s:

The peacefull'st cot the moon shall shine upon,
Lull'd by the thrush and wakened by the lark,
Without thee were but a becalm'd bark,
Whose Helmsman on an ocean waste and wide
Sits mute and pale his mouldering helm beside.

The self-referentiality that often characterizes the later poems is here projected in a double aspect, the implication being that if the first possibility – Coleridge as possessor of Cot and Maid – turns out to be untenable, the only alternative is the second – Coleridge as the Ancient Mariner.

The dilemma is summed up in the last eight lines, beginning with the question "And art thou nothing?" and proceeding to the comparison of the Brocken Spectre. Coleridge's interest in this phenomenon was almost obsessional, and he refers to it frequently. We should, however, be aware that the meaning given to this image in Coleridge's prose differs according to context, and what we find in his various discussions of it is a spectrum of possible meanings.

Coleridge was of course aware of the optical nature of the phenomenon. In a MS note to his own *Aids to Reflection*, he wrote:

This refers to a curious phenomenon which occurs occasionally when the air is filled with fine particles of frozen Snow, constituting an almost invisibly subtle Snow mist, and a person is walking with ye Sun behind his back. His shadow is projected, and he sees a figure moving before him with a glory round his head. I have myself seen it twice, and it is described in the 1st or 2nd vol. of ye Manchester Phill. Transactions.¹⁸

In Coleridge's source, reprinted in part by J. Livingston Lowes in *The Road to Xanadu*, the image is seen on a mountain above the Valley of Clwyd:

In the road above me, I was struck with the peculiar appearance of a very white shining cloud that lay remarkably close to the ground. The Sun was nearly setting but shone extremely bright. I walked up to the cloud, and my shadow was projected into it; the head of my shadow was surrounded at some distance by a circle of various colors whose centre appeared to be near the situation of the eye,

¹⁷ See my "Apocalypse and Millennium in the Poetry of Coleridge," *The Wordsworth Circle*.

¹⁸ RX (London: Constable, 1927), 470-71 n. 138. The original is in the Harvard College Library.

and whose circumference extended to my shoulders. The circle was complete except where the shadow of my body intercepted it – it exhibited the most vivid colors, red being outermost – all the colors appeared in the same order and proportion that the rainbow presents to our view.¹⁹

In one of his Notebooks, Coleridge also copied out a German account published in 1798:

In this mist, when the sun had risen, I could see my shadow, a gigantic size, for a few seconds moving as I moved, but then I was swiftly enveloped in mist, and the apparition was gone. When the sun reaches a higher position than that where its rays fall directly upon us, it is impossible to observe this phenomenon, because at any higher position of the sun our shadow is cast below us rather than in front of us ... Just after a quarter past four I walked towards the inn ... And behold! I saw, towards the Achtermannshöhe, at a great distance, a human form of gigantic size ... I cannot describe my joy at this discovery; for I had taken so many blessed steps in vain pursuit of this phantom and had never been able to lay hold of it.²⁰

Coleridge made literary use of this image, both with reference to his own works and to those of others. In the ninth of his lectures on Shakespeare and Milton of 1811-12, Coleridge says:

In the plays of Shakespeare every man sees himself without knowing that he sees himself as in the phenomena of nature, in the mist of the mountains a traveller beholds his own figure but the glory round the head distinguishes it from a mere vulgar copy; or as a man traversing the Brocken in the North of Germany at sunrise when the glorious beams are shot ascance the mountain: he sees before him a figure of such elevated dignity, that he only knows it to be himself by the similarity of action.²¹

Here the image is neutral, with the reader/spectator left to imbue it with value (except insofar as the plays of Shakespeare themselves represent a positive value). Later, in the passage in *Aids to Reflection* (1825, p. 220) to which Coleridge added the note already cited, he wrote:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, from "Description of a Glory" by John Haggart, *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester* 3 (1790): 463-67. Lowes observes that Coleridge borrowed this volume from the Bristol Library in 1798.

²⁰ CN 1: 430 31/2.40n. From "Beobachtung des Brokengespenstes" mittgetheilt von J. Lud. Jordan, *Göttingisches Journal der Naturwissenschaften* (1978), ed. J. Fr. Gmelin, I iii 110-14.

²¹ *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London and Princeton: Routledge & Kegan Paul and Princeton University Press, 1987).

Pindar's fine remark respecting the different effects of music, on different characters, holds equally true of Genius: as many as are not delighted by it are disturbed, perplexed, irritated. The beholder either recognizes it *as a projected form of his own Being, that moves before him with a Glory round its head*, or recoils from it as from a spectre.

At first the image again seems neutral: it is for the "beholder" to invest it with value. Yet it must be said that the beholder who recoils from Genius as from a spectre seems less interesting than the one who recognizes it as a projected form of his own being. If we were to regard Coleridge's other uses of the analogy, we would find similar seeming inconsistencies – I say "seeming" because it is in the very nature of this image to have an indeterminate meaning. Each time he recontextualizes this image Coleridge revalorizes it. This being so, it is not surprising that "Constancy to an Ideal Object" has been subjected to contrasting critical interpretations. It can be viewed very pessimistically, with the image of the glory regarded as "the self-generated illusion of the rustic."²² Or, contrastingly, the rustic's activity may be viewed positively: "He pursues, and *by his own act of pursuit* gives life to his ideal."²³ The pursuit may be seen as a correlative to the poetic enterprise: "Through the 'life-enkindling' power of the poet's imagination, his abstractions are reclaimed from pure thought and returned to the life that fostered them."²⁴ Closer to my own view is that of Tilottama Rajan, for whom this poem "recognizes both love's apparition and its evanishment, and achieves the difficult peace which eluded Coleridge in his poem of that name"; at the same time, Rajan underscores "the ironic element which continues to complicate the constitutive power of imagination even at the end."²⁵ Something further needs to be said about that end, however, and about the two literal descriptions of the phenomenon cited earlier.

Following the question "And art thou nothing?" Coleridge gives an analogy that seems to be the answer but that is itself, as we have seen, subject to interpretation.

²² James Boulger, *Coleridge As a Religious Thinker*, 210.

²³ Stephen Prickett, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: The Poetry of Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 22-23.

²⁴ Edward Kessler, *Coleridge's Metaphors of Being* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 136.

²⁵ Dark Interpreter: *The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 245-47.

Such thou art as when
 The woodman winding westward up the glen
 At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's haze,
 Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
 An image with a glory round its head;
 The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues,
 Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues!

In the two accounts to which we know Coleridge was indebted, the narrator does not find anything supernatural in the image. John Haggart is motivated by scientific interest, but is not oblivious to the visual beauty of the phenomenon, as his description of its rainbow colors attests. J. Lud. Jordan is actuated more by mere curiosity, but he too is under no illusion, and his response is one of gratification: "I cannot describe my joy at this discovery; for I had taken so many blessed steps in vain in pursuit of this phantom and had never been able to lay hold of it." With these two, Samuel Taylor Coleridge makes a third. He too is sensible of the beauty of the scene – "The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze" is reminiscent of imagery associated with the imagination in poems of the 1790s as, for example, the mist, cloud, and fog-smoke white through which the Albatross was seen in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The poet is distinguished from the woodman, who believes in the literal reality of the apparition and worships it without knowing its source. The poet, like the two observers upon whose accounts he drew, knows the source and can take pleasure in the phenomenon without being deluded by it. There remains a certain poignancy in his knowledge that the image is self-generated. That self-knowledge brings freedom from illusion but not emotional fulfillment is a theme of the later poems.

The question of the reality of love is also at the center though in a much different way, of "The Pang More Sharp Than All," which is the last of the poems I shall discuss today. First published in the *Poetical Works* of 1834,²⁶ it may go back to two short Notebook fragments of 1807 (CN 2: 3056, 3075), one in cipher, that are associated by Coburn with this poem. Two attempts at part of stanza IV exist on paper watermarked 1819 (but are dated "much later" by E. H. Coleridge), and in a Notebook entry that Coburn dates c. September 1825 (CN 4: 5245) we find Coleridge making two attempts to work out a rhyme scheme for stanza II.²⁷ The germ of the poem may have

²⁶ Whether by accident or intentionally, it was put into the "Sibylline Leaves" section and not in with the additional poems.

²⁷ For he dwelt at large,
 As gay and innocent as the pretty shame

been in existence as early as 1807, and it may have been “germinating a very long time,” as Coburn remarks (CN 2: 3056), but the impulse that made Coleridge write the poem, re-fashioning some older material for a new context but creating most of the text anew, almost certainly derived from a meeting with Sara Hutchinson at Ramsgate in 1823.

On 14 October 1823, Sara Hutchinson wrote to her cousin Thomas Monkhouse: “Coleridge who arrived on Saturday & called upon us yesterday – almost smothered her [the baby] with kisses which, tho’ she endured them with patience, did not, her Mother observed, give her as much satisfaction as those of a younger Beau ...”²⁸ The baby was Mary Monkhouse, daughter of Thomas and Jane Monkhouse, and the women were not alone in noticing how she “endured” Coleridge’s kisses. The poet made this episode the dramatic center of the poem that became “The Pang More Sharp Than All.” At the same time he created for it devices typical of his later poetry: personification, allegory – the poem is subtitled “An Allegory” – and “faery” material. The result is no less anguished than earlier poems in Coleridge’s “confessional” mode, and it may indeed be because of its personal content that it, unlike the more distanced “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” was not published in the collections of 1828 and 1829.

The poem begins with an unnamed personification, a Boy who is evidently Love, and who is troped to the “faery” image of “some Elfin Knight in kingly court,” who, “having won all guerdons in his sport, Glides out of view ...” This carefully controlled stanza of eight pentameter lines rhyming abbacddc has an element of pathos but does not prepare us for the chagrin of stanza II.²⁹ Here the absent child is linked with “the pretty shame /

Of Babe, that rising to the menac'd charge,	aim
With wily shiness & with cheek aglow	large
From its twi-clustri-n-g-ed hiding-place of Snow	shame
Tempts & eludes	charge
	glow
	snow
	kiss
	miss
	targe
cove?	
Of babe, that from its hiding-place of Snow	
Twy-cluster'd, rising to the menac'd Charge	
Tempts and eludes the happy Father's kiss	
Which well may glance aside yet never miss	
When the sweet Mark emboss'd so sweet a Targe	

²⁸ *The Letters of Sara Hutchinson*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), 264.

²⁹ See James C. McCusick, “Living Words,” 43. McCusick also notes that “warmthless” (l. 2) does not occur in English before this poem.

Of babe, that tempts and shuns the menaced kiss / From its twy-cluster'd hiding place of snow!" The compound adjective created for the mother's breasts – "twy-cluster'd" is a Coleridgean coinage³⁰ – is related to other double sources as in "The Two Founts," and the image of mother and infant, usually one of Coleridge's most positive ones, is here transformed. A typical use would be in lines 14-16 of "The Day-Dream," a poem explicitly addressed to Sara Hutchinson:

I guess
It would have made the loving mother dream
That she was softly bending down to kiss
Her babe ...³¹

This sort of image can appear where one least expects it, as in *The Statesman's Manual*: "For never can I look and meditate on the vegetable creation without a feeling similar to that with which we gaze at a beautiful infant that has fed itself at its mother's bosom, and smiles in its strange dream of obscure yet happy sensations." But the poet's resentment is scarcely concealed in "The Pang More Sharp Than All." The babe and its mother are aspects of the same female, with the onlooking but unmentioned Sara Hutchinson making a third – tempting and teasing with kiss and "twy-cluster'd hiding-place of snow!" This image charged with chagrin leads to the bitter conclusion "Twice wretched he who hath been doubly blest!"

In keeping with the greater complexity of feeling in stanza II, the rhyme scheme is also more complex: ababccdebbcd. In the 1825 Notebook entry previously mentioned, we find Coleridge trying to work out a rhyme scheme for this stanza, and the order of the last three rhymes of the second version there is that of the final version, though the wording of the lines is not the same. Certainly Coleridge devoted an unusual amount of workmanship to the completion of this material, and this extends to the allegory as well. In stanza III the nameless boy is gone but has been replaced by a sister and brother, Esteem and Kindness. Yet the poet remains devoted to the absent child, whose internalized image is evoked in memorable lines in stanza IV:

For still there lives within my secret heart
The magic image of the magic child ...

³⁰ *Ibid.* xxxi n.

³¹ PW 387. "The Day-Dream" – not to be confused with "A Day-Dream" – was published in the *Morning Post* for 16 October 1802 and not again in Coleridge's lifetime.

This stanza is evidently a re-writing of manuscript material first printed by James Dyke Campbell in 1893 and then by E. H. Coleridge (*PW* 457). In what appear to be two previous starts, the second and longer introduces “Graveyard” imagery introduced after the magic child has departed:

A blank my Heart, and Hope is dead and buried,
Yet the deep yearning will not die; but Love
Clings on and cloathes the marrowless remains,
Like the fresh moss that grows on dead men’s bones,
Quaint mockery! and fills its scarlet cups
With the chill dewdamps of the Charnel House.

This imagery, both melodramatic and inappropriate, was wisely omitted from the final version of the poem, just as years earlier Coleridge had eliminated the charnel house imagery of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” before publishing it in *Sibylline Leaves*. A tightly organized stanza rhyming ababacbc replaces the longer MS fragment (which breaks into rather limp blank verse after its fourth line), and this new stanza introduces “faery” imagery derived from Spenser – Coleridge’s own note refers the reader to Book III, canto ii, stanza 19 of *The Faerie Queene* – thus linking it with stanza I:

The magic image of the magic Child,
Which there he made grow up by his strong art,
As in that crystal orb –wise Merlin’s feat, –
The wondrous “World of Glass,” wherein inisled
All long’d-for things their beings did repeat ...

There is nevertheless a certain irony here. Merlin’s “world of glass” is a hollow mirror in which Britomart first sees her future love, Artegall. Though she suffers from the wound inflicted by “Imperious Love,” we know that consummation is in store; indeed, Britomart is given a vision of this in the next canto. In Coleridge’s poem the crystal orb retains an image of perpetual longing, and so the poet’s state is one of continued deprivation “To live and yearn and languish incomplete!”

In the fifth and last stanza the personifications of III return to engage in a little drama in which Kindness puts on the “faded robe” of the absent child, “And inly shrinking from her own disguise / Enacts the faery Boy that’s lost and gone.” One of the most perceptive critics of Coleridge’s poetry, Max Schulz, finds this development unsatisfactory, remarking “The emotions involved appear in the place of the persons, the allegorical figures of

Kindness, Esteem and Love playing out a pretty charade about metamorphosed feelings.”³² In my view, this is part of the poem’s very subject: the miming of the “faery” world fails to establish a credible reality, and the poem’s personifications fade into abstractions as the poet exclaims “O worse than all! O pang all pangs above / Is Kindness counterfeiting absent Love!” The note of acceptance sounded in “Constancy to an Ideal Object” and in other later poems such as “Duty Surviving Self-Love” (1826) and “The Improvisatore” (1827) has at least temporarily given way, as a result of an encounter with the undesiring object of desire, to a cry of anguish and of anger.

This has necessarily been only an introduction to Coleridge’s later poetry. In what direction would a fuller consideration proceed? I suggest that it would begin with a consideration of the role of personification in Coleridge’s verse. Personification was, early on, a commanding trope in Coleridge’s poetry. Then, for a time, its role subsided, perhaps in deference to the program advanced in connection with *Lyrical Ballads*, with its distrust of highly conscious fictions. It seems significant that in revising “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Coleridge introduced “The Nightmare LIFE-IN-DEATH,” who in the version published in 1798 had been “That Woman,” described at length but not named. Personification became ever-more important in the later poems, yet the later personifications have little in common with the “images imageless – those small capitals constituting personifications” that Coleridge later blamed on Southey in a note to *Joan of Arc*.³³ The personifications he now created were also to be distinguished from those of Thomas Gray, which Coleridge called “mere printer’s devil’s personifications – persons with a capital letter, abstract qualities with a small one” (TT 1: 12). In his later poetry, Coleridge created another type of personifications, one that calls attention to its own fictiveness. To what degree these were part of his habit of thought can be seen everywhere in his later writings, as in a letter to his son Derwent (conjecturally dated October 1827; CL 6 : 705), where “the spice-islands of Youth and Hope, the two realities of this Phantom World” enter as easily and naturally as a “sinecure of 200L- a year” later in the same paragraph. Coleridge gave precise instructions about the typography to be used for his personifications – small capitals (see CL 6: 955), protesting against modern printers’ “levelling

³² See Max Schulz, *The Poetic Voices of Coleridge: A Study of His Desire for Spontaneity and Passion for Order* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 147.

³³ See James Taylor Brown, “Bibliomania,” *The North British Review* 40 (1864): 82. Coleridge’s annotated copy of *Joan of Arc* is now in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

spirit" of antipathy to such. Modern readers are not used to poetry in which intense and intimate feelings are projected in these terms, and that is why, did time and space permit, I would continue with a consideration of personification and allegory in the later Coleridge's imagination. But that is a subject to be undertaken at another time.